



Community Philanthropy: A conversation across the Americas September 2021

Launched in 2016, **Connecting Communities in the Americas (CCA)** is an initiative whose mission is to *inspire and strengthen community foundations and their partners for local impact as they address social and economic issues that transcend borders*. One way that we do this is by inviting conversations during our monthly Peer Resource Sharing sessions.

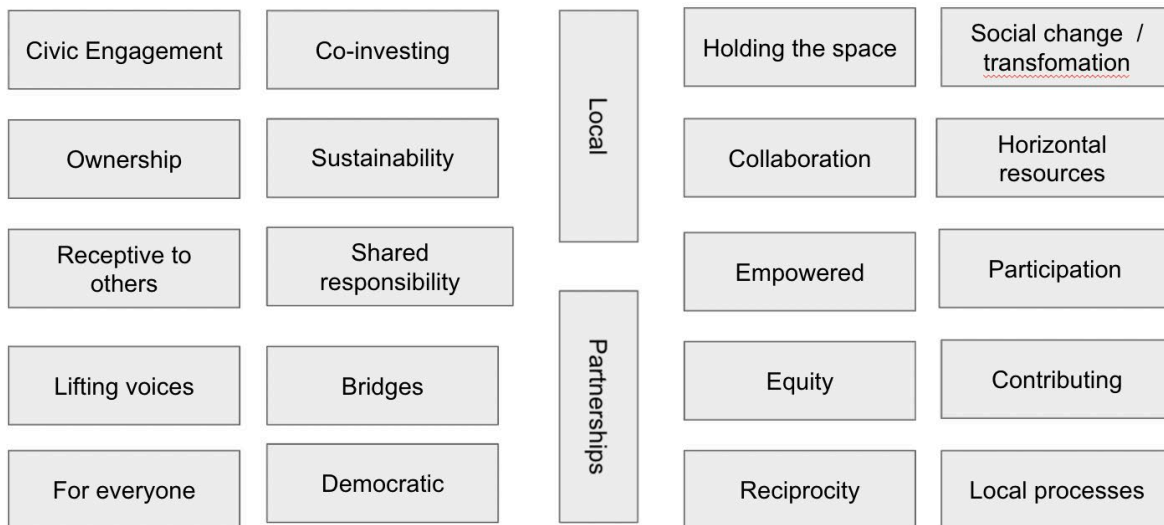
In August of 2021, colleagues from 10 community foundations and 8 partner institutions across 9 countries in the Caribbean and South, Central and North America came together to discuss the practice of “community philanthropy.”

To begin the conversation, which took place via zoom and with interpretation in English and Spanish, we asked participants to brainstorm words that initially come to mind when they think about community philanthropy. We encouraged them to write in the language of their preference, promoting a sense of inclusion and equity in communication. The image below shows what they shared:

Words that represent Community Philanthropy for you



Palabras que representan la Filantropía Comunitaria para tí



COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS PROMOTING COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY

This was followed by a presentation by Nick Deychakiwsky of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, which outlined definitions of community philanthropy and of community foundations in particular. According to the Mott Foundation, community philanthropy is a FORM OF AND FORCE FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT, which encompasses the values of:

Reciprocity
Solidarity
Social Cohesion
Self-reliance

Interdependence

Community philanthropy is focused on the use of LOCAL RESOURCES for addressing LOCAL NEEDS, and can take many forms, such as community foundations, giving circles, United Ways, social venture partners, community development organizations, volunteer centers, etc.

Nick went on to give the Mott Foundation's definition of community foundations, which the foundation works to strengthen worldwide. At the foundation they recognize that community foundations come in many shapes and sizes, yet share several characteristics including:

- Being a legally registered charitable non-profit
- Serving all residents within a defined geographic area
- Governed by members of the same community
- Independent of any religious group, political affiliation, business interest, individual, family or government
- Permanent, with long-term goals and strategy for sustainability
- Reliant on a broad array of local resources, financial and otherwise

The Mott Foundation does not view community foundations as:

- Social movements, advocacy campaigns or organizations who serve individuals directly
- Internet-based giving platforms
- Single issue, identity, interest or practice-based organizations (Women's fund, Environmental fund, etc.)
- Direct social service agencies
- Organizations relying on a single or limited funding sources
- Organizations relying solely on funding from outside of their local service area

COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY AS A BROADER CONCEPT

We led the participants into the broader definition of community philanthropy by presenting some of the key attributes identified by five years of work of the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF).

The first activity was to understand community philanthropy through imagery in an interactive fashion. Participants were shown the following image from the GFCF report (Hodgson & Pond, 2018) and asked to write what they saw that might characterize community philanthropy.



WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE PICTURE?

We were able to categorize the responses to the image in three ways: actions, products and ideas, as seen below.

Actions

Evolving and growing together
 Generating local resources
 Conversing
 Learning together
 Collaborating
 Using technology in innovative ways
 Houses in trees – thinking outside the box
 Understanding each other
 Communicating
 Gathering
 Growing
 Celebrating

Products

Local resources - common pot for all; trees at different stages of development
 Various groups engaging in specific activities
 Bridges that connect
 Fruit of their labor

Ideas

Sense of community
 All ages
 Integration
 Harmony

One thing we were talking about in our group, is that community philanthropy should include not only the pooling of resources, but also the pooling of decision-making - sometimes we forget the second part of this.

CREATING AN OPERATIONAL CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY

“Community philanthropy is not an organizational form, it is a practice” (Doan, 2019). So how can we get even closer to walking the talk? The following are some questions that can be discussed with your team and partners as you develop your own working definition of community philanthropy:

1. What does *community* mean to us? Who does it include? Which groups might have been excluded, even if unintentionally?
2. What does *philanthropy* mean to us? Is this the right word?
3. What do we want *community philanthropy* to mean for our institution? Develop a definition that fits with the mission and beliefs of the organization, is realistic and true to the heart of your work.
4. How will we know if we are moving in the right direction to promote community philanthropy? How will it be measured?

Doan, D. (2019). *What is community philanthropy? A guide to understanding and applying community philanthropy*. Global Fund for Community Foundations.

<https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/WhatIsCommunityPhilanthropy.pdf>

Hodgson, J. and Pond, A. (2018). *How community philanthropy shifts power*, Foundation Center.

<https://grantcraft.org/content/guides/how-community-philanthropy-shifts-power/>