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CHAPIN HALL
DISCUSSION PAPER

Community Change Makers: The Leadership Roles of Community Foundations

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COMMUNITY CHANGE MAKERS: THE LEADERSHIP ROLES OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

This is a critical time for community foundations. More than 650 community foundations now operate throughout the country, and collectively they control over \$30 billion in assets. Their contributions to community well-being are widely acknowledged and respected; local civic leaders and national foundations often turn to them to lead pivotal community improvement efforts. But community foundations also face two interrelated challenges that cut to the heart of their mission and effectiveness.

First, the communities in which they work are becoming more complex and fragmented. In many cities and suburbs, populations are more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse. Commercial development, housing, and jobs are more regionally scattered than in the past. Mechanisms for raising public funds, providing public services, and making public decisions are more decentralized. Local civic leadership is being eroded by corporate consolidation and other factors. Meanwhile, the non-profit sector is growing in both size and diversity, often without the organizational infrastructure or funding required for optimal performance.

Second, the fundraising environment for community foundations is becoming more competitive. Well-financed national corporations like Fidelity, as well as smaller, local financial service providers, have emerged as competitors for the same philanthropic dollars. Some large issue-specific charities and United Ways are creating their own endowments in addition to their annual fundraising efforts. Increasingly, individual donors want direct involvement with their giving and demand measures of impact and accountability. Compounding these pressures, a fluctuating stock market and a sluggish economy have reduced charitable assets and giving, while state and local budget constraints have decreased public sector support for meeting critical social needs.

Community foundations are responding to these challenges by building on their distinctive position and history of community leadership. They are taking on more complex and demanding roles to convene, connect, inform, influence, and lead solutions to pressing problems. They are helping their communities take broader, bolder, and more comprehensive steps to build better futures. And they are connecting their donors to these efforts, expanding the influence, resources, and knowledge that are brought to bear. In short, they are becoming “community change makers.”

These leadership roles are a great strength of community foundations. As one community foundation executive notes, “Leading with our work is our best way to raise money. It puts community change at the center of the foundation’s activities, and that’s where it belongs.” The potential that community foundations have for local leadership also distinguishes them from most other philanthropic institutions (e.g., national and regional foundations, donor-advised funds offered by investment companies) and civic and service organizations, which often lack the foundations’ institutional flexibility, range of boundary-crossing relationships, civic standing, or ability to see and connect the pieces into a larger whole.

Community foundations have always been more than grantmaking conduits for philanthropic endowments. But although community change-making is not new for *all* community foundations, its current breadth and depth is new for many—and the complex roles can have significant organizational implications for foundations. Leaders often have to build special capacities, transform internal structures, reorient staff, prepare trustees, and reposition themselves in their home communities. In a word, they have had to *align* their organizations with their expanding roles in community change.

This paper suggests that **developing and expanding their leadership roles and making the necessary institutional adjustments are the central challenges for community foundations today**, and it includes examples of ways in which community foundations meet the challenges. The decision to assume change-making roles is driven by a passionate belief in the potential and responsibility of community foundations to promote positive community change, combined with a confidence that asset growth and community change can go hand in hand. This belief and confidence seems to be validated by experience. As one community foundation executive noted, “Because we were small [in endowment funds], we decided the only way we could have an impact was to act like we were big. So that’s what we did and the money followed.”

In the pages that follow, **Section I: Leadership Roles in Community Change** identifies, describes, and illustrates some of the key leadership roles through which community foundations are working to improve residents’ lives in poor neighborhoods. Many roles involve grantmaking at some level. However, because community foundations’ skill at grantmaking is well known, we emphasize five other aspects of their change-making roles, including: contributing ideas and information, fostering strategic connections, expanding resources devoted to change, leveraging systems change, and promoting performance. We conclude

each description and example of a role with a brief comment on a factor that contributed to a community foundation's successful leadership.

Section II: Internal Readiness for External Leadership examines the organizational changes that many community foundations make in order to play their expanded roles effectively. They include: clarifying mission and strategy, aligning the organization, and building a board for leadership. This section draws from the experience of just one community foundation to highlight the interrelationship among the various internal adjustments.

Section III: Conclusion summarizes our observations about community foundations as change-makers, and **Appendix: Sources of Information** describes and lists our sources.

A final word about examples: Community foundations' leadership roles are rarely one-dimensional, and a community foundation's roles often overlap and reinforce one another. Although many of our examples come from older, larger, urban community foundations, some small or young community foundations have also assumed change-maker roles. We selected the stories profiled here because they exemplify practices to which many community foundations aspire. Our small sample does not begin to exhaust the universe of examples, however. Nor does the emphasis on community foundation leadership intend to deny the critical contributions of their many partners.

I. LEADERSHIP ROLES IN COMMUNITY CHANGE

“One of the unique and important roles we play is to maintain a high level of knowledge about the needs and resources of the communities we serve.”

Chris Sutherland

East Bay Community Foundation

From their inception, community foundations have added value to communities in ways that extend far beyond grantmaking and donor services. The range and significance of community foundations' leadership has grown in recent years,

however. It now takes many forms depending on the character, challenges, culture, and external opportunities present in specific communities. It depends also on foundations' internal factors, including the proportion of unrestricted to restricted funds, the number and capacity of staff, the age of the institution, the nature of the board, and the geographic focus.

All community foundations face competing pressures and must make tough choices about where and how to deploy their resources. This means there is a great deal of variety in roles across foundations and communities. Nonetheless, groups of community foundations around the country are becoming active change

makers. They consistently find, foster, and connect the pieces of their communities into united and effective forces for positive change.

CONTRIBUTING IDEAS AND INFORMATION

Ideas and information can catalyze changes in minds, behavior, and communities. Some community foundations are harnessing the power of information by creating new knowledge and introducing new ideas. They translate national and state issues to the local context. They stimulate and shape community dialogue about solutions to critical local problems. And they mobilize community attention around tough issues.

