



# Case Studies of Organizations Supporting Community Foundations:

## *An Overview*

### **I** *Introduction*

In late 2000, WINGS-CF began to prepare for a project that would result in a series of case studies of the organizations supporting community foundations around the globe. From February to September 2001, a WINGS-CF working group, U.K.-based consultant Diana Leat, and eight very different regional and national organizations assisting the development of community foundations in very different parts of the world, worked together to profile their organizations. E-mail provided the basis for communication between these partners, and was supported by a modest number of telephone conversations. No face to face contact ever took place.

The result of this collaborative effort is a collection of eight vivid and diverse profiles which illustrate the types of organizations engaged in supporting community foundations, the environments in which they are operating, the challenges they face and the lessons they have learned. These case studies invariably delve much into issues related to community foundations themselves. This project has proved how intertwined the issues are for community foundations and the organizations supporting them.

Some of the profiled organizations have worked with community foundations—and in some cases, other grantmakers as well—for years and have a bountiful history to share. Others are working in environments where community foundations are newcomers. Issues around relationships are being addressed at the same time as the support organization is designing services for community foundations. All are dealing with very limited human and financial resources and engaging in policy issues facing communities in their regions or countries. All have a great commitment to the community foundation model and realizing its potential for the benefit of their communities.

#### **The Eight Organizations**

- 1. Academy for the Development of Philanthropy (ADPP) (Poland)**—This profile includes a focus on the staffing of this philanthropic support organization, particularly in relation to community foundation activities.
- 2. Baltic American Partnership Programme (BAPP) (Latvia)**—This case study provides an early glimpse into activities in Latvia (and two neighboring Baltic countries) relating to the potential development of community foundations.
- 3. Community Foundation Network (United Kingdom)**—The profile of this support organization for community foundations includes a special focus on the services it provides to its members.

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4. **Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF) (United States)**—The profile of this 26-year old statewide association of grantmakers includes a special focus on some of the programs it has delivered to Michigan’s community foundations, including the establishment of standards.
5. **European Foundation Centre (EFC) (Belgium)**—This case study focuses on the Community Philanthropy Initiative (CPI), a project formally initiated in January 2000 (following a pilot project begun in 1997) by the EFC to promote the development of community philanthropy organizations, including community foundations.
6. **Fondazione Cariplo Foundation (Italy)**—This profile provides a fascinating look at the ways in which a banking institution and its private foundation have made use of the community foundation model to reach the grassroots in its grantmaking.
7. **Institute for the Development of Social Investment (IDIS) (Brazil)**—This case study includes a focus on the delivery of a program by a new organization in a region where community foundations and community philanthropy are emerging.
8. **Southern African Grantmakers’ Association (SAGA) (South Africa)**—This profile of a national association of grantmakers includes a focus on the development of the first ten community foundation initiatives in South Africa.

This Overview seeks to summarize the key findings from the set of case studies, by highlighting differences between and common threads shared by the eight profiled organizations, particularly in relation to:

- Organizational type and environmental factors;
- Factors in the development of community foundations; and
- Key tensions and challenges for community foundations and the organizations supporting them.

The trends and findings recorded here relate to both the WINGS-CF organizations profiled and the community foundations they support. In some cases, the learnings reported here are intertwined, reflecting how difficult it is to isolate the issues for each.

**Note:** The Overview and seven of the eight case studies were prepared in English; the eighth case study was drafted in the organization’s native language and then translated into English, the common language of WINGS-CF. Translation of these documents into other languages is a possibility and will be largely determined by the needs of WINGS-CF participant organizations.



## II *Differences Between Organizations: Organizational Type and Environmental Factors*

### **Differences in Mission and Objectives**

The organizations included in these case studies differ in mission and objectives, age and origins. Some organizations' primary, if not only, purpose is to promote and support community foundations; other organizations have a wider range of purposes and constituencies. Organizations not only have different purposes and missions, but also different philosophies in relation to the nature and value of community foundations. For example:

- Institute for the Development of Social Investment (IDIS) in Brazil sees community foundations primarily as one strategy in encouraging wider social investment;
- Fondazione Cariplo in Italy became involved in community foundations initially, in part, as a way of solving a technical problem of grantmaking;
- Community Foundation Network in the United Kingdom, like the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF) in the United States, emphasizes the advantages of community foundations as a way of creating an endowment for the longer term.

