October 21, 1999

Dear Colleagues:

In response to the growing interest of many engaged grantmakers, a group of us in EGA, CGBD, GIH and other funder networks have had conversations with over fifty colleagues during the past year about the value for our work of formalizing a Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN).

The central purpose of HEFN will be to enable funders currently in different grantmaker affinity groups to communicate and strategize effectively about shared interests at the interface of health and the environment. We see it as complementing, not replacing existing funder interest groups. HEFN is designed not be be another funder affinity group but a way of working on shared interests across formal affinity group lines.

A small drafting committee, including Pete Myers and Karen O’Brien from the W. Alton Jones Foundation, Rachel Pohl from the Cox Charitable Trust, and Michael Lerner and Marni Rosen from the Jenifer Altman Foundation, have come together to draft a description of HEFN, which has gone through many modifications as we have shared it with colleagues who have expressed interest.

Phil Lee, M.D., the distinguished past Assistant Secretary of Health in both the Clinton and Carter Administrations, and former Chancellor of the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine, has agreed to serve as Chairman of the HEFN Steering Committee, which we hope will reflect a careful balance of health and environmental funders. The real work of HEFN will be done by HEFN Partners, engaged in exploring new opportunities for collaboration across existing funder affinity group and interest group lines.

As you will see below, HEFN requires no dues; it will initially focus on participation by individual funders, rather than institutions; and it commits to taking no more of your time than your interest warrants.

If you are interested, please respond with your thoughts and comments to any member of the drafting committee and to HEFN Consultant Kathy Sessions. We will put you on the e-mail list (only if you wish) or keep you apprised of developments by mail.

With best wishes,

Michael Lerner, President, Jenifer Altman Foundation
John Peterson Myers, Director, W. Alton Jones Foundation
Karen Peabody O’Brien, Special Projects Program Officer, W. Alton Jones Foundation
Rachel L. Pohl, Senior Program Officer, Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust/
    Associate Director, Donor Services Office, Hemenway and Barnes
Marni Rosen, Executive Director, Jenifer Altman Foundation

C/o The Jenifer Altman Foundation
P.O. Box 1080, Bolinas, California 94924
415-868-0821
October 21, 1999

PROPOSAL FOR A NEW HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDERS' NETWORK

Dear Colleagues:

We invite you to join us in exploring the development of a Health and Environmental Funders Network that will complement, but not replace, existing funder affinity groups.

I. HEFN Background

Over the past year, a growing number of colleagues in the philanthropic community have expressed growing personal and professional interest regarding opportunities to serve both human health and the environment by exploring shared interests at the interface of health and the environment.

We have discussed with over fifty funders in EGA, GIH, CGBD and other formal and informal funder affinity groups the need to improve both communication and strategic grantmaking among funders with strong interests in the interface of health and the environment.

We think the time is ripe to take these conversations to the next step and to consider seriously the creation of a new, light and inexpensive mechanism for communication and collaboration, which we are calling the Health and Environmental Funders Network (HEFN).

Over the next several months we will engage in broad consultation, looking for comments and suggestions about HEFN's utility, focus, organization, and mission. Based on the suggestions we receive, we will refine the proposal, with the aim of announcing the formation of the network and its workplan by the end of the year, inviting interested colleagues to participate at that time. If you would like to stay informed about this process, please let us know. We will provide different levels of e-mail contact or regular mail contact, depending on your level of interest.

II. Analysis of Benefits of HEFN

This is our analysis:

1. There is growing funder interest in environmental (or ecological) health (EH) or, more broadly, the interface of public health, medicine and environmental issues. We will use the abbreviation EH (environmental or ecological health) for this interest in health and the environment, explicitly understanding our equal interest in human health and biodiversity.

C/o The Jenifer Altman Foundation
P.O. Box 1080, Bolinas, California 94924
415-868-0821
2. EH grantmakers currently are fragmented among funder interest groups, with pockets of interest in the Consultative Group on Biodiversity (CGBD), Grantmakers in Health (GIH), Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA), and many other funder groups with interests that include public health; medicine; science education; biotechnology; sprawl; public education on environmental health issues; children, youth and families; population; women's reproductive health; environmental equity and environmental justice; ozone depletion; climate; trade; international environmental health; and other issues.

3. Many funders who are members of these disparate funder groups have strong shared interests in cross-cutting EH issues. Currently, we have no mechanisms for exploring and prioritizing these shared EH interests.

4. Beyond cross-cutting interests, funders new to EH, considering the development of new EH program interests, or seeking strategic partnerships with funders from other fields need a place to turn to for a map of the rapidly growing EH field and pointers to funder groups within the field.

5. For these reasons, a growing community of our colleagues has expressed interest in exploring the viability of a low-cost, flexible, mostly-virtual network that does not require membership fees and invites funders with a real interest in EH issues to participate.