BUILDING USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

In many communities, existing knowledge sheds little light on pressing community problems or possible solutions. Community foundation leaders and staff can help fill the void by surfacing knowledge of local conditions. They understand the local context. They know their community's history, organizations, and politics. They have first-hand contact with community problems. They often have experience using data to reveal conditions and inform thinking. They can document what is happening, investigate underlying factors, provide analysis, and capture and communicate lessons. They can serve as hubs for community information through the Web and other mechanisms. They can provide a bridge between national and

state issues and the local context. And community foundations can import promising information, ideas, and approaches from other localities.

The **Greater Milwaukee Foundation**, for instance, is making a long-term institutional commitment to serve as an “information broker.” The foundation recently began providing community members, policy makers, donors, and other constituencies with better information on the changing nature of low-income neighborhoods in the greater Milwaukee area. The foundation chose this arena because the lack of such information had become a barrier to progress. Public agencies did not typically track how many potentially eligible people fail to take advantage of public benefit programs—a piece of data that could indicate both the effectiveness of outreach efforts and the potential amount of federal funding not captured.

As a first step, the foundation engaged the Center for Urban Initiatives and Research (CUIR) at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee to provide a 30-year trend analysis on families in low-income neighborhoods. The resulting paper, *Poverty in Greater Milwaukee*, includes a synthesis of previous studies on the causes and impacts of poverty in the metro area, presented with charts, graphs, and GIS maps that community groups and policymakers can use. The foundation also funded a second paper, *Local Leaders Talk about Poverty in Milwaukee*, based on interviews with community leaders about how to promote the success of struggling Milwaukee families. These reports conclude that poverty in Milwaukee persists despite the availability of strong assistance programs and regardless of improvements to the area’s overall economy. The reports recommend making a concerted effort to help the working poor as the most effective way to move people out of poverty. The foundation shared what it learned with grantees, public agencies, other funders and donors through meetings, presentations, mailings, and e-mail.

This led to an initiative (described later in this paper) to increase working families’ use of public programs.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Greater Milwaukee Foundation’s effort to build useful knowledge through a research partnership with the University of Wisconsin benefited from the close involvement of a senior program officer in all aspects of the research team’s work. This active partnership kept the research team’s work responsive to the foundation’s needs while also increasing the foundation staff’s data-gathering and analytic capacity. Furthermore, it brought the foundation’s trustees closer to the project and helped build their understanding and support for it, even as it positioned the foundation as a knowledge resource for the community.

SHAPING COMMUNITY DISCOURSE

New information alone rarely changes minds. Its impact often dissipates without a broad, long-term effort to inform and shape public opinion. Community foundations are well positioned to help develop, carry out, and sustain strategies

“If we cannot inspire and organize voices at the community level for more equitable policies and budgets, the program and policy objectives of foundations and communities alike will be that much more difficult and elusive.”

Stephen Mittenthal

Arizona Community Foundation

to move public opinion about critical community issues. They understand various constituencies’ perspectives on issues and can help translate and frame information so that key constituencies understand what it means to them. Because bringing together new partners, investors, and supporters is part of what most community foundations do, they know how to seek out, cultivate, and provide ongoing information to sympathetic and respected leaders. Because they have relationships with people in low-income neighborhoods and with decision makers and opinion leaders throughout the region, they can forge long-term connections among them.

Through these efforts, community foundations can help reframe thinking about critical issues or set a community’s change agenda.

For example, the **Rhode Island Foundation** wanted to significantly improve the public’s and policymakers’ understanding of the conditions of the state’s children. After assessing its options, foundation leaders decided the state needed a new intermediary to produce good data, manage its release, promote public discussion, and help apply information to policy work. They identified KIDS COUNT, a state-by-state effort to track the status of U.S. children and to provide policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being. With the support of national funders, the foundation helped establish a KIDS COUNT project in Rhode Island,

incubated it within the foundation, and spun it off as an independent organization.

The Rhode Island Foundation has reinforced KIDS COUNT’s communications efforts to reach decision makers and enhance public discourse through

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Rhode Island Foundation’s work to shape community discourse through a partnership with KIDS COUNT benefited from treating communications as a core part of the foundation’s mission and as a critical aspect of its grantees’ work. All of the foundation’s communications strategies now aim to shift the public agenda by increasing public awareness, expanding public engagement, and building public will for the long term. The foundation has learned to communicate about issues and about its own institutional role in community change.

community meetings, board and staff speeches, special reports, press relations, technical assistance, and Web-based newsletters. The foundation provides grant support for the annual KIDS COUNT Fact Book because state officials have come to rely on the Fact Book to guide decisions about children. It also funded KIDS COUNT to analyze gaps in the state's early childcare and education systems in order to bolster the case for additional public childcare funding, and helped establish a partnership between nonprofit organizations and state agencies to disseminate the analysis. Those activities precipitated Starting Rte, a three-year policy and public engagement campaign to improve and expand early childhood education and care, which resulted in a \$60 million increase in state childcare subsidies for low-income families.

“Baltimore Community Foundation’s core strength lies in the potential of the three C’s: convening, connecting, and collaborating.”

Cheryl Casciani

Baltimore Community Foundation

FOSTERING STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS

Every community has a wide range of financial, human, and social resources, but many struggle to harness and develop them effectively for ambitious common purposes. Some community foundations are establishing, expanding, and maintaining strategic linkages—both locally and regionally—that can improve the lives of community members.

