

A Shared Learning Experience: West Central Initiative and The Winnipeg Foundation



Rewind to the Summer of 2019

The relationship between Canada ([The Winnipeg](#)[□] Foundation – TWF) and Minnesota (West Central Initiative – WCI) began in the summer of 2019 when West Central Initiative was just adopting [The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#)[□] as a cornerstone of our strategic framework. Recognizing that Community Foundations of Canada had a head start on incorporating the 17 SDGs, our staff and board embarked on a trip to Victoria, British Columbia, to attend the Community Foundations of Canada National Conference. It was during that conference that we identified the desire to do more work with the community of Winnipeg, specifically with The Winnipeg Foundation. Plans to pursue this relationship were thwarted by a pandemic, and the outreach was delayed for several years.

Enter: Connecting Communities in the Americas' Learning Exchange Program

Fast forward to the fall of 2022, when WCI and TWF submitted a joint application to participate in Connecting Communities in the Americas' Learning Exchange Program. After several unsuccessful attempts due to unpredictable winter (and spring!) weather, we finally made it in June of this year. Making their way across the border was our Minnesota delegation, which included:

- Anna Wasescha, President
- Jacob McArthur, Board member
- Neal Cuthbert, Consultant
- Greg Wagner, Director of Business & Economic Development
- Celeste Koppe, Rural Initiatives Strategist
- Wayne Hurley, Director of Transportation Planning
- Mallory Jarvi, Transportation Planner
- Sarah Casey, Director of Strategic Communications
- Rebecca Petersen, Director of Development



The view outside of The Winnipeg Foundation's headquarters

Our WCI learning exchange team was greeted by members of TWF team, including:

- Sky Bridges, CEO
- LuAnn Lovlin, VP Communications
- Mary Beth Tayler, VP Donor Engagement
- Alan Goddard, VP Endow Manitoba
- Kim Metcalf, VP Finance
- Megan Tate, VP Community Grants
- Cathy Auld, VP Strategic Philanthropy
- Darlene Ott, VP Technology
- Noah Erenberg, Grants Associate
- Neneth Banas, Grants Associate
- Aliya Mrochuk, Grants Officer
- Stacy Cardigan Smith, Capacity Building Consultant
- Nancy Mak, Communications Associate
- Carolina Stecher, Community Engagement Convenor
- Mercy Oluwafemi, Youth Engagement Specialist
- Noah Erenberg, Grants Associate
- Neneth Banas, Grants Associate
- Aliya Mrochuk, Grants Officer
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What we learned

After two days packed with large and small group meetings, tours, presentations, and casual discussions over meals, both teams walked away with new connections and takeaways. Here's a summary of what we learned.

From The Winnipeg Foundation

Our initial goals for the exchange: We were very interested in meeting as both WCI and TWF have embarked on new Strategic Plans with common focuses, including equity, diversity, and inclusion and environmental sustainability. We were both interested in learning how we are engaging with the communities such as Indigenous communities, newcomers, and youth.

What we learned: We were interested to learn how significantly WCI is engaging with rural communities, including their work in community planning. Our Endow Manitoba team works with rural community foundations and is interested in applying some of these approaches to our work. The Grants team was also very interested in the reading materials WCI shared, particularly their approach to environmental sustainability.

It was a pleasure to meet with WCI and share our processes, and we were glad to learn that some of this knowledge will be useful and incorporated in their work. We intend to keep in touch and continue to share our knowledge with each other. It has been wonderful to make a connection with a foundation based in the United States, particularly since our community in Winnipeg and theirs have so many similarities.

From West Central Initiative

Our initial goals for the exchange: Our initial overarching goal of this shared learning experience was continuous learning and partnerships across borders. We believed there was much to be learned from the community foundations in Canada, and this experience proved that theory.

What we learned: Central to our conversations was exploring our similarities and differences. Both organizations emphasized the importance of tracking indicators and measurements to gauge impact. Both organizations are venturing into new program work, WCI around climate action and TWF around housing. And both organizations serve as conduits for public/private partnerships, needing to manage resources while initiating grassroots funding and additional support.

A particular growth area for our organization was learning from TWF and the [Winnipeg Metropolitan Region](#), Winnipeg's regional development organization, about their connections with and support of Indigenous communities and youth.

After this initial learning exchange, we're inspired to continue this new relationship between organizations through email exchanges and occasional visits between countries. There is still so much we can learn from each other.



Representatives from West Central Initiative and Winnipeg
Regional Development