



Community Leadership Framework Toolbox

A tool for community foundations for using the
Framework for Community Leadership by a Community Foundation

DECEMBER 2009



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At achments in MS Word

(To view at achments from this PDF document, go to View, Navigat on Panels, and click on At achments.)

- Community Leadership Status Assessment Tool Template
- Community Leadership Act on Planner Template
- Community Leadership Story Tool Template

Using This Toolbox

The purpose of this toolbox is to make the *Framework for Community Leadership by a Community Foundat on* user-friendly and accessible for community foundat on staf and boards as they consider their foundat ons' role in building stronger communit es. Included are several tools and instruct ons for using each tool. Each tool is at ached to this PDF document in MS Word, so that community foundat ons can complete, save, refer to and update.

A web conference presentat on about the toolbox can be viewed at [ht p://www.cf eads.org/resources/webinars/2009_webinar4/index.php](http://www.cf eads.org/resources/webinars/2009_webinar4/index.php)

We invite your feedback. Please send your comments about this Toolbox to dsilke@cf eads.org

Why the focus on Community Leadership?

Ever since the day in 1914 when the Cleveland Foundation first opened its doors, community leadership has been part and parcel of the work of community foundations. In fact, creating the community foundation model in the first place was a true exercise of community leadership – an amazing experiment in how people in a community could organize and perpetuate local resources in new ways to help take care of their community.

Almost a century later, the number of community foundations in the United States has grown from that first one to more than 700, and the community foundation movement has gone worldwide. Fifteen years ago, few if any community foundations existed outside the United States and Canada. Today, there are more community foundations outside North America than there are inside. And community foundations elsewhere are organizing in their own new ways to take care of their communities.

Recent decades have also witnessed a pendulum swing in the focus of U.S. community foundations. Late in the 20th century – especially during the 1980s and 1990s – many U.S. community foundations concentrated on building stronger relationships with leading donors in their communities, and providing services to address the community philanthropic interests of those donors. This emphasis positioned community foundations as a value-adding alternative to placing a donor’s assets with charitable gift funds held by financial institutions. The community foundation field learned a lot and gained a great deal from this concentrated effort.

In 2005, however, a study about the future of U.S. community foundations encouraged the field to stop, look, and listen. This provocative examination of the community foundation field and its future – *On the Brink of New Promise: The Future of U.S. Community Foundations* – challenged the field to think anew, and to shift beyond its recent focus on the accumulation and management of donors’ financial assets.¹ It examined the relevance and competitive positioning of a financial-asset-focused view of the field in light of growing competition for that ground from commercial gift funds and a range of other community philanthropy organizations, including United Ways, giving federations, identity-based funds, giving circles, hometown associations and healthcare conversation foundations.

On the Brink concluded that the future viability of community foundation field is closely tied to community foundations’ broad and deep knowledge of their communities, and their effectiveness in helping lead the way on significant issues in their communities. In effect, it encouraged the U.S. community foundation field to look back to its origins to find its future, to reattach the field to its very earliest roots -- a burning commitment not just to do good things in the community, but to be a *catalyzing force* that takes on the critical issues that will fundamentally improve our communities.

On the Brink of New Promise created a “buzz” in the field. This new attention – some say new movement – on community leadership in the community foundation field influenced many foundations to begin to ask themselves new questions about how they can take on or improve their community leadership roles. Many community foundations began looking for tools and resources to help them better understand their roles in community leadership and how they can improve their practice, but discovered a real scarcity of relevant resources. ***There wasn’t even a generally accepted definition of what “community leadership” means in the context of a community foundation.***

¹ Lucy Bernholz, Katherine Fulton and Gabriel Kasper. *On the Brink of New Promise: The Future of U.S. Community Foundations*. Blueprint Research & Design, Inc. and Monitor Company Group, LLP: 2005.

So what *is* Community Leadership by a Community Foundation?

In 2007 and 2008, the Community Foundations Leadership Team of the Council on Foundations, with support from several national foundations, commissioned the national nonprofit CFLeads to convene a National Task Force on Community Leadership (NTF). The Task Force, composed of more than three dozen community foundation and philanthropy leaders, was deeply interested in improving the practice of community leadership both in individual foundations and in the field as a whole.² The Task Force took on two major assignments: First, define community leadership. Then build a framework that can help community foundations better understand and practice it.

The National Task Force on Community Leadership defined community leadership in a positive statement that declares what is true when a community foundation is acting as a community leader:

The community foundation is a catalyzing force that creates a better future for all by addressing the community’s most critical or persistent challenges, inclusively uniting people, institutions and resources, and producing significant, widely shared and lasting results.

To better understand what this definition means, it helps to break it down part-by-part.

The community foundation...

is a catalyzing force...

This acknowledges that the community foundation *always* takes a part that makes something happen – but it rarely acts in isolation. It acts in concert with others, sometimes taking or sharing the lead, sometimes following another leader with key assistance, sometimes paving the way for new leaders.

that creates a better future for all...

This acknowledges that the community foundation’s constituency is the entire community. Every issue, every cause it embraces, every activity it engages in, has some connection to the greater good of producing benefits for all, including those who are marginalized or left out of society.

by addressing the community’s most critical or persistent challenges...

This acknowledges that the community foundation can be counted on to address the things that matter the most in the community and that it doesn’t shy away from something because it’s too hard or “it has always been that way.”

inclusively uniting people, institutions, and resources...

This acknowledges how the community foundation goes about its business in the open and how it ensures broad participation. It also recognizes that the community foundation is particularly well suited to assemble, leverage and deploy a wide range of resources.

and producing significant, widely shared and lasting results.

This acknowledges that the community foundation looks beyond quick fixes and innovative pilot projects, and that it has the staying power to reach long-term results that have positive impact across the community’s spectrum of people, place and organization.

² See Appendix I for National Task Force membership.

Overall, this definition acknowledges that community leadership is not something “apart” from what many community foundations do or have been doing. Certainly, plenty of community foundations have either chosen or found themselves in a central role of coordinating or leading the way when their communities have experienced a particular challenge or enjoyed some new opportunity.

And this definition does not suggest that community leadership is something that community foundations do *besides* their basic grantmaking and donor services. Rather, it makes clear that those services are critical parts of community leadership.

But the definition does signal that community foundations that wish to pursue a community leadership mission have a clear “Job One” priority. They pay most attention to whether they are organizing the work they do – whether it is grantmaking, donor and asset development, convening, investing, leveraging -- to produce significant positive results for people and the community focused on the issues and opportunities that will make the *most* difference today and for the future.

In summary, community leadership has always existed in the field to some extent. But it has varied in emphasis over the decades, and by preference of individual community foundations. For some community foundations today, community leadership is a new way of thinking and acting. For most, community leadership is about systematically getting better at what has always been one of the most important aspects of our work.

Why us? Shouldn't or