

FAMILY FOUNDATIONS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

This is the first in a series of three articles which will explore how small- and medium-sized family foundations can increase the impact of their grantmaking and engagement in communities.

The series will culminate in a corresponding fall conference session for family foundations led by the authors.

If you think you're too small to be effective in achieving change, you've never been in a room with a mosquito!

We often hear media reports on the contribution and impact of super-sized grants and mega-foundations. But data and experience tells us it's the presence and consistency of small- and medium-sized family foundations that provide much of the giving power to nonprofit organizations in our communities.

And, it's not just money that powers this change we see in our communities.

Family foundations can serve as brokers, conveners, bridge builders, catalysts and partners. From your unique vantage point as an on-the-ground organization you can, for example, note when there is an unrealized connection between a grantee and another organization or nonprofit and bring them together to create a synergy to positively impact vexing community problems. Or, in the role of thought partner, you might share your expertise in a particular subject area to build the capacity and effectiveness of an organization. Your foundation might also stimulate community conversations about pressing issues that demand more focused and informed attention.

In each instance, your interventions can influence others to think and act differently because of the investment of time and money you make in them – helping them change their thinking and approach to the problems they, and you, are attempting to solve. And that's exactly what a change agent does.

So what is your family foundation trying to change in those communities

in which you invest? What's your role as a change agent?

Take a moment to pause and ask yourself, "How clear is my foundation about what it intends to change? Do our investments of time and money connect to those hoped-for outcomes?"

Consider furthering this conversation with your trustees and staff by reflecting on this set of guiding questions. You can do this formally at your next board meeting, or informally at your next family get-together.

- What is it we hope to change?
- What is the ultimate impact we want to achieve?
- What will be different in the world because of our efforts?
- What roles do we play in our philanthropy? How are we a catalyst for change?

Keep track of what shows up during these conversations. What patterns and themes do you see? What questions emerge from the discussion? What insights can you draw?

Pay attention to what topics inspire the most energy and excitement, and which are met with less interest. Be patient with one another as you talk about these important issues, and listen as much for what you have in common as you do for the differences that arise in your dialogue.

Recognize that this is the beginning of a conversation that can reap clarity and shared purpose which will better guide and improve the effectiveness of your investments of time and financial resources.

And don't forget the focus and tenacity of that mosquito!

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FAMILY GIVING UPDATE

America's family foundations gave \$17 billion in 2006, a 21 percent increase from the previous year, according to *Key Facts on Family Foundations*, released in March by the Foundation Center. Family foundations also accounted for the bulk of giving by independent foundations overall (59 percent).

35,693

Number of grantmaking family foundations in 2006

48%

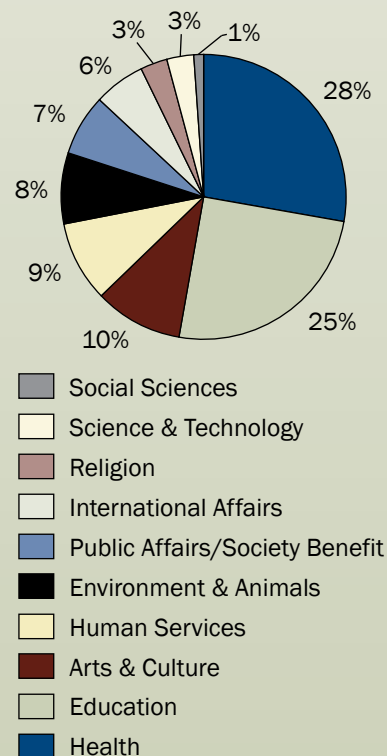
Share of family foundations reporting less than \$50,000 in giving in 2006

59%

Estimated family foundation giving as a share of all independent foundation giving in 2006

Source: Foundation Center, 2008

FAMILY FOUNDATION GIVING PATTERNS, 2006



Source: Foundation Center, 2008