

DISCUSSION and DECISION POINTS

When Considering a Community Fund

A geographic-based Community Fund is a great opportunity for citizens to give back to their local community. Led by community members, donations of all sizes are pooled together into a single fund that supports charitable causes in the local area for generations.

The first step however, is to explore the following discussion points to help determine the potential strength of creating a Community Fund.

Use these questions to guide the conversation with community leaders before going to the next step.

Boundaries and Barriers

- What is the geographical area your community fund will cover?
- Are there political and physical boundaries that help to define an appropriate service area?
- Are there factors such as transportation, trading area, historical relationships that should be considered when identifying community fund boundaries?
- What are the coverage areas of adjacent community foundations?

Community characteristics

- What is the population of the area to be covered by the fund?
- What are the demographics? Eg. average age, income, education levels, ethnicity, employment statistics, etc.
- How strong is the local economy?
- Is it a growing community – or shrinking?
- How resilient is the community?
- Does the community tend to be generous?
- Are there significant political divides?

Local organizational capacity

- What is the level of civic engagement and volunteerism?
- How many registered charities are in the community? Service clubs?
- How many and what type of non-profit groups are there?
- Is there local expertise such as lawyers, accountants, financial planners?
- Are there willing volunteers with management and leadership experience and abilities? Administrative, investment, fund development, marketing skills?

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Capacity of “parent” community foundation

- Does the neighboring community foundation have the administrative, financial, and investment capacity on its staff and/or board to adequately and effectively support a community fund?
- Can it provide training and support in such activities as fund development, grantmaking, marketing and communications, leadership activities?
- Does it already hold other community funds? If so, how has it handled the relationships?

Local identity, profile

- What key traits are most often identified with the community?
- Is there significant community pride?
- What is the local history?
- Are there historical regional relationships or politics that still have an effect today?
- What are the factors that unite the community?
- What factors divide the community?

Resources and leadership

- What financial and human resources will be required to build and sustain the community fund?
- What financial resources are already available or committed?
- Are there opportunities to leverage additional support through matching or other programs or efforts?
- Are operating funds available? Administration fees or fees for services?
- What human resources are available to build and sustain the fund? Is there sufficient volunteer capacity?
- Are there in-kind resources available, eg. donated meeting space?

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Where will the necessary leadership come from to build and grow the community fund and undertake granting and leadership work? What partners/potential partners can be engaged to help develop and grow the community fund? eg. credit unions, community economic development agencies, local government, service clubs

Accountability/Governance

- How will the community fund be governed locally?
- What legal structure will be used to articulate purpose and accountability –sole purpose society, committee of an existing society?
- What is the most appropriate organizational structure?
- What policies need to be in place to effectively govern and guide the community fund?
- What are the critical elements to include in the Community Fund Agreement?
- Are there other agreements that should be in place eg. Letter of Agreement, partnership principles?
- How will the community fund be accountable to the parent community foundation? To donors? To the community?
- When and how will the relationship be reviewed or evaluated?
- How can the local board be developed and structured to ensure that it represents the diversity of the community it will serve?

Relationships, roles and responsibilities

- How will the formal roles and relationships be defined for the community fund and parent community foundation?

- What kind of informal roles and strategies might be possible? eg. mentoring, peer learning.
- How will information be coordinated?
- What kind of communication processes will be implemented?
- How will shared vision and values be surfaced?
- How will relationships and trust be nurtured?
- Will differences in organizational culture matter?

Sustainability

- How will the community fund be supported during its early development?
- Will it continue as a community fund as its assets, donors, granting and leadership activities grow?
- Or will it become an independent community foundation following an incubation period?

Impact

- What are the short-term goals for the community fund? Long-term?
- How will it identify priorities for granting and leadership activities?
- How will it know it's making a difference?

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Ready? Who to recruit to your Community Fund team:

The success of a Community Fund can often be connected to those who are a part of its inception and ongoing activities. Depending on how the Community Fund is established, community foundations may wish to consider the following attributes as they populate the Community fund team:

- Local perspective and knowledge
- Local influence
- Access and ability to connect to potential donors

Likewise, it is recommended that the following groups are approached in advance of the development of the Fund. They can assist with a feasibility assessment, marketing of the Fund and general community engagement.

- Local political figures
- Media: local newspaper, blog, radio and television
- Non-profits, charities and community groups

A grassroots approach to the development of Community Funds has often proven to be successful. Engaging local leaders by harnessing their support, and if possible involvement, can often lead to expedited acceptance and growth of the Fund.

Sample Community Fund Statement of Purpose:

The ABC Community Fund is an endowment fund created by and for the people of ABC to enrich the quality of life of those living in and around the (City/Township/Region/ Etc.) both now and forever. The Fund is held within the Community Foundation of XYZ and is focused on building a permanent endowment for the community and making strategic grants within ABC. This Fund was established to provide a way for all of us to contribute to the community we love and to help ensure that our needs are addressed both now and into the future.