It is also worth noting that the European Foundation Centre (EFC) is the only organization among the eight with a multi-country focus, which introduces other complexities to its work.

### **Differences in Resources**

The organizations included here also differ radically in financial and other resources such as staffing, both in total and in the amount allocated to work with community foundations.

### **Differences in Age**

Baltic American Partnership Programme (BAPP)–Latvia has barely established itself; CMF is 26 years old. The remaining six organizations fall somewhere in between in age.

### **Membership and Non-Membership Organizations**

Some organizations have members, others do not. Membership organizations may draw members primarily from community foundations (e.g., Community Foundation Network), from a mix of community foundations and other foundations (e.g., CMF) or from a wider pool of stakeholders and supporters (e.g., IDIS).

Irrespective of whether they are membership organizations, most aim to have a Board representative of key stakeholders (though these differ), and most view the Board as a valuable asset in providing legitimacy and networks.

### **Differences in Political and Economic Environments**

Most strikingly, the organizations included in these case studies operate in radically different economic and political environments. Apart from levels of wealth and poverty, and their distribution, traditions of and attitudes to both philanthropy and the role of government appear to make a significant difference to community foundation development and support. In addition, tax and legal frameworks, economic growth and levels of unemployment, cultures of giving and existing levels of voluntary activity, levels of community conflict, division and integration all play a part.

The following description of the context in which IDIS operates is, to varying degrees, typical of the environment in which some of the other support organizations work:

*“The perception that only a strong state can ‘deliver’ what people need is matched by the perception by some members of the public that nonprofit organizations cannot make an impact on basic-needs delivery or welfare and other development programs. These attitudes not only inhibit local initiative but also contribute to reluctance by the public to contribute funds to nonprofit development programs.”*

### **Differences in Traditions of Philanthropy**

This sort of assumption that only the state can, or should, deliver basic needs, is in contrast to the U.S. environment in which there has long been a distrust of government intervention and a tradition of public initiatives and philanthropy. But the case studies also highlight the way in which there is increasing interest in and reliance on the Third Sector, even in those countries in which the state has traditionally been the dominant provider. Nevertheless, in many countries, organizations aiming to develop community foundations face critical challenges.

## The Importance of the Legal and Fiscal Framework

One challenge emphasized in several case studies is the lack of appropriate legal forms and associated tax incentives for community foundation formation.

## Understanding the Concept of a Community Foundation

Another major challenge, even in an otherwise favorable environment, is lack of understanding of the concept and benefits of a community foundation.

Given the political and economic environments outlined above, most community foundation support organizations emphasize the importance and advantages of community foundations as apolitical, independent organizations.

## The Benefits of Community Foundations

The SAGA case study describes a particularly difficult environment characterized by significant racial and political divisions. However, SAGA's analysis of the potential benefits of community foundations could apply equally well in other countries:

### SAGA's Analysis of the Potential Benefits of Community Foundations

*Building bridges in economically and geographically divided communities* will require engaging visionary leaders from all facets of community life. A community foundation can bring these leaders together to establish effective communication channels, identify shared values and expectations, craft ways of working together, and build trust across racial, political and economic divisions.

*Meeting massive development needs* will require concerted action at both the national and local levels and involvement of government, business and nonprofit development organizations. A community foundation can help focus attention on local development needs, leverage new resources and encourage new alliances amongst key community actors. In addition, a community foundation can be a mechanism to consult with, and involve, poor and marginalised citizens in addressing local needs.

*Assisting with growing demands on local government*, as responsibility for the delivery of services has shifted from central government to the provincial and local levels. A community foundation can assist local government by helping identify emerging and changing needs in the community and by testing innovative and cost-effective ways to deliver services.

*Sustaining the nonprofit sector* in the face of a financial crisis as traditional sources of funding, primarily from international donors, have declined or shifted to other priorities; a less than favorable legal and tax environment, which limits the ability of nonprofits to raise funds from the public; and loss of skilled staff to the public and private sectors. A community foundation can help strengthen the financial and human capacity of local non-profits, and assist them in sustaining current programs and developing new ones.

