

# PortlandTribune

## Movers, shakers become 'connectors'

*Pioneering program will create links between leaders, needs*

BY JENNIFER ANDERSON

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**Malcolm Gladwell was the first to call them "connectors" in his 2000 bestseller, "The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference."**

In the book, Gladwell used the example of Paul Revere, who was so effective as a revolutionary leader because he had an "extraordinary knack ... for making friends and acquaintances," he wrote.

In Portland, no revolution is under way, but there are plenty of behind-the-scenes movers and shakers who have the power and credibility to mobilize their fellow citizens to get things done.

They're the civic superstars who work to create change when it comes to local government, business, education and the nonprofit sector.

Now, those unsung heroes are about to be recognized and put to good use.

The Portland/Vancouver Connector Project – a nonprofit modeled after similar projects in Philadelphia, Louisville and Tucson – officially kicked off this week with an electronic survey that's being sent to thousands of citizens in Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas and Clark counties.

The survey asks citizens to name and provide contact information for people who've been effective at mobilizing their local communities.

Karen Stephenson, the Harvard researcher who helped pioneer the Philadelphia model in 2005, will compile and sort the names as they come in, and the surveys will snowball through e-mail lists and social media during the next few months.

Eventually, Stephenson – who is based in New York and traveled to Portland this week to address a large group of civic and business leaders – will home in on about 100 connectors. Those people will be recognized in an official ceremony, and then they'll get to work, mobilizing themselves to tackle the issues of the day.

"People are already doing it; it's intuitive – they just didn't realize there was a science behind it," Stephenson told The Tribune shortly after leading a panel discussion that included Multnomah County Chair Jeff Cogen and Portland Development Commission Chairman Scott Andrews.

Project leaders are being careful not to name specifically any stalled civic projects, saying it's too early to set an agenda. But the Columbia River Crossing – an enormous project getting mired in bureaucracy – would be a top candidate for some grassroots finessing, they all agree.

Whether it's as complex as an interstate bridge or as straightforward as educating people about the public health benefits of breast feeding – part of the county's mission – project leaders say the connectors could be an invaluable tool.

With all the public engagement in Portland, a more formal connection tool is a good idea, says Peter Andrews, a broker at Melvin Mark Companies and member of the Connector steering committee.

"How can we make it more effective? There's 20,000 nonprofits in Oregon," Andrews says. "(The hope is) to make those groups work better, make our government work better."



CHRISTOPHER ONSTOTT / TRIBUNE PHOTO  
Harvard researcher Karen Stephenson, in town to kick off the Portland/Vancouver Connector Project this week, led a panel discussion Tuesday morning for local business and civic leaders. She spoke with Portland Development Commission Chairman Scott Andrews about how the project could help engage the public more effectively to solve some of the region's biggest problems.

For more information, and to access the survey, go to [http:// connectorprojectportland.com](http://connectorprojectportland.com).

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