

A Comprehensive Recovery Strategy

# REINVIGORATING The Civic Process In Camden



A Discussion At The Camden Development Collaborative  
Annual Event 2000

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation*

## About the Annie E. Casey Foundation



The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States.

The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. The Annie E. Casey Foundation was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother.

Through the Making Connections initiative the Annie E. Casey Foundation is working in Camden, New Jersey, and 21 other cities around the United States to connect families in neighborhoods to the opportunities, social networks, and formal services that will improve the lives and well-being of children and families. One component of the initiative offers learning opportunities and other technical assistance to the 22 cities in their pursuit of goal achievement for strengthening families in a neighborhood context. For more information, visit the Foundation's website, [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

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## What Is the Camden Development Collaborative?

The Camden Development Collaborative, a non-profit funding intermediary founded in 1995, is guided by the belief that communities can be built most effectively through strategic partnerships. The essential mission of the Collaborative is to contribute to building a sustainable community infrastructure in the City of Camden by facilitating housing production, economic development, and job creation.

The Collaborative is committed to providing support for comprehensive community-based development efforts in the City of Camden. Made up of funders from many different sectors including foundations, higher education and financial institutions, the Collaborative is governed by a board of directors drawn from these groups. The Collaborative, which emphasizes accountability and measurable results, has generated more than \$5.5 million in funding commitments since its inception, and has attracted assistance from organizations that had not previously contributed to work in Camden. In addition to providing operating grants, supporting community organizing, and assisting with neighborhood strategic planning the Collaborative offers technical assistance aimed at increasing the capacity of 14 community development groups it has selected for support.

These groups have had a significant impact on Camden neighborhoods over the last five years, with 319 new housing units completed and 390 more units in the production pipeline. Their efforts have resulted in an additional \$5.9 million in facilities and commercial development, and \$70.8 million in total investment. Thanks to the work of the organizations supported by the Collaborative, hundreds of Camden families have realized the dream of home ownership. Hundreds of children are being cared for in new state-of-the-art childcare facilities, and jobs and businesses are being created through economic development efforts.

Through its work with Rowan University's Urban and Public Policy Institute, the Collaborative has helped create other partnerships related to development in Camden as well. For example, the large and diverse group of stakeholders working with the data partnership in Camden called CAMConnect was influenced, in part, by the commitment and energy of this working relationship.

The fourteen groups served by the Collaborative, some of which work together under an umbrella organization, include:

rehabilitation of vacant housing for sale to low- and moderate-income people. Parkside is targeting the rehabbing of vacant units in high-drug-trafficking areas of the neighborhood. Within the past year it has renovated six homes to be sold to low- and-moderate-income homebuyers. Parkside also is participating in the construction of a Boys and Girls Club.

- St. John's Community Development Corporation (SJCDC)—This volunteer organization, sponsored by St. John's Baptist Church, serves the Rosedale/Dudley neighborhood. With the support of Collaborative funds the SJCDC has completed its first two units of homeownership housing. Future plans include the rehabbing of a multi-unit property and six houses, and the establishment of an owner-occupied housing repair program.

## Camden Development Collaborative Funding Partners

Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Campbell Soup Foundation

Commerce BankFirst Union Bank

The Ford Foundation

The Harbourton Foundation

PNC Bank

The Prudential Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Rowan University Urban and Public Policy Institute

The Fund for New Jersey

The Pew Charitable Trusts

The Reinvestment Fund

The William Penn Foundation

## Introduction

Each year, the Camden Development Collaborative draws together a diverse group of people who live and work in Camden and presents them with a forum dedicated to celebrating the city's community development. This annual event recognizes the groups funded by the Collaborative, allows them to share excitement about their work, and fosters a dialogue on important policy issues related to development. This year, one issue loomed large—the economic and social recovery of Camden.

The Collaborative decided to look to the experience of Washington, D.C., a place not unlike Camden in its grassroots efforts toward community rejuvenation, for some suggestions on how the community might proceed. To that end, the organization invited urban planning expert James O. Gibson, Senior Fellow in Residence at the Center for the Study of Social Policy and a Senior Associate at the Urban Institute, to describe the unique civic engagement process that occurred in the District, and the group (DC Agenda) that is playing an important role in the city's ongoing recovery.

## **CAMDEN DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIVE ANNUAL EVENT NOVEMBER 29, 2000**

### **Agenda**

- Welcome, introduction, and overview: Melvin Randy Primas, Camden Development Collaborative Chair; and Jerome C. Harris, Collaborative Vice-Chair
- Introduction of keynote speaker: Carole Thompson, Senior Program Associate, Annie E. Casey Foundation
- “The DC Agenda Story”: James O. Gibson, Senior Fellow in Residence, the Center for the Study of Social Policy; Senior Associate, the Urban Institute
- Break-out sessions: Roundtable discussions and reports
- Presentation: H. Ahada Stanford, Camden Development Collaborative Executive Director
- Announcements and closing remarks: Jerome C. Harris

## “The DC Agenda Story”

James O. Gibson is Senior Fellow in Residence at the Center for the Study of Social Policy and a Senior Associate at the Urban Institute in Washington, D.C. Mr. Gibson, whose work focuses on urban revitalization, community building, and race relations, directed the Rockefeller Foundation’s Equal Opportunity Program from 1986–1992. He has worked as a planning official for the District of Columbia, and was an appointee to the President’s National Commission on Rural Poverty. Gibson is Past president of, and still works with, DC Agenda, a non-profit organization devoted to improving the quality of life in the nation’s capital.

