

Community foundations and community—changing definitions and expanding concepts

... we must reconsider what it means to be a community foundation. Based on my experience as a consultant and researcher of community foundations, here are some reflections I would like to share.

[In this StratML rendition, the author's reflections are summarized as goal statements.]

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Colton C. Strawser (CCS)

Description:

Colton C. Strawser is a researcher and writer on community foundations, community engagement within higher education, and nonprofit executive development. He is currently a PhD student and researcher in The Nonprofit Institute at the University of San Diego. He can be found online at www.cstrawser.com and on Twitter @Colton_Strawser.

Frederick Goff :

Almost as soon as Frederick Goff spearheaded creating the Cleveland Foundation, the world's first community foundation, in 1914, these institutions began playing an integral role in philanthropy across the globe. Today, approximately 1,900 community foundations exist worldwide. These place-based foundations annually contribute billions in grants to the global economy. Each serves an average of 185,000 individuals within a specific geographic region, and nearly two-thirds were established within the past 25 years.

United States :

Nearly half of all community foundations are located in the United States. Research suggests that more than 1,000 U.S. community foundations serve approximately 98 percent of the United States.

Community Foundations :

Although historically community foundations have had a geographical focus, with each foundation serving locally or regionally, the term community has begun to shift to a broader, more global context over recent years. A community can be where you currently live, where you went to college, where you grew up, where you work, where you worship, where you spend time on the weekends, or a variety of other factors. Today, community foundations are taking on new forms that go beyond geography to focus on elements of individual identity and religion.

Identity Communities :

For foundations such as the Latino Community Foundation or Horizons Foundation, community reflects various aspects of individual identity.

Latino Community Foundation

Horizons Foundation

Religious Communities :

For foundations such as the Catholic Community Foundations and Jewish Community Foundations, the definition of community has a religious basis.

Catholic Community Foundations

Jewish Community Foundations

Vision

Community voids are filled

Mission

To reconsider what it means to be a community foundation

1. Voids

Fill voids

Reflection 1. New community foundations are born to fill a void — Many in academia would argue that new organizations are created to fill a need. The same rings true for community foundations. Philanthropy is inherently values driven. Thus, if an individual's values do not align with that of a geographic community foundation, they may elect to target their giving elsewhere, perhaps a community foundation of identity or faith.

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2. Options

Create options for community gifts by those at all levels of income

Reflection 2. Geographic community foundations often market to millionaires — Over the years I have noticed that many community foundations market themselves to wealthy individuals. Community foundations' original intent was to pool community assets to increase the quality of life in their respective regions. Today, fund minimums, often \$10,000 or more, frequently cause potential donors to look elsewhere to give. Community foundations must consider how individuals can support them at an appropriate level and create options for all community gifts.

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3. Opportunities

Create opportunities for all individuals in a community to give.

Reflection 3. Creating space and opportunity are often two different things — Both community foundations of identity and faith are often created out of a need to be seen within the field of philanthropy. Historically, community foundation donors, directors, and executives have often been white, utilized a very western model of philanthropy, and focused on individualized giving for collective impact. Although more traditional community foundations may create space for giving, they also need to consider how they are creating opportunities for all individuals in a community to give. In some cultures, giving is highly collective for collective impact, whereas in others, giving takes place at a hyperlocal level. Neighborhood funds could be an option in both cases. Furthermore, the endowment model of community foundations may deter individuals from giving when the problem they seek to address is a concern today, rather than one in the far or distant future.

4. Competition & Value

Reestablish the value of community philanthropy in a competitive market.

Reflection 4. Community philanthropy is now a competitive market — This concluding reflection is likely all too familiar for those working within the community philanthropy space. Historically, community foundations were the one-stop shop for philanthropy. As time has gone on, however, an increasing number of nonprofit organizations and for-profit companies have begun to serve donors in various capacities similar to those offered by community foundations. Therefore, community foundations of all types must question the relevance of their work, because funds can now be placed elsewhere.

Administrative Information

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Submitter:

Given Name: Owen

Surname: Ambur

Email: Owen.Ambur@verizon.net

Phone: