

## [Microfinance USA 2010 Blog](#)

FIELD Entries by Joyce Klein

### [Session Summary: Funding U.S. Microenterprise: Why Now?](#)

Posted: 2010-05-26 @ 6:20 PM PDT

*By Joyce Klein, "Funding U.S. Microfinance: Why Now?" panelist*

Many of those who gathered in San Francisco last week wondered why there was a donors-only session on the agenda. While the session organizers (the [Microenterprise Funders Group](#) and [Silicon Valley Community Foundation](#)) well understand the attraction of being in a room full of donors and investors, we also know through our work in donor education that there are some issues and questions that donors can discuss more freely when only their funding colleagues are in the room – questions such as: **What directions are you thinking to move in with your grant-making? How do you evaluate the budgets your grantees are presenting? How do you interest your trustees in this issue?**

The group of donors and investors that gathered for this session reflected the diversity of those who support microenterprise in the United States: individuals engaged in giving circles, family foundations, city government, financial institutions, regional and national foundations. As we had hoped, **some in the room were long-time funders of U.S. microenterprise programs**, and some are just considering whether and how to support this work in the United States. And while some are providing grant support, others are providing investment capital.

I started the session by providing some basic information about the U.S. microenterprise field, some of which was based on the results from [FIELD's recent field-wide survey](#). Amanda Feinstein described the [Walter and Elise Haas Fund's](#) support for microenterprise development; the Fund has been supporting a number of Bay Area programs for several years as part of its economic security program. Ash McNeely then shared her recent experience in educating herself and her trustees about microenterprise development, as part of the [Sand Hill Foundation's](#) recent entry into the field.

We then moved into a lively discussion about some of the questions and challenges faced by donors, such as: **Are you expecting the microenterprise lenders you fund to become self-sufficient? How do you evaluate the costs and cost structures of the organizations you fund? What size grants and investments are you making? What's more important – providing general operating funds or support innovation?** To stay true to the intent of the

session, I won't share the answers here. But it was clear that the funders in the room valued hearing each others' experiences and perspectives, and we look forward to continuing these conversations with donors, both new and established.

*Joyce Klein is a senior consultant to the [FIELD program](#) of the [Aspen Institute](#), which staffs the [Microenterprise Funders Group](#).*

## **[Special Learning Opportunity for Funders at Microfinance USA 2010](#)**

Posted: 2010-05-07 @ 9:40 AM PDT

*By: Joyce Klein, "Funding U.S. Microenterprise: Why Now?" panelist*



Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the [Microenterprise Funders Group](#) are teaming up to provide a special learning opportunity for funders at [Microfinance USA 2010](#). **"Funding U.S. Microenterprise: Why Now?"** will be a donors-only session for current and potential U.S. microenterprise funders to discuss the why and the how of funding microenterprise in the U.S.

At the session, we'll welcome funders of all shapes and sizes: foundations, corporations and individuals; public and private; grantmakers and investors. You'll get a first look at just-released data findings on the size and scope of the microenterprise field in the U.S.. We'll also discuss how microenterprise connects to some of the key challenges that our nation currently faces, such as job creation and meeting the needs of the underbanked. My co-panelists—Amanda Feinstein of the [Walter and Elise Haas Fund](#) and Ash McNeely of the [Sand Hill Foundation](#)— will share their experiences in funding microenterprise development in the Bay Area.

Although we'll be making formal presentations, the session will provide ample opportunities for questions and discussion. Questions we may discuss include:

- How is the current economic climate affecting microentrepreneurs and microfinance programs?
- How are funders evaluating or assessing which microenterprise programs to invest in?
- What is the role of private funders and investors at a time when there are significant Federal resources available through the Recovery Act?

**We hope to provide an opportunity for funders to learn together and from each other, and to link participants to resources that can inform and support their grants and investments.**

We've also asked the conference organizers to reserve tables at the network luncheon just after our session, so that we can continue our conversation informally over lunch.

If you are a donor, funder, investor who is funding or interested in microenterprise in the U.S. – please come and join the conversation at “Funding Microenterprise in the U.S.: Why Now?”

*The [Microenterprise Funders Group](#) is an informal affinity group of donors who are interested in or are currently funding microenterprise development in the U.S. Membership is free to any donor interested in learning more about the field. The Funders Group is staffed by the FIELD program of The Aspen Institute. FIELD also publishes [Funder Guides](#), brief publications that discuss key important or emerging issues in the field, including:*

- *Microenterprise programs and credit building*
- *A federal policy agenda for microenterprise*
- *Microenterprise and asset development*

*Joyce Klein is a senior consultant to the [FIELD](#) program of the [Aspen Institute](#). She's been working in the U.S. microenterprise field for 20 years, focusing on research, policy, grantmaking and identification of best practices.*

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