*Building on existing practices of giving and volunteering.* A community foundation can recognize, nurture and encourage these existing practices and help stimulate the development of new forms of giving — of time, money and skills to address local problems.

*Assuming community leadership.* As a locally owned, locally controlled and locally financed entity, a community foundation can nurture local leadership and promote self-reliance, provide a forum for a variety of stakeholders to come to the table and discuss issues and options, and develop cross-sector partnerships amongst citizens, community groups, businesses, government, the media and other local players.

*Serving as a conduit of knowledgeable and equitable funding to communities* for individual donors, corporate and small- to medium-sized businesses, including government agencies.

In the South African environment, it was necessary to: raise community, business and government awareness of the community foundation concept; train members of the Boards of trustees to operate community foundations; lobby government to create an appropriate legal environment for community foundations; and position community foundations as conduits of funding and custodians of community funds.



# III

## *Factors in the Development of Community Foundations*

Despite the significant differences between the community support organizations and the environments in which they operate, some common themes emerge regarding the key factors in developing community foundations.

### **Building Understanding of Organized Philanthropy**

Several case studies illustrate the fact that although some forms of philanthropic tradition exist, there is not a strong history of organized philanthropy and a culture of giving for social good by the wealthy. Encouraging giving by wealthy families and individuals appears to have great potential in many countries, but will take time and work to ensure that all stakeholders see the benefit of getting involved in this process.

### **Gaining Trust and Confidence**

One of the initial problems community foundations face is that the concept is generally unfamiliar and, in addition, as emergent organizations, community foundations lack legitimacy. Even if people are familiar with the idea of giving to charity for problems here and now, they are likely to be less familiar with the idea of giving for the future.

Several case studies highlight the problem of gaining potential donors' trust and confidence to get started before there are any tangible results. Gaining the support of one or more recognized, respected, local figures willing to give financial backing is an important first step in encouraging others to give.

External challenge grants clearly play an important role in creating community foundation legitimacy and in encouraging others to give.

In an important sense, a community foundation has only one chance to get its public "birth" right and it is important to wait to launch the foundation publicly until there is some demonstration of real local support. A premature public launch may actually delay progress in the longer term.

### **The Role of Incubators**

Starting a new community foundation requires time, financial and human resources, as well as organizational skills. A strong incubating organization and passionate pioneer can be invaluable, but the dangers of control and overdependence need to be recognized by both community foundations and support organizations. Several case studies highlight the dangers of dependence on one key figure or organization and the need for a broader base. Overdependence or over-identification with one person or organization can seriously limit the real or perceived independence of a community foundation. In addition, community foundations in their early stages are highly vulnerable to loss of a key supporter and Board changes.

Plans need to be put in place to consciously manage the changing relationship between a community foundation and its incubator / pioneer. Community foundations and their incubators and support organizations need to be open and honest with each other about their resources and commitments.

### **Ensuring Representativeness**

Representativeness is another important, possibly essential, characteristic of an effective community foundation Board. The case studies suggest that the more divided a society, as in South Africa, for example, the more important this is.

### **Involving Business**

Business involvement is also seen by some as crucial in developing trust and confidence in the business sector and encouraging corporate donations.

### **Building a Strong Board**

Forming a steering committee can be a process of trial and error. In some case studies, early Board members came, but did not stay when they realized there was no money to be had in the short term. Involving a range of people—from business, the voluntary sector, and government—and clarifying and agreeing on mutual expectations early on are important.

In the early stages of a community foundation, all of those directly involved are likely to be working voluntarily (without pay), with other commitments, limited time, and often with an imperfect understanding of what is involved.

There is a limit to what Board members can be expected to do. In poorer and rural areas, some Board members may need help merely in getting to and from meetings and in establishing effective lines of communication.

One of the challenges of building a viable community foundation Board is to negotiate the power relations between stakeholder groups on the Board, including donors, business, nonprofit organizations and other community representatives to ensure a balanced partnership. Building a strong united Board requires dealing consciously with relationships and team issues and tensions in order to resolve any differences.

Local people involved in the community foundation need to be directly involved in designing and possibly even doing, or at least commissioning, basic data surveys and situational/needs analysis (if these are considered necessary). Without firsthand knowledge of and awareness of the community, foundation Board members are likely to be less than fully effective.