Formed in 1994 as a forum for citizen participation in crafting a solution to the city’s deepening economic and social crisis, DC Agenda is not a member organization or a service provider. Instead, the organization, which has a staff of 15 and a board numbering 60, acts as a facilitator, convenor, information broker, idea incubator, and technical assistance provider. Among other things, DC Agenda has developed a scorecard on government services and has successfully lobbied for the creation of a citywide economic development corporation. It has helped spur an initiative to increase youth programs and has also assisted in designing and conducting a management training series for District officials.

“I wanted to talk today about an experience in Washington, D.C., that I think has some resonance with what you are facing in Camden,” James O. Gibson told the group. “I am not coming with the sense that we can parachute the experience of Washington into Camden. But there are enough similarities between the situation you are in and the situation Washington has been in that I think it would be useful to talk about how that community responded and mobilized itself to participate.”

Gibson went on to describe what had been a looming fiscal crisis in the District of Columbia in 1994, characterized by deteriorating municipal services, a diminishing tax base, and businesses and families fleeing the city. The travails of Mayor Marion Barry, arrested on drug charges, added further to the city’s woes. Reported Gibson, “We were in a situation in which our chief elected official became an embarrassment to Washington in a very complicated way because he was also a powerful actor in our city and he represented something very important in many parts of the community. We could not totally dismiss the mayor because he brought many strengths at the same time that he was a weight on and disservice to the community.”

## Break-out Sessions

After Gibson's talk, attendees were asked to break into roundtable groups and come up with answers to four questions:

- Is the DC Agenda process one that you think can be initiated in Camden?
- Is there an independent intermediary organization in Camden that can provide the organizational framework for such an effort? (If the answer is "no," what organizations do you think should make up this essential entity)?
- What do you think the next steps are to pursue socioeconomic recovery for Camden?
- If the state were involved in Camden's recovery, what would you suggest as guidelines for this involvement?

All of the groups reporting back agreed that the DC Agenda model could be used in Camden. One group suggested that a corresponding education process would be needed, however, to inform Camden's citizens of ways in which their voices could be heard and to empower them to act. Several other groups noted that for the model to work, territorial issues and self-interest and divisions among existing organizations would need to be eliminated.

When the groups examined the question of whether Camden has the kind of independent intermediary organization that could spearhead a DC Agenda-like citizen participation process, they agreed unanimously that the answer was no. Once again, competing agendas among existing organizations and fragmented efforts were cited.

In answer to the question of how such an entity might be constituted, one group called for a nonpartisan "city-based organization with participation from community residents." This prompted a suggestion that such an entity should reflect the racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity of the city. Other suggestions from the roundtable reports included the following:

- Create a neutral organization made up of community members or grassroots groups
- Tap educators and scholars for help

## Moving Forward

Inspired by James O. Gibson's presentation and the powerful model he presented, the participants at the Collaborative event suggested a framework for Camden's social and economic recovery that could reflect the model set by the DC Agenda. That framework includes finding the resources and experts to undertake an analysis; organizing a civic participation process to discuss recovery strategies that not only consider the city's economic infrastructure but also invest in the well-being of Camden's families and youth; and finally, creating an intermediary organization that includes a broad cross section of Camden stakeholders.

The participants envisioned that this work would begin without delay by convening groups to further explore the model, identify resources to support its implementation in Camden, and discuss the assessment process and structure. Following this, a representative body could be selected to guide the needed analysis and data gathering while it would undertake a review of the state's plan. Throughout, the community would be engaged in a series of discussions about recovery strategies. From this, a process would be devised to select members of an intermediary organization charged with overseeing those strategies. An example framework is the outreach and community involvement experience of the City of Camden's Master Plan. Using that framework would link recovery activities to the master planning process.

Said Camden Development Collaborative Executive Director H. Ahada Stanford, "Mr. Gibson raised the level of discourse from frustration and a sense of powerlessness to thinking about creating a process for Camden's recovery."

## Our Partners

### **Funding Partners**

Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Campbell Soup Foundation, Commerce Bank, First Union Bank, The Ford Foundation, PNC Bank, The Prudential Foundation, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Rowan University Urban and Public Policy Institute, The Fund for New Jersey, The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Reinvestment Fund, The William Penn Foundation

### **Community Partners**

Camden County Council on Economic Opportunity, Heart of Camden, Latin American Economic Development Association, St. Joseph's Carpenter Society and Camden Churches Organized for People, Parkside Business and Community on Partnership, St. John Community Development Corporation, and the North Camden Partnership, with Save Our Waterfront Housing, Concerned Citizens Lutheran Housing, Concerned Citizens of North Camden, Fair Share Housing, New Visions for Community Service, North Camden Land Trust, and State Street Housing

### **Event Planning Partners**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Rowan University Urban and Public Policy Institute – College Outreach Partnership Center, Live Tracks Mobile Recording



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