

Community Foundations and Resident Engagement

Resident engagement is the next step in community leadership. To fulfill their potential for impact, community foundations must reach beyond traditional leaders — such as policymakers, nonprofit executives, researchers and other funders — to directly engage residents as partners in change.

This Call to Action was issued in 2013 by the CFLeads Cultivating Community Engagement Panel — a group of 34 individuals from community foundations, national foundations, academia, government and community organizations — after a year of study and deliberation. Immediately following the release of this report, eight community foundations came together for a year to better understand resident engagement and learn how to advance their own practice. A number of lessons for the community foundation field have emerged from this work.

Resident Engagement Defined

Resident engagement by a community foundation centers on helping community members identify the changes they want to see in their communities and then supporting them in pursuing their goals. It is based on the belief that incorporating the ideas, resources and leadership of people across the community — particularly those residents most affected by the policies and systems many foundations seek to influence — is crucial to tackling the deep and complex challenges facing communities today.

Why Resident Engagement Matters

Community foundations that have embraced resident engagement have found that it inspires boards and donors, energizes staff and leads to:

- Solutions that are appropriate for the complex, interconnected challenges facing communities
- Long-term, sustained community impact
- Trusting relationships that can serve as a foundation for further community-building

What it Takes

Ten lessons emerged from the eight foundations that participated in the learning network on resident engagement. Summarized on the reverse side, these lessons are more fully discussed in a 2014 report by CFLeads, *Powerful Partners: Lessons from Community Foundations about Resident Engagement*, and illustrated through real-life examples in *Community Foundations and Resident Engagement: Stories from the Field*. In addition, the *Resident Engagement Guidebook*, also released in 2014, helps community foundations assess their readiness for this work.



10 Lessons about Resident Engagement

- 1 Build a board that supports resident engagement.
- 2 Create common understanding of resident engagement and its importance.
- 3 Develop staff capacities for resident engagement.
- 4 Balance charitable and transformational activities.
- 5 Address race, equity, and power dynamics.
- 6 Establish trusting relationships with residents and community leaders.
- 7 Establish partnerships that involve more than money.
- 8 Connect residents to issues, allies, and opportunities.
- 9 Commit to a long-term and sometimes complex process.
- 10 Ensure sustainable support for resident engagement.