### **Doing Your Homework**

The CMF case study provides the following list of questions Steering Committees and Boards need to ask themselves:

1. Do we know what is involved in starting up an independent community foundation (e.g., costs, legal requirements, time needed)?
2. Do we have, or can we get, the financial support needed to begin and operate an independent community foundation?
3. What are the foundations or other groups in our region we might ask for a challenge grant, support for technical assistance, initial operating monies, or mini-grants for special projects?
4. How will we define our “community” boundaries?
5. What is our community’s philanthropic tradition?
6. How strong is the sense of community in our area? Do individuals feel rooted to the extent that they will want to give something back to the community, even if they currently do not live here?
7. Do we have a sufficiently large population and enough wealth in our area to support a vibrant, growing community foundation?
8. Do we have a credible, well-respected community leader or group of leaders who are willing to commit to the community foundation and take this on with a passion?
9. Do we know about the different legal options for affiliating, and the advantages and disadvantages of each?
10. What community foundations are nearby that might serve as lead community foundations?
11. What are our community’s social, economic and political ties to each of the potential lead community foundations?

### **Professional Support**

For this reason, professional support is vital until a community foundation has its own staff. However, community foundation support staff should be wary of “taking over” and pushing things too far or too fast. Support organizations need to consider the extent to which they should intervene directly to support community foundation initiatives that are struggling; whether embryonic community foundations should have to show they can do it themselves and/or how much and what kind of support is appropriate, and whether they have the capacity to provide individual support.

### **Gaining Financial Support: A Slow Process**

Community foundation Board members need to be aware of how difficult, and slow, the process of gaining financial support is likely to be. The case studies highlight the need for community foundations to be constantly re-inventing themselves and coming up with new ideas and strategies to gain support. Furthermore, community foundations have to be constantly aware of the need to educate different audiences about the role and benefits of endowment. Starting a community foundation is one thing; keeping it going is quite another.



## Board and Organizational Planning and Development

There is a need for ongoing Board development and regular (at least annual) review and planning workshops that deal with strategic, organizational, policy and team issues.

The Board of a new community foundation has a number of difficult but important tasks and decisions. Some of these are not once and for all decisions but need to be constantly reviewed and updated. The Board will need to make decisions regarding:

- Legal matters—Registration of the community foundation as a voluntary association rather than a trust. Why? What are the relative advantages and disadvantages? Support organizations have an important role to play here—advising on models, providing model documents and professional expertise to get through the bureaucracy, and lobbying for a more supportive legal framework.
- Strategic and operational planning, including policy regarding its role in development facilitation and development practice.
- Grantmaking policy regarding focus areas, and pro-active versus responsive grantmaking.
- Policy regarding conflict of interests, e.g., where Board members are involved in organizations or projects seeking grants.
- Effective communication (e.g., liaison via a public forum, use of the community foundation's patron, and mailing of a newsletter); fundraising and ongoing local and external acquisition of resource.
- Equal participation in meetings, and a chair to facilitate this.
- Understanding of and policy regarding development practice.
- Whether to act as a conduit and manager of a specific grant by an external funder. In the early stages there is a temptation to take on anything without thinking through the wider and longer term consequences for the identity and mission of the foundation.
- If necessary, contributing to rekindling of a widely shared vision in and for the local community.

- Facilitating real links and cooperation between better off and disadvantaged communities.
- Obtaining outside funding to employ staff and start operating.
- Developing local support and contributions, and innovative ways to achieve these.
- Beginning to make grants which will make a difference.

The Board will need to be wary of thinking too big, being too idealistic, and playing for stakes that are too high. The level/scale/type of development the community foundation is aiming to get involved in raises questions as to whether a fledgling community foundation, (or even a developed one) is an appropriate vehicle to fund the major development projects that business wants to fund. The business sector may want to rush the process to see immediate results. In the face of all these pressures, the Board needs to be constantly focused on developing a community foundation that concentrates on community foundation core business.