6. As examples of the kinds of activities that EH funders are already engaged with, many of us have been active during the past year responding to requests to (a) consult with colleagues on the development of new EH programs within their foundations; (b) assist new or developing "health conversion" foundations to consider EH program interests; (c) work with large funders launching major EH initiatives to assist them in networking with smaller funders on shared EH interests; (d) support EH projects at the interface between philanthropy and government; and (e) sponsor grantmaker briefings in existing affinity groups on EH issues. In other words, HEFN is not so much a new entity as an effort to rationalize current activities and communicate more effectively across grantmaker affinity groups about growing activity around EH funding.

III. Organization of HEFN

Following extensive consultations with other grantmakers, the Jenifer Altman Foundation has engaged an able consultant, Kathy Sessions, to help us collectively to explore whether HEFN might be useful to those of us with strong interests in health and the environment.

From consultations so far, here are our thoughts about structuring HEFN:

* Participation: We would rather develop HEFN with a smaller group of genuinely interested colleagues rather than a larger group of less interested funders. We propose that at least initially funders participate in HEFN as "Partners" -- as individuals from foundations or public agencies, rather than as representatives of foundations or agencies. We believe that we should define criteria to ensure that HEFN Partners share a genuine commitment to health and the environment. HEFN will not be open to participation by corporate funders.

* Finances: HEFN will accept contributions from funders who find it useful, but will be non-dues paying with absolutely no pressure to contribute. It will be as light and
inexpensive a structure as possible. Jenifer Altman Foundation has committed $10,000 to explore its development, and we have had expressions of interest in contributing from other foundations.

* Structure: HEFN will be represented initially by a Founding Steering Committee consisting of interested members of some of the funder affinity groups, formal or informal, where the work on specific issues is actually done, contributing funders, and a small executive committee, with further procedures to be developed as needed. Because HEFN will seek to serve as an open framework through which grantmakers from the health, environmental, and other communities can communicate and collaborate, the Steering Committee should include, as far as possible, a balanced representation of the diverse grantmaker groupings and issue areas involved.

IV. First Year HEFN Activities

We propose to begin HEFN's first exploratory year with a small number of very focussed activities. These activities, focused on funder communication and education, will also help build the relationships and capacities to support a broader range of HEFN activities in subsequent years. They include:

* Organization of a HEFN Founding Steering Committee (as described above), to guide the development of HEFN and manage its activities. A subsequent Steering Committee will be elected, should HEFN prove its value to its Partners. Sub-groups of the Steering Committee will be formed as needed;

* Operation of an electronic list-server, providing at least two levels of e-mail communication for HEFN members (an informational list-server, sending members no more than one e-mail per month; and a strategic communications list-server, supporting more frequent communication among members interested in committing significant time to HEFN's operations); and

* Organization of three major funder education events:
  - An ad hoc breakfast at the annual retreat of the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA);
  - One stand-alone roundtable on environmental health, and environmental health perspectives in other roundtables, for the annual meeting of the Grantmakers in Health (GIH); and
  - An "Issues Forum" on environmental health, co-sponsored by HEFN and GIH.

In addition to the above, a password-protected Web page may be developed, perhaps initially on a HEFN partner's Web site, to provide additional information (e.g., calendar of events & workshops, lists of resources) for HEFN participants. A refined version of this Web page might later become a publicly-accessible Web site for HEFN, as appropriate.

V. Next Steps for HEFN

HEFN is very explicitly an experiment. If it is useful, wonderful. If not we should acknowledge that and move on over time to explore other ways for EH funders to work together. Here are some proposed next steps to determine how we should proceed.

* We will continue consultations until a balanced group of funders that include representatives of relevant key constituencies have had an opportunity to comment on draft plans for HEFN.
* When we believe we have a working consensus on HEFN, we will convene a call with a balanced group of representatives from the funder community, who will constitute a Founding Steering Committee to agree upon an initial text for the formation of HEFN.

* That initial HEFN text, which will take the form of an invitation letter, will be circulated inviting funders with shared EH interests to become Founding HEFN Partners and participate to the extent of their interest.

* We should explicitly recognize that there will be a few of us who are interested in doing the organizing work, but we will welcome the comments and participation of all Partners.

VI. Conclusion

In summary, we expect that HEFN will be an experiment for EH grantmakers seeking to improve the quality of information, communication, and consultative grantmaking. We emphasize that HEFN will in no way replace existing funder affinity groups or focal groups, but will seek to improve communication and collaboration among EH funders who are currently fragmented among existing affinity groups.

Thank you for your interest. We look forward to hearing your suggestions.

With best wishes,

The HEFN Drafting Committee:

Michael Lerner, Jenifer Altman Foundation (mlerner108@aol.com)
Pete Myers, W. Alton Jones Foundation (JPMyers@wajones.org)
Rachel Pohl, Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust/Hemenway & Barnes (rphol@hembar.com)
Karen Peabody O'Brien, W. Alton Jones Foundation (kobrien@wajones.org)
Marni Rosen, Jenifer Altman Foundation (mrosen@jaf.org)

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To participate in HEFN conference calls, be added to the HEFN email list, or get more information about HEFN, please contact:

Kathy Sessions