# THE BUSINESS OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION

Friday morning, 10:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

While we devote most of our meetings to the substantive work of local partners, this session was established several years ago to discuss the critical organizational and management responsibilities involved in running a successful local data intermediary. In our summer survey seeking ideas for the meeting, almost everyone mentioned their interest in approaches to business planning or fundraising. In the ideal world, partners would receive long-term general support grants to fully pay for the time-consuming work of accessing and cleaning basic data, developing easy-to-use websites, analyzing neighborhood trends, and working directly with groups on community issues. In practice, partners build in some support for data and infrastructure development into project-based contracts and use larger grants to subsidize work for smaller organizations. All of the partners are figuring out how to build a sustainable and diversified funding base - whether to expand the types of services they provide, build competence in a broader array of topic areas, reach out to other local organizations for formal partnerships, etc.

This session will have two parts and be chaired by Jeff Matson from CURA in Minneapolis. In both, the speakers will present their viewpoints and then the plenary conversation will allow us to take advantage of the breadth of expertise and diverse experiences of the other participants. We hope the session will also generate ideas about future trainings, guidebooks, webinars, and meeting sessions.

*Top 10 Grant Writing Mistakes*

In the first part, we focus on practical skills. Andrew Bramson from The Providence Plan will share his wisdom from many years of writing successful federal grants, and partners will be able to ask questions and offer their own advice. We will have time afterwards for questions (30 minutes)

*Strategies at the Regional, State, And Federal Levels*

In the second part, two partners will discuss their past experiences and future plans to strengthen their organizations and fund the data development and information assistance services for their cities, regions, and perhaps beyond.

* Kurt Metzger from Data Driven Detroit will begin by exploring statewide relationships, including their collaborations with fellow partner Community Research Institute and D3’s potential role in helping smaller Michigan cities improve their strategic use of data. (10 minutes)
* Holly St. Clair from the Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council will discuss the evolution of her business plan to support data development and use in the Boston region – from establishing regional indicators as an integral part of the regional plan, to including the work as a component in their federal Sustainable Communities proposal, and then leveraging the Sustainable Communities work to win other federal grants like the CDC’s [Community Transformation Grant](http://www.cdc.gov/communitytransformation/). (10 minutes)

We will then open it up to the plenary for questions and conversation to exchange ideas about strategic planning. (40 minutes)

**Questions for Discussion**

* What formats are the best ways to share experience and ideas about strategic planning and business models? Case studies? Another partner-wide funding survey? Other ideas?
* Would bringing in outside experts on budgeting, fundraising, or staff development be useful?