## Critical Success Factors

The case studies suggest that critical success factors in developing community foundations include:

- ***Understanding of the Community Foundation Concept:*** In general, public understanding of the community foundation concept is low in all sectors. To be successful community foundations and those who support them need to actively promote understanding of the community foundation concept.
- ***Educating Donors and Others about Endowment:*** Because the advantages of endowment are not widely understood it is difficult for many to see the logic in giving for the future rather than to meet current needs. In order to be successful, community foundations/support organizations need to educate various audiences about the value of endowment building.
- ***Community and Stakeholder Participation:*** Community foundations need broad-based community participation if they are to establish credibility and legitimacy, have the knowledge to meet real needs, and obtain resources.

- **Representation:** Most successful steering committees and Boards are representative of the communities they claim to serve.
- **Links with the Business Sector:** Efficient steering committees have strong links with the business sector, while less efficient ones do not seem to have access to local/other sources of wealth that could be attracted by the concept of a community foundation.
- **Political Impartiality:** As several case studies suggest, community foundations need the support of local government organizations to establish themselves and to implement their action plans. But there is also a danger that government may wish to use their grantmaking capacity for political purposes, and thus place at risk the accountability, transparency and independence of the organization.

Inefficient steering committees appear to continue to perceive (even if covertly) the community foundation as a “political vehicle” and therefore cannot demonstrate its impartiality with any level of credibility. Conversely, successful steering committees demonstrate that they have crossed the political, and racial, divides.

- **Leadership and Commitment:** Steering committees and Boards with strong, visionary leaders seem to generate commitment from their teams and consequently show the best progress.
- **Infrastructures and Incubators:** Emerging community foundations are usually inhibited by lack of infrastructure. Support organizations and incubators play a crucial role in providing early infrastructure, without which new community foundations cannot get off the ground. It appears that the stronger the incubator, the more the steering committee is enabled and empowered to “get to the job done.” But at the same time, community foundations and incubators must know when to let go of each other, and how to manage that separation.
- **Strategic Positioning and Operational Planning:** In general, those steering committees/Boards who have, or are in the process of conducting, strategic planning exercises, also seem to be progressing faster in terms of organizing their operational processes.

- **Funding, External and Challenge Grants:** Early funding is essential for community foundations to establish credibility and demonstrate tangible results. Challenge grants mainly from international funders can provide the spur needed to get the ball rolling. For new or small foundations, a challenge grant provides essential credibility via recognition and support from a major outside foundation.

A challenge grant may also promote success insofar as it encourages strategic thinking, encouraging community foundations’ Boards to ask and answer questions about purposes and strategies. This sort of clarification may be of enormous value for new community foundations, as well as re-energizing established Boards by developing or reaffirming their shared vision and/or by engaging new Board members.

- **Legal and Fiscal Matters:** Successful community foundations have generally received considerable assistance in these areas. Support organizations can play a crucial role in providing support, advice and model documents, as well as lobbying for more favorable legal and fiscal frameworks.
- **Staffing:** It seems to be generally agreed that, at least, one half-time staff person (preferably full-time) is necessary for effective growth in the early stages of setting up a community foundation.
- **Capacity Building:** Successful community foundations engage in an ongoing process of capacity building. Community foundations need financial assets, but they also need effective Boards, skilled staff, organizational structures which support their grantmaking, donor service and leadership activities, sound investment practices, evaluation tools and processes to help them become learning organizations, and adequate technology with staff trained in its use. Support organizations play invaluable roles in providing services to encourage and enhance this sort of capacity building.

Support organizations also have a valuable role to play in encouraging networking and information sharing as powerful tools for building capacity. Annual conferences, learning events for Board members and staff (separately and/or together), computer users groups,



regular written communications, access to sample documents, and a website are some of the ways in which community foundations can be supported, and encouraged to support each other.

- **Technical Assistance:** Support organizations have an important role to play in providing technical assistance designed to meet a diversity of needs. Such assistance needs to be designed in the light of levels of experience of staff and trustees/Board members and for different sized foundations. A variety of methods need to be used, including: on-site consulting, seminars, retreats, conferences, telephone conferencing, video trainings, etc. Reaching Board members and other volunteers can be difficult because of their other time commitments.
- **Marketing and Shared Standards:** As CMF demonstrates, support organizations may also encourage community foundations in a nation, region or individual locality, to engage in joint marketing campaigns to promote wider public understanding of the concept of a community foundation. But joint marketing requires strategic decisions about levels of common identity and standards. If a joint marketing campaign is to be successful, community foundations have to be able to consistently deliver what is being offered or “marketed” to the public. The more that community foundations work together, the greater the risk to all if one does not operate according to the agreed upon standards. Community foundation staff and trustees/Board members all need to understand the connections between marketing, a common identity and standards.

