

Connecting Communities in the Americas

Peer-to-Peer Learning Exchange Grant, 2022-2023, Final Report



CCA Peer-to-Peer Learning Exchange Participants:

- Deanna James, President, St. Croix Foundation for Community Development
- Gerry Roll, CEO, Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky
- Felecia Lucky, President, Black Belt Community Foundation
- Lilli Cox, Director of Communications and Community Investments, St. Croix Foundation for Community Development
- Haley Cutler, Project Manager & Senior Program Officer, St. Croix Foundation for Community Development
- Bonus Learning Exchange Participant (participated in some of our learning exchange activities): Lirio Márquez D'Acunti, Executive Director of the Vieques Community Historic Trust

About our Learning Exchange:

As holistic, place-based foundations St. Croix Foundation (SCF) for Community Development, Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky (FFAK) and the Black Belt Community Foundation (BBCF) are seated in places that may seem very different on the surface, yet we have learned that our communities and organizations have so much in common and so much to learn from one another. SCF, FFAK, and BBCF are working to achieve deep, lasting impacts in our respective communities. Relative to the broader field of philanthropy, and community foundations more specifically, our place-based foundations have small budgets, no or small operating endowments, and represent communities with histories of systemic racial, economic, political, and geographic marginalization and philanthropic disinvestment.

SCF, FFAK, and BBCF have been invigorated by the deep, thought provoking, explorative learning exchange work we have completed together over the last year. Our learning exchange was completed through a series of virtual convenings via zoom and one major in-person convening on the island of St. Croix.

Though on the surface the communities we serve are very different from one another (race, geographies, politics), what we have found is that we have so much in common, much to learn from each other, and much to share with the broader field of philanthropy. All three of our communities were recently impacted by natural disaster: Hurricane Maria (2017) on the island of St. Croix, major flooding across the Appalachian region (2022), devastating tornadoes through Selma, Alabama (2023). Through our learning exchange, we identified the nimble ways that our organizations have developed to best serve our under-resourced communities creatively and with high impact through deeply rooted community partnerships.

Our learning exchange included information sharing and the nurturing of collective wisdom on a wide range of topics related to operating place-based foundations in communities like ours. Topics of exploration included but were not limited to: disaster recovery and mitigation, opportunities and challenges for leveraging federal disaster recovery and mitigation resources for holistic community development and placekeeping initiatives, fiscal sponsorship, and a deep dive in to an analysis of what our place-based foundations and similarly situated philanthropies may have to teach the broader field of philanthropy about equity, partnerships, trust-based philanthropy, and advocacy.



In addition to the series of virtual exchanges between our organizations, our learning exchange included deep in-person engagement at a three-day retreat including SCF, FFAK, BBCF, more than 20 community-based nonprofit organizations, and national philanthropic leaders at the 2023 Philanthropy Retreat hosted by the St. Croix Foundation on the island of St. Croix. The theme of the 2023 Philanthropy Retreat was *"A Post-pandemic Exploration: The Responsibility of Place-Based Foundations in a Global Crisis"*. The culminating activity of our

learning exchange was joint participation on a panel presentation titled *"The Case for Place"* which centered the essential positionality of place-based organizations like SCF, FFAK, and BBCF as leaders and experts in the national philanthropic framework and key experts in nurturing collaboration and resiliency in their respective communities. James, President of SCF opened the retreat and the panel with important context and table setting. Gerry Roll, CEO of FFAK and Felicia Lucky, President of BBCF served as panelists alongside Lirio Márquez D'Acunti, Executive Director of the Vieques Community Historic Trust (VCHT), a place-based community organization located on the small, geographically remote island of Vieques in the territory of Puerto Rico. In this venue, SCF, KCAF, BBCF and VCHT Trust explored and shared critical perspectives and lessons learned that are specific to our isolated (by geography, marginalization, politics, race, class, etc) contexts.