GROWING AND LINKING LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Individual local organizations may have difficulty achieving significant community improvement and knitting together broader constituencies for change on their own. Community foundations, however, can reduce the barriers, sometimes by merely placing a strategic phone call or arranging a meeting with the right person. When the pieces of a solution exist but are located in disconnected places throughout the city, community foundations often can find and connect the components of success. Most community foundations draw on extensive contacts at all levels to stimulate inclusive, productive community dialogue. They can make introductions, broker partnerships, and help mend frayed relationships. They can educate disparate players about one another's work and bring new voices into community decision making. They can link diverse stakeholders who would not otherwise engage with each other. And they can help communities find a more powerful vision and a more unified voice.

The **Baltimore Community Foundation**, for example, was convening groups of public, private-sector, non-profit, and community leaders around various important social and civic issues. Foundation staff noticed a lot of overlap among the

participants' disparate efforts and judged that they might benefit from a larger vision and more integrated action. The foundation helped initiate discussions with the mayor and business, civic, and political leaders about linking efforts to increase the city's tax base with those to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Baltimore Community Foundation's work to grow and link local leadership benefited from the foundation playing a central role in helping city and community leaders negotiate the competing priorities of supporting poor families and recruiting a new tax base. Rather than shying away from this tension, the foundation has identified that "bridging" function as a change-making role in which it can often add value.

in low-income neighborhoods. From those conversations emerged Reason to Believe, a broad-based civic coalition that married business development with poverty reduction. Local leaders are now raising and investing \$30 mil-

lion to achieve specific, measurable outcomes in the areas of drug treatment, family supports, school readiness, after-school internship opportunities, and jobs. For instance, the school readiness goal targets such things as appropriate child care and lead paint abatement for 1,400 families; preschool language acquisition and early literacy support for 7,000 families; and after-school, summer reading, and youth development and enrichment activities for 5,000 first, second and third graders. The community foundation helped identify many of the substantive steps required to achieve the goals and committed a senior staff person to serve as coordinator of the coalition; the foundation also assumed responsibility for raising \$5 million of the initiative's funding.

"Everyone wants everyone else to play in their sand box. Someone needs a more inclusive vision."

*Winsome Hawkins
Coalition of Community
Foundations for Youth*

BROKERING REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

The solutions to many problems extend beyond the boundaries of any one city. Yet developing a common vision and concerted action across cities, school districts, police departments, and so forth can be difficult unless someone steps forward to facilitate the process. As even-handed conveners for community visioning and problem solving, community foundation staff often have the sophisticated process skills needed to help players across the region work together. Because they work in many fields, foundation leaders and staff often know the stakeholders in many jurisdictions and fields of endeavor who should be included in regional problem solving. And, because many community foundations try to address the underlying causes of problems, they can push beyond short-term band-aid

approaches to help find more lasting solutions. Their long-term commitment of leadership and resources also helps sustain long-term, broad-based efforts.

For example, in 1994, the **East Bay Community Foundation** saw youth violence growing in Richmond, Berkeley, and Oakland, California. The jump in youth homicides was creating a sense of hopelessness in many neighborhoods. Because its grant dollars were limited at the time, the community foundation responded by helping to convene leaders regionally to explore ways of stemming the bloodshed. These leaders formed the East Bay Public Safety Corridor Partnership, which soon included mayors, county administrators, school superintendents, police chiefs, and faith representatives from 18 cities and 22 school districts. After taking time to define the problem clearly and study the contributing factors, the Partnership decided to focus on limiting the availability of guns. Members identified the policy changes that were needed, developed a strategy to enact the changes, and began taking concerted action. When Oakland leaders saw a need for local legislation to require trigger locks and to limit access to guns and ammunition, they worked with the Partnership to get it enacted.

As the work continued, the Partnership tackled other aspects of the problem, such as domestic violence. Under the Partnership's auspices, local agencies developed common protocols and a data system to share warning signs of potential abuse, which led to more effective early interventions. Recognizing the rare opportunity this provided to talk across sectors and jurisdictions about common regional problems, the participating agencies decided to sustain their collaboration through self-assessed membership fees. The result of these and other efforts has been a decline in youth homicides and domestic violence regionally.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The East Bay Community Foundation's effort to broker regional solutions through the Public Safety Corridor Partnership benefited from: (1) the foundation's role in enlarging the scope of dialogue beyond any one jurisdiction or field, (2) its commitment to sustaining alliances among the partners, and (3) its willingness to share credit broadly. Although grants can provide incentives and lubricate common action, the foundation believes that creative and responsive institutional leadership is a critical element in most significant regional problem solving.

EXPANDING RESOURCES DEVOTED TO CHANGE

An erratic stock market and shrinking government budgets have increased financial pressure on communities aiming to improve. Many locales are struggling to retain

existing resources while seeking new revenues. In response, some community foundations are working to increase local access to public funds and to nurture philanthropists who want greater local impact.

“We need to build on what is already out there. Lots of good programs are not sufficiently utilized.”

James Marks
Greater Milwaukee
Community Foundation

MAXIMIZING ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

Billions of public dollars flow into cities, counties, and states through federal funding streams, but the bewildering complexity of the process leaves a large amount of funding untouched. Even when the funds are fully tapped, their local distribution and delivery often needs improvement. Community foundations can help communities find more effective ways to draw down and use government funds. Foundation leaders often are familiar with government resources, public programs, and publicly funded providers of service. Many already have strong relationships with key players. Their staffs know what changes in funding, policy, and practice would make it easier to access and use the money effectively. And community foundations can help connect representatives of the public and community sectors to work out innovative solutions.