## IV Key Tensions and Challenges for Community Foundations and the Organizations Supporting Them

In addition to the specific tensions and challenges identified above, community foundations and their support organizations need to deal with:

- **The Opportunities and Threats of Strong Local Identity:** As several case studies demonstrate, strong local identity may be both a strength and a challenge. A sense of connection and responsibility to local communities is a strength. This connection to place and “community” extends to individuals who have moved away to work in other parts of the state or country

who retain ties through family and friends to the communities where they grew up and to tourists who may visit an area with some regularity. But strong ties to communities also pose a challenge insofar as many small towns each want to have their own independent community foundation, making it difficult for them to cover their operating costs, to meet standards, and to find ongoing local leadership from a small population.

- **Managing the Tension Between Local Ownership and Diversity:** Support organizations face challenges in overcoming perceptions of community foundations as “imported” models with little relevance to local situations. But insofar as local ownership leads to diversity, it creates opportunities and threats. As the EFC points out: “It is an opportunity because it reflects the great potential of the community foundation concept to adapt to different local communities over time. It is a threat because it may lead people to see the movement as lacking unity, and a common identity. The different stages of development, and the different models of community philanthropy that are being pursued in Europe, are an asset but also an obstacle, making our task more difficult in terms of representation of the overall interests of the movement.”
- **Serving Members and Acting as “Gatekeepers” of Resources:** Membership-based support organizations have to manage the tension between being membership driven and serving as an intermediary for grants to community foundations from national funders (particularly government).
- **Finding Sustainable Funding for Ongoing Development:** Both community foundations and support organizations face the challenge of securing sustainable funding. Several case studies suggest that the more services and help support organizations have provided, the greater the challenge to sustain these when initial development funding expires. These dilemmas may be particularly difficult for support organizations to manage if they have provided services free or well below cost in the early stages of developing community foundations.

Sustainable funding for community foundations is important for at least two reasons. First, new community foundations are fragile and may not survive if support is withdrawn. Second, development of community foundations is an ongoing process. New and established community foundations need to be constantly

building, maintaining, and strengthening their capacities. They need to develop strong processes for continuous learning if they are to continue to grow and remain at the cutting edge of philanthropy.

- **Preventing Staff Overload:** Finding sustainable funding is closely related to the dangers of staff overload and burn-out illustrated in several case studies. This is true for both community foundations and the organizations supporting them.
- **Being Flexible About Endowment Building:** The North American model of community foundations emphasizes the importance of endowment building as a primary goal of community foundations. Many support organizations and funders have adopted this model for application in other societies. But in the early stages of a community foundation, it may be difficult to create credibility unless the organization is seen to be producing some relatively tangible benefits. Furthermore, in many Central and Eastern European countries, the lack of a stable financial market, or the absence of an equity market, or a weak and conservative banking sector, or restrictions on investment of charitable assets, do not provide many opportunities for professional investment of assets. The sheer urgency and scale of current social problems in some countries may mean that endowment building is difficult for donors and others to comprehend. For these reasons, support organizations may need to be flexible in their approaches to endowment building and its place in the concept of a community foundation.

## V **Conclusion**

The points above are brought to life in the individual case studies that follow. These profiles were designed to be read individually or as a collection, and stand equally well in either context. It is also expected that the case studies will hold useful insights for philanthropic support organizations of all kinds, their funders, as well as others active in the philanthropic field and the broader Third Sector.

During the development of the case studies, those working on the project heard several times that a global project of this kind was rare and bound to be plagued by logistical problems, communications barriers and other challenges. Although challenges were encountered along the way, the project's original goals and outcomes were achieved, and, amazingly, achieved on time. WINGS-CF is grateful for the active and enthusiastic participation of the eight organizations represented here, as well as the working group and additional readers who helped to shape the final profiles.

## VI **WINGS-CF Case Study Working Group**

The Case Study project was guided by a Working Group composed of the following:

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