

# WORKING WITH GRANTEES AND COMMUNITIES TO MAKE CHANGE

*This is the final installment in a series of articles exploring 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 workshop led by the authors at the IGA Fall Conference on November 11.*

Family foundations are uniquely positioned to serve as leaders in community problem-solving. Because their board members and staff have typically grown up, raised families and built businesses in the communities they serve, family foundations provide insight into community challenges and their potential solutions. By capitalizing on personal and professional relationships, as well as deep community understanding, family foundations of all sizes are poised to lead crusades to solve complex issues.

To create the positive change you seek in return for your investment, here are four key strategies to engage the community and your grant partners:

## **BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH, AND WHY.**

- Use this clarity to improve communication, understanding and engagement among others who have a stake in your key issues.
- Work with current grantees to better understand what went well with their funded efforts and what areas fell short. Ask what they learned, and what they might do differently the next time.
- Draw community attention to your causes by highlighting successes and lessons learned.

## **FIND OTHERS WITH COMMON INTERESTS.**

- Survey your board and staff to determine the network of relationships that can be tapped for collaboration. Map those relationships, and make it regular practice to keep each other informed of new and emerging connections.
- Identify others outside that network who share your concerns and priorities, i.e. community opinion leaders, key individuals, elected officials,

grantees, other organizations and foundations. Again, document your findings to share with board and staff, and determine how and when to approach these potential partners.

- Ask yourself who is missing from the list by looking beyond the people you might typically work with.

## **BUILD AND LEVERAGE RELATIONSHIPS.**

- Communicate your shared concerns, as well as what you have in common, to create fertile ground for shared action.
- Consider how your foundation might build a network or coalition among key stakeholders to share baseline data on an issue, raise awareness about the issue, or promote successful approaches to a problem.
- Consider bringing together leadership from those organizations you have funded to leverage the collective influence in the community around a particular issue.
- Visit other funders doing similar work and learn more about their efforts.

## **CONSIDER YOUR FOUNDATION'S ROLE BEYOND DIRECT INVESTMENT. EVEN WITH LIMITED OR NO STAFF, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED FOUNDATIONS CAN EXERCISE THEIR INFLUENCE.**

### **As Catalyst:**

- Host or fund a series of issue briefs working with local colleges and universities, community organizations and other experts to share topical information about important issues.
- Organize a town meeting with key funders, decision makers, public officials, faith-based organizations and others around a critical community issue to better understand its complexity, engage support and involvement, and raise awareness about the issue.

### **As Convener:**

- Hold a breakfast or lunch meeting for all of your grantees in a particular investment area to meet and discuss the successes and challenges they've faced in their projects. Ask them to identify ways your

foundation and others could help them beyond direct investments. How else might the foundation be of service in resolving key problems facing the community? How can they be of service to each other?

- Make introductions around a particular issue or problem between key constituencies – public officials, civic and business leaders, your grantees and other nonprofit organizations. This could be done informally over lunch, or at the foundation's offices to highlight the importance of shared problem solving around the issues you fund.

### **As Disseminator of Information:**

- Make it a part of each board meeting to invite a grantee to share with staff and trustees the challenges and successes of the work funded.
- Use your annual report, brochures and website to highlight the effective strategies of your grantees. Tell their stories enhanced with pictures and quotes to bring the work to life. If you have limited or no staff, consider working with student interns to help.
- Support collecting and analyzing data around the key issues you fund. In partnership with grantees, public agencies, or institutions of higher learning, fund the research and publication of monographs, issue briefings, and articles. Share locally and statewide with key stakeholders, media, public officials, and other nonprofit organizations.

Inherent to the nature of family foundations, regardless of size, are characteristics that provide much of the charitable "fuel" to nonprofit organizations in our communities. Leveraging the unique position of family foundations through creative grantmaking and these other available tools, your family foundation can engage grantees and communities in contributing to the kind of change your investments are meant to have.

*Jeffrey M. Glebocki is Principal and Joann M. Ricci is Partner of Strategy + Action Consulting, Inc. For more information, visit [www.jeffglebocki.com/partnership.htm](http://www.jeffglebocki.com/partnership.htm).*