For example, when the **Greater Milwaukee Foundation**'s research revealed that certain federally funded poverty-alleviation programs were grossly underutilized by families in its region, the foundation reached out to the Milwaukee Asset Building Coalition, which promoted broader use of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Badger Care Consortium, which promoted access to the state's health insurance program for the uninsured. Although these highly regarded coalitions represented most of the state and local agencies, advocacy groups, and business leaders concerned about poverty, they did not frequently work together. The foundation facilitated a series of discussions about how to better coordinate the coalitions' efforts. After several meetings, the groups formed a partnership to create three multi-lingual, one-stop service centers (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Super Sites). The Super Sites helped families file tax forms at no cost, apply for the EITC, and connect to available health and social service programs; they also provided information about savings options with local banks, other aspects of “financial literacy,” energy assistance, cost-saving techniques for weatherizing houses, and other services. The partnership selected a local organization to coordinate the sites and design an outreach effort that targeted customers of day care centers, barbershops, beauty salons, and other local meeting places. The community foundation gave a \$75,000 grant to the Super Sites, helped recruit other funding partners, and contributed \$25,000 to an external evaluation.

In just six months, the Super Sites effort (along with expanded activities of the major partners throughout the city) helped more than 8,000 households claim \$5.3 million in EITC income—an amount three times greater than EITC filings the previous year. Many individuals and families also secured a range of other public benefits.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Greater Milwaukee Foundation’s work to maximize access to government resources benefited from: (1) the foundation’s strong and diverse relationships throughout the community, (2) its commitment to helping the coalitions build on what they were already doing, (3) its reputation as a fair and trustworthy organization, and (4) its provision of new funds to support collaboration around the Super Sites.

NURTURING HIGH-IMPACT PHILANTHROPISTS

Many communities have private philanthropic resources that are not directed toward local improvements or to community change efforts. Moreover, research confirms that new donors often want more active roles in community change, in addition to making donations. Community foundations are well positioned to engage and mobilize donors as participants in and leaders of efforts to address stubborn community problems. Community foundations are experienced at providing donors with information about community needs that addresses the donor’s interests. Foundation leaders often know how to involve donors in research and project development and how to assist them. They often introduce donors to role models, mentors, partners, and key community leaders. Many have experience helping donors set up giving circles. They know how to enlarge donors’ vision of what is possible and how to connect donors to real-time opportunities for change. Many also understand that donors have much more to offer than money, and they can link donors’ knowledge, expertise, and networks to places where they are needed.

“To the extent that we engage donors in questions of what they can do, we have greater impact.”

Mike Howe

East Bay Community Foundation

For instance, the **Baltimore Community Foundation** views its current and future donors as crucial resources for the entire city’s future and is expanding efforts to engage them. The foundation has created “The Baltimore Investment Guide,” a comprehensive resource for donors who want to make a difference in Baltimore’s future. The Guide “shines a strategic spotlight” on existing community problems, identifies promising opportunities for investment, and connects donors to a coherent agenda for change. For new donors, in particular, the Guide shows in concrete terms how they can have an effect on seemingly intractable problems. To reinforce the Guide’s benefits, the community foundation introduces donors

to representatives of grantee organizations and helps them work together on projects. For example, the foundation regularly pulls together broad review teams to assess neighborhood grants. The teams include residents from the neighborhoods, government managers, civic leaders, donors, and staff. These teams plan and conduct site visits together, which enables team members to get to know each other, develop common language, sort through assumptions and ideas, and learn from each other. The interaction between donors and small neighborhood projects often gives donors a deeper understanding of grassroots-level opportunities and helps them become direct supporters of these efforts. This kind of work, along with leadership of large-scale efforts such as the Reason to Believe initiative, is repositioning the community foundation as a central resource in the region for philanthropic knowledge about improving Baltimore's future.

The **Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta** offers another example. This foundation revised its mission statement in 1998 to reflect a renewed commitment to increasing the knowledge, capacities, and roles of its donors in community change. The foundation also made significant institutional changes by breaking down the boundaries between its fundraising and program divisions and by establishing a donor relations staff. This staff's job is to understand donors' needs and desires, orient donors to community needs and to strategies for change, help donors clarify their goals and develop grantmaking plans, identify possible grantees, and manage donors' funds. Some program staff worried that the changes might impede the foundation's ability to respond strategically to opportunities in the community. Experience soon revealed, however, that new donors for important community efforts emerged when staff time and effort were spent helping to contribute to donors' knowledge and their contacts. Furthermore, the foundation found that program staff's expertise was a selling point to donors who wanted to be better informed and more effective in their grantmaking.

To further assist donors, the foundation publishes guides like "Extra Wish," which identifies special small grants opportunities, and a "Grantmaker" series that profiles specific organizations.

The foundation's work to support donors' learning has generated more than \$1 million in additional grants annually for community projects.

SUCCESS FACTORS

In both Baltimore and Atlanta, the community foundations' efforts to nurture high-impact philanthropists have been fueled by a shared belief that the goals for community change and fundraising are mutually reinforcing. Moreover, both efforts have benefited by the combination of: (1) a deep commitment to donor learning and involvement, (2) the provision of tools and services to support donor effectiveness, (3) efforts to connect donors directly to people and problems, and (4) outreach to professional financial advisors.

LEVERAGING SYSTEMS CHANGE

The policies and procedures of federal, state, and local governments can overwhelm community efforts to improve conditions. Similarly, ineffective or poorly integrated public programs can ignore opportunities to improve people's lives or even stand in their way. Some community foundations are helping improve public and private systems by connecting institutions, mobilizing communities, and advocating for needed service system and policy reforms. They are filling small but significant gaps in public and private systems in the short term while also helping to develop long-term solutions to large-scale problems.

COLLABORATING FOR LOCAL SYSTEMS REFORM

The jumble of agencies, funding streams, and programs that support children and families have developed in isolation and with little capacity to coordinate or leverage each other's resources. Each has its own rationale, rules, advocates, and inertia. Key players have little time or space to take a comprehensive view of causes or solutions. Community foundations can function as an external prod for local systems reform by asking new questions, inserting new ideas into the processes, offering new opportunities to work together, or providing impetus for change. Community foundations' leaders and staff understand the pieces, the politics, and the personalities involved. They are familiar with successful approaches to systems change and may have technical expertise that can guide the effort over time. If they lack knowledge in-house, they usually know where to find it externally. The standing of community foundation trustees can help provide the political cover needed to make difficult choices and can help stimulate communities' latent values and resources to reinforce system change efforts.