The panel presentation to national philanthropic leaders highlighted

processes, wisdom, and learning to inform and shift the paradigm about the role of place-based community foundations and organizations in the national philanthropic framework. Critical national leaders in philanthropy including representatives from the following organizations were present for the culminating presentation lead by SCF, FFAK, BBCF, and VCHT:

- Association of Black Foundation Executives
- Bridgespan Group
- Global Giving
- Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation (Arkansas)
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- Open Society Foundations
- Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
- Lilly School of Philanthropy
- One Eleuthera Foundation (Bahamas)
- Quantum Foundation
- K.B. Reynolds Foundation
- Philanthropy Southeast
- Climate Strong Islands Network
- Giving Gap
- Grantmakers for Education

This format also provided an unparalleled opportunity for FFAK and BBCF to sit within the context of SCF's nonprofit consortium, to do a deep dive into this particular model of convening and collaboration building as a potential model. Likewise, while sitting with SCF's nonprofit consortium members, FFAK and BBCF shared lessons learned and successes from collaboration within their communities as well as programmatic approaches that are applicable to the needs of St. Croix. FFAK and BBCF spent an entire day sitting in community with many of SCF's nonprofit partners, including:



- Caribbean Center for Boys and Girls of the Virgin Islands
- Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts (CMCArts)
- Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism (CHANT)
- FYR is LIT (Fueling Youth Reading is Leaders in Training)
- Good Hope Country Day School
- HOPE (Helping Ordinary People Every Day)
- Liberty Place
- Music in Motion School of Higher Dance Education
- Per Ankh
- St. Croix Council of Elders
- St. Croix Environmental Association
- St. Croix Landmarks Society
- St. Croix Long-Term Recovery Group
- St. Croix Montessori School
- VI Architecture Center for Built Heritage and Crafts, Inc.
- VI Breast Cancer Project
- VI Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council
- VI Good Food Coalition
- VI Partners for Healthy Communities
- Women's Coalition of St. Croix
- World Ocean School
- Yvonne A. Galiber Foundation, Inc.



At the retreat, a facilitator skilled in nurturing collaboration and inquiry fostered deep investigation and learning among the more than 40 nonprofit and philanthropic leaders who were present. Together we engaged in courageous conversations about place, race, and philanthropy. Highlights of our in-person learning exchange at the 5th Annual Philanthropy Retreat, made possible in part by the support received from CCA, are featured in a short video submitted as supplemental to this written report.

Use of CCA Peer-to-Peer Learning Exchange Grant Funds:

CCA grant funds were used to cover travel expenses for Felecia Lucky, President, Black Belt Community Foundation and Gerry Roll, CEO, Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky to join us for the in-person learning exchange visit on the island of St. Croix in February 2023. This travel would have been cost prohibitive without an investment from CCA. A portion of grant funds were also used to help SCF cover some of the costs of learning exchange project coordination, travel coordination, panel facilitation, and grant management. Each organization contributed approximately \$2,500 in in-kind contributions to the learning exchange in the form of staff time and travel expenses that were not covered by the grant. Our combined in-kind investment in this learning exchange was approximately \$7,500.

The Future for our Learning Exchange Collaboration:

In a recap of our 5th Annual Philanthropy Retreat, SCF President Deanna James wisely shared:

“We believe deeply in the nobility of this field and its potential to change systems and to Heal the World. But, we also know that’s the ideal. In reality, the field of Philanthropy often falls short of its potential and sadly, sometimes even reinforces the systems of oppression fueling the social ills it aims to heal. Hopefully, by building greater competency around collaboration and more safe spaces for sharing (and dreaming), together we can begin to live up to our potential....Change can be radically powered through durable, trust-based relationships that are rooted in Place. In the words of our systems change consultant, RELATIONSHIP IS THE RESOLUTION! We’ve modified that - just a tad - with the affirmation that RELATIONSHIP is the REVOLUTION; that People in intentional alliance-ship (and Love) can change the world!”

Indeed, this is the heart and spirit with which we walk into the future of our now deeply cherished partnership between St. Croix Foundation, Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, Black Belt Community Foundation and our bonus comrade, Vieques Community Historic Trust. Though the CCA Learning Exchange grant period has ended, our collaborations are just beginning. SCF, FFAK, and BBCF have been working together on ideating opportunities for national outreach to take our lessons learned and find even more place-based philanthropies like us representing marginalized communities across the country so that we may work together to affect change in the field and beyond.