The **Arizona Community Foundation**, for example, is developing a comprehensive, integrated agenda to support families throughout their growth and development. Part of the effort aims to mobilize civic commitment to supporting child and family success and part seeks to improve support systems. The foundation's agenda includes work on childcare certification and training, school readiness, family-supporting jobs, and college scholarships. One component of this larger effort is *Communities for Kids*, which seeks to identify, coordinate, and mobilize community resources to benefit children and families. Beginning in two demonstration communities, the foundation's effort focuses on helping "cornerstone institutions"—public libraries, public schools, childcare services, and health care institutions—

“For the messy, politically charged work of creating an organized system, the even-handed convening power of the community foundation's table is essential.”

Mike Howe
East Bay Community Foundation

work together to better support young children. This process includes mapping community assets for children and families; identifying priority issues through dialogue with parents, community leaders, service providers, business leaders and

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Arizona Community Foundation's effort to collaborate for local systems reform is benefiting from: (1) the foundation's commitment to developing long-term partnerships with grantees that promote grantee capacity and organizational stability; and (2) the marriage of increased service coordination with broader community mobilization to foster an ethos of community responsibility toward all children. By placing the system reform initiative in a larger context, the foundation has activated a full range of the community's institutional and civic assets to support, expand, and sustain the effort.

other stakeholders; defining interim and long-term benchmarks for progress; developing action plans for each site; and creating communications strategies to support the action plans.

To assist the sites further, the community foundation also created

a workbook on key research, organized technical assistance and training sessions for each site, and helped sites develop measures of progress. It is now identifying statewide organizations affiliated with the cornerstone institutions that can advise the communities.

ADVOCATING AND PARTNERING FOR POLICY SOLUTIONS

The devolution of federal authority in recent years has made public policy more of a state and local game. At the local level, however, government is more fragmented by special taxing and service provision districts and other factors. Some community

“It is not possible to effect permanent systemic change without working to change policy.”

Ron Gallo

The Rhode Island Foundation

foundation leaders, recognizing a need for more effective local community voices for long-term progress, are becoming active policy advocates on a range of issues, including education, health care, recreation, policing, child welfare, foster care, and adoption. In this change-making role, community foundation leaders and staff can cultivate relationships with elected officials, legislative staff, and public departmental managers. They can get to know the perspectives, constraints, and competing pressures faced by public officials and administrators. They can learn the political processes that lead to new policy and look for opportunities to intervene. They can provide money for things the public sector cannot easily support. They can break through departmental barriers to develop cross-cutting solutions. They can support community advocates, or even fill occasional gaps in the advocacy infrastructure. And they can leverage their own credibility and resources by drawing in national partners to boost the stakes.

For example, when leaders of the **Rhode Island Foundation** decided to support more fundamental community change, they began to look for opportunities to work more closely with state agencies, legislators, mayors, and special commissions. The foundation increasingly advocated for policy change and often partnered with the public sector to make change happen. For instance, the foundation funded a health insurance demonstration program that expanded health coverage for uninsured children statewide; conducted research on the topic, including a survey of employer health insurance provision; supported retreats, speakers, and seminars for public managers; and joined with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to bring the *Covering Kids Initiative* to Rhode Island. These efforts increased families' participation in the insurance program, thereby leveraging millions in state outreach funds that directly benefited children.

Later, when a managed care program that served most Medicaid families in Rhode Island was at risk of bankruptcy, the foundation made a \$2 million program-related investment in the form of a loan to purchase the Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island, the state's Medicaid HMO. As a result of the foundation's investment, children kept their insurance. The managed care provider is repaying the loan and has begun reaching out to the 50,000 people who are eligible but not enrolled.

In another instance, the Rhode Island Foundation worked with the University of Rhode Island and the state Department of Education to improve teachers' use of technology in the classroom. With the partners' support and management, public school teachers designed the *Rhode Island Teacher and Technology Initiative* (RITTI).

RITTI has provided 60 hours of training, laptop computers, and technical support to 2,400 Rhode Island teachers—more than 25 percent of the state's teachers. Having reached its initial goal in just three summers, the foundation increased

its commitment to \$5.7 million, attracted another \$400,000 from local funding partners, leveraged \$3.4 million from the State Assembly to purchase additional computer equipment for schools, and helped the state win a \$1 million grant to connect RITTI to teacher training at the University of Rhode Island.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Rhode Island Foundation's efforts to advocate and partner for policy solutions benefit from the foundation's willingness to push and to cooperate. The foundation raises the stakes for change with public entities by bringing its diverse intellectual, financial, and political capacities and influence to the equation. But the foundation also remains flexible and responsive to its public partners' needs, and works hard to create supportive conditions conducive to policy change.

Smaller efforts have value, too. When the Rhode Island Foundation found that residents in its target communities were frustrated by a 64-page government application that was available only in English, it asked the relevant public agency for permission to redraft and translate the application. The revised version was only 4 pages long and available in several languages.

PROMOTING PERFORMANCE

During the 1990s, the private, public, and philanthropic sectors all became more demanding about performance. The private sector adopted better methods for assessing management quality and is working to develop more transparent accounting standards. The federal government increasingly tied social program spending to outcomes. Newly wealthy donors began to require more concrete evidence of

“The object of our philanthropy is not assistance to isolated individuals but the systematic development of human and institutional resources in our shared community.”

Mike Howe

East Bay Community Foundation

grantee results. In response, some community foundations have provided leadership to ensure greater accountability while also increasing community capacity.

ENHANCING COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Strong grassroots and civic leadership, effective social networks, and well-run community organizations make it easier to address many community problems, but communities often lack the civic and organizational ingredients needed to move forward. Most community foundation leaders know that even the most depleted neighborhoods have individual and collective resources that, with a little development, can support community change. Community foundations can help identify those individuals and organizations and, frequently, can build their knowledge and skills for leading and achieving community goals. They can pull together training, technical assistance, mentoring, peer assistance, coaching, referrals, and other learning opportunities. They can create venues in which groups learn from and support each other. They can identify unmet needs among nonprofits and help grantees and funders develop collective responses. They can improve the capacity of technical assistance providers and influence the quality of training. By braiding and layering these efforts, community foundations can help develop the base of effective leaders and organizations needed to tackle the most daunting challenges.

For example, the **Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta** believes that community change can be achieved and sustained most effectively by growing the capacity of local leadership and institutions to determine and direct their own

future. Foundation leaders are confident that neighborhoods have numerous assets that can be enhanced and harnessed for community betterment, so they created a small grants program that included dedicated technical assistance for neighborhood groups in low- and moderate-income communities. This “Neighborhood Fund” makes 10 to 12 grants a year ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. The application process is simple, and grantees may apply for and receive Neighborhood Fund grants more than once. Each grant recipient gets a technical assistance provider for the duration of the grant. The assistance providers, trained by the foundation in asset-based community development, focus on the grantees’ real-time needs: developing a work plan, grants management, writing an end-of-project report, and the like. Grantees also come together to learn from each other, and some former grantees have joined the Fund’s grant-making panel.

In addition, the Community Foundation and the University of Georgia’s Fanning Leadership Institute developed a Neighborhood Leadership Program for leaders of funded neighborhood groups. Over a three-month period, the University trains neighborhood leaders in a broad range of leadership skills. Some program graduates have been trained and certified as presenters for the program and have used this expertise to train others in their neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Fund, the Leadership Program, and other foundation efforts are steadily producing a cadre of effective leaders and organizations in the region. Based on the success of the Fund, an asset-based orientation and wrap-around technical assistance have been embedded in all of the community foundation’s grantmaking.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta’s effort to enhance community capacity benefits from: (1) connecting training and support to the real-time problems that grantees face; (2) providing different kinds of complementary capacity-building opportunities over time; (3) ensuring that technical assistance and training is consistent and of high quality; and (4) “closing the circle” by helping beneficiaries of training spread their knowledge and skills to others in their neighborhoods.

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY

Unclear goals and progress measures make it difficult for communities to judge whether interventions are working. Some community foundation leaders and staff play a valuable role by helping define credible performance targets, accepting accountability for progress towards goals, and evaluating and publicizing results. Community foundations can contribute this type of leadership because they know how to engage critical partners in developing a common language, vision, and set of expectations. Their knowledge and analytic skills help to frame questions, select approaches, and guide research into trends, opportunities, threats, and gaps. Their

“We need to be clear what we mean by measures of progress and measures of success. We don’t have a way of knowing intuitively whether we’re making a difference.”

*Bruce Astrein
The Arizona Foundation*

staff can help grantees build capacity for generating and interpreting useful information. They can introduce new approaches to measurement, such as asset mapping, or expand thinking about the validity of experienced-based knowledge. Moreover, community foundation leaders and staff understand that long-term improvements in organizational performance and community outcomes require an integrated approach that connects clear goals, performance measures, capacity building, and impact evaluation.

For instance, when voters in the city of Oakland passed a measure to set aside 2.5 percent (approximately \$7 million) of the city’s unrestricted general purpose fund for each of 12 years to support direct services to youth under 21 years of age, the **East Bay Community Foundation** was asked to help develop both the grantmaking and evaluation aspects of the initiative. Working as staff for a 19-member governing board appointed by the mayor and city council, the foundation assisted in developing a strategic planning process, defining funding priorities, and designing a competitive grant process. The *Kids First!* initiative focused on four outcomes: children’s success in school (ages 0-13), child health and wellness (ages 0-13), healthy transition to adulthood (ages 14 -20), and youth empowerment (ages 11-20). The community foundation provided further assistance to identify realistic indicators of success, ranging from the percent of youth promoted from kindergarten to the percent of graduating youth who have completed requirements that qualify them for the University of California or California State University systems.

The foundation also helped design capacity-building workshops and an evaluation process for grantees, foster a culture of learning, and provide for grantees’ continuous improvement. The evaluation process, in particular, has become a tool that helps grantees improve services and strategies by promoting collaboration and learning among organizations. Grantees identify and share both successes and failures without penalty.

Early process measures show that the Initiative has increased the 49 grantees’ direct service hours to children and youth by 10 percent and leveraged additional funding by 86 percent from 75 other sources.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The East Bay Community Foundation’s effort to strengthen accountability in the *Kids First!* initiative benefits from the link between building grantee capacity and evaluating progress. By committing to stabilizing and strengthening the service sector, the foundation encourages grantees to examine the quality of their services and the relationship of their services to the desired impacts. This capacity-building process also gives grantees support and mechanisms for revising their approaches.

II. INTERNAL READINESS FOR EXTERNAL LEADERSHIP

New and expanded leadership roles often require extensive, interrelated changes in a community foundation's own structure and capacities. The organization's leaders and staff must question their priorities, promises, and practices, and they must let many different institutional dimensions evolve simultaneously. The experience of the Rhode Island Foundation illustrates the range of organizational changes one community foundation made to successfully meet those challenges. The Rhode Island Foundation had undisputed advantages in its large pool of unrestricted funds and its strong board and staff leadership, which helped the organization make necessary changes. Still, the need to clarify mission and strategy, align internal operations with external goals and roles, and build a supportive board is shared by all community foundations, regardless of their relative wealth.

“You need to get the foundation ready for this kind of work.”

*Bruce Astrein
The Arizona Foundation*

CLARIFYING MISSION AND STRATEGY

Community foundations that play an expanded leadership role are willing to grapple with questions central to their mission and strategy. Who is their primary constituent? What is their relationship with donors, grantees, and the community at large? For what are they willing (and able) to be held accountable? In relationship to the changing needs of communities and donors, what are they uniquely positioned to do? For what do they want to be known? Is their primary job community grantmaking or does it also include community change-making? Is the community foundation ready to provide more active leadership?

The process of answering these questions requires courage and must be revisited as foundations attempt to meet their communities' ever-changing needs. Furthermore, the answers are not always obvious, and they always are shaped by local context. Legitimate financial, institutional, and community pressures can operate at cross-purposes. Opportunities to play new roles may not emerge. Principled agreements about the purpose of community foundations may not exist. Board and staff leadership may not align well.

As it has struggled to answer these and other questions, the Rhode Island Foundation's mission has evolved in a deliberate but incremental way. Each new refinement in its mission has sharpened the foundation's work and increased knowledge about how to go farther. For instance:

- Early in the recent process of self-reflection and change, foundation leadership and staff sought a better understanding of poverty in the state. Among other things, the foundation's inquiry revealed that poverty was increasingly concentrated in certain neighborhoods of five cities. This insight led the foundation to focus on the five communities in addition to its traditionally categorical funding strategy.
- As they worked in the five communities more closely, foundation staff began to recognize the crucial impacts of larger public policy and economic structures. This led the foundation to address public policies that directly affected residents' quality of life. In addition to its work on health coverage and early childhood education, the foundation began promoting reforms in public education and access to training in English as a Second Language for the growing Latino population.

In 2002, foundation leaders concluded that having four funding categories fragmented the work in the target communities and that the foundation's own internal structures undermined opportunities for synergy across programs. They refined their mission to embrace a single, larger, and more ambitious focus for community activities. Convinced that the foundation should strive to be a community change maker, the leaders committed to using the full range of institutional resources and connections to help "create vibrant communities with healthy families and neighborhoods." Thus the foundation's current strategy areas are: (1) policy, advocacy and systems reform; (2) organizational and leadership development; and (3) innovative models and proven practices.

ALIGNING THE ORGANIZATION

Community foundations that provide leadership for community change often change their internal structures to better balance the competing pressures of grant cycles and categories, donor needs, and participation in long-term initiatives. Some dismantle the walls between functions (such as "program" and "development") to become more flexible and better able to make quick decisions. Others add new functions or departments to gain important new capacities. For instance, a commitment to informing public opinion led some to create a new kind of communications department. Other foundations redesign the role of program staff to be more active resources in communities; some give program staff more autonomy (including authority to commit small amounts of funding and other resources) so they will have more credibility and can operate in "real time." Still others hire staff who better reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of communities in which they work. Some community foundations have done all these things and more.

The Rhode Island Foundation, eager to be more effective in achieving goals for community change, began by examining staff roles and reimagining the potential contribution that program staff could make. Foundation leaders came to realize that most staff time was consumed internally by the grant review process. Achieving the foundation's goals would require staff to be more active, engaged, and able to add value in the communities. Consequently, the foundation changed its grants docket to free up program staff between January and April for time spent in communities. Over the course of a year, program staff members now spend 50 percent of their time providing direct assistance to communities. Their job is to get to know neighborhoods firsthand. They listen, stimulate conversations and ideas, explore activities that can make a difference, connect people to each other and resources, provide technical assistance, and help pull people together to solve problems.

BUILDING A BOARD FOR LEADERSHIP

Community foundations can succeed in leadership roles only if they have supportive, involved trustees who are resolved to sustain commitments over the long haul. Every board wants to see progress in its community, but not all boards recognize on the front end how long it takes to create lasting change, how great the uncertainty is throughout such efforts, or how demanding a change-making role can be.

Some community foundation leaders have helped board members venture beyond their traditional roles by building their confidence and knowledge, slowly and deliberately. These foundations have:

- Encouraged staff and boards to be candid about problems and challenges
- Used site visits and other opportunities to deepen trustees' experience and knowledge
- Facilitated relationships among board members, grantees, and grassroots leaders
- Emphasized clear objectives and the importance of tracking indicators of progress
- Diversified board membership to encompass many constituencies and viewpoints and to deepen their roots in the communities they serve
- Found opportunities for board members to apply their own knowledge, access, and networks to community-change efforts

In the Rhode Island Foundation's case, the board's appointment authority was limited by the foundation's charter. Foundation leaders mounted a successful legal challenge to give the board more control over its own nominating process. Staff and trustees then expanded the board's composition by profession, gender, ethnicity, and race. As these changes occurred, so did an evolution in the nature of the board's discussions and its work. Staff began providing the board with more analysis and a broader set of options and encouraging trustees to pursue deeper discussions about what could be done. The board had traditionally functioned like a high-level grants committee, questioning and assessing individual grant requests, but increasingly trustees began to spend more time discussing the policy context for critical neighborhood problems and vetting strategies they might pursue for greater impact.

The board then began approving small but significant forays into more active roles and more venturesome projects. The success of these efforts encouraged trustees to go farther. Even where there were setbacks, the growing willingness to examine and reflect openly about the work helped the foundation's commitment to change-making take root. Trustees began to see the board not just as a governance, fundraising, and grant approval entity but also as having critical roles to play in supporting community improvement strategies. Board members became more visible. They helped bring greater access, connections, and resources to bear on foundation efforts. They functioned more often as a bridge between the centers of public and private power. And they challenged staff to challenge them.

III. CONCLUSION

Faced with greater complexity, fragmentation, and competition than in the past, community foundations are expanding their reach and their effectiveness as community change makers. As the examples of community foundation leadership in this report demonstrate, the foundations' unique access, agility, credibility, and local knowledge place them in a pivotal position at the center of community life. Their diverse intellectual, institutional, and financial resources enable them to foster and harness untapped community assets and to braid pieces of a community into something greater than the sum of the parts. Few other philanthropic institutions or community-level players have the potential to play such multi-faceted local roles.

A consistent core of values cuts across the change-making roles of community foundations. The change makers are energized by a belief in their communities' potential for self-improvement. They bridge their communities' disparate constituencies, institutions, and ideologies, and they firmly believe in inclusion and cross-sector dialogue. They are committed to ensuring that their communities' progress is fair and leaves no one behind. And they lead by fostering, catalyzing, and celebrating the contributions of others so that the whole community grows stronger.

Leaders of community foundations that play change-making leadership roles are committed to improving their communities' well-being, and they say their institutions have not yet reached the limit of what they can do to contribute. They know they face hard work both within and outside their institutions, and they are as willing to change internally as they are to lead change. They take new risks, develop new capacities, recruit new partners, and play unfamiliar roles. They balance donor and community needs. And wherever they fall on the spectrum from grantmaking to change making, they believe passionately in their organization's potential and responsibility to promote positive community change. That, in the end, holds both the promise and the challenge of community foundations' expanded leadership role.

APPENDIX: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

This paper is part of Chapin Hall's Program on Philanthropy and Community Change. The goal of the program is to expand discussion and build knowledge about the practice and potential of philanthropy to stimulate and support community improvement. Because community foundations are making important contributions in this domain, understanding the roles they play and the capacities they exercise can help enhance their impact.

To examine and illustrate community foundation roles and capacities, we drew primarily from data collected at four four-day meetings with a group of senior, community foundation leaders. These "Executive Sessions for Community Foundation Leadership on Changing the Lives of Children and Families in Distressed Communities" were designed and facilitated by Chapin Hall. The CEO and senior program staff at each of 10 participating community foundations attended the four meetings, which were held in January and June of 2002, May of 2003, and February of 2004. The Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth sponsored the Executive Sessions under a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Additional information was gathered through telephone interviews with participants.

The participating foundations were:

- Arizona Community Foundation
- Baltimore Community Foundation
- Central Indiana Community Foundation
- Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
- East Bay Community Foundation
- Greater Des Moines Foundation
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation
- Greater New Orleans Foundation
- Philadelphia Community Foundation
- Rhode Island Foundation

The Executive Sessions generated rich information and insight about the roles community foundations play. Though small in number, this group of community foundations is in many ways representative of the more established community foundations. The foundations' assets vary from about \$40 million to \$380 million. Some of them have a high proportion of discretionary funds; for others, very little funding is discretionary. Two operate state-wide; others serve metropolitan areas of various sizes. Some are pursuing innovative approaches; others have undertaken local translations of well-established strategies.

The roles and organizational implications described in the paper are illustrated with examples generated in the meetings. Although all 10 foundations provided rich stories from which to draw, in order to keep the paper to a moderate length we did not use stories from all foundations.

COALITION OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS FOR YOUTH

Executive Sessions Participant List

Bruce Astrein

Senior Vice President
for Programs
Arizona Community Foundation

Cindy Ballard

Executive Director
Coalition of Community
Foundations for Youth

Lynette E. Campbell

Vice President, Programs
The Philadelphia Foundation

Anna Cano-Morales

Program Officer
The Rhode Island Foundation

Cheryl Casciani

Program Director
Baltimore Community
Foundation

Johnny Danos

President
Greater Des Moines Foundation

Ron Gallo

President
The Rhode Island Foundation

Lesley Grady

Senior Program Officer
The Community Foundation
for Greater Atlanta, Inc.

Winsome Hawkins

Vice President of Programs
and Initiatives
The Community Foundation
for Greater Atlanta, Inc.
(now Associate Director, the
Coalition of Community
Foundations for Youth)

Sally Hays

Senior Program Officer
The Greater New Orleans
Foundation

Michael Howe

President
East Bay Community Foundation

Douglas Jansson

President & CEO
Greater Milwaukee Foundation

Gregory Ben Johnson

President and CEO
The Greater New Orleans
Foundation

Harry McFarland

Vice President for Programs
Central Indiana Community
Foundation

Tony Macklin

Philanthropic Services Director
Central Indiana Community
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James Marks

Associate Director
Greater Milwaukee Foundation

Ari Matusiak

Program Associate
The Rhode Island Foundation

Steve Mittenthal

President and CEO
Arizona Community Foundation

Alicia Phillip

Executive Director
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Deanna Silke

Director of Operations
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Christina Sutherland

Chief Operating Officer
East Bay Community Foundation

R. Andrew Swinney

President
The Philadelphia Foundation

Bob Uyeki

Program Officer
East Bay Community Foundation

Tom Wilcox

President and CEO
Baltimore Community
Foundation

CHAPIN HALL CENTER FOR CHILDREN

Chapin Hall Center for Children is a policy research center dedicated to bringing sound information, rigorous analysis, innovative ideas, and an independent multi-disciplinary perspective to bear on policies and programs affecting children. Located at the University of Chicago, Chapin Hall brings the highest standards of scholarship and the intellectual resources of one of the world's great research universities to the challenges of policymakers and service providers struggling to ensure that children grow, thrive, and take their place in a formidable world. Working with lawmakers and government administrators, as well as on the front lines with program providers, Chapin Hall puts rigorous, non-partisan research in the hands of those who shape the programs and policies that affect all children in their daily lives.

Chapin Hall's focus takes in all children, but devotes special attention to children facing significant problems, including abuse or neglect, poverty, and mental or physical illness. It takes a broad view of children's needs, including their potential as well as their problems, and addresses the services and supports—public and private—aimed at fostering child and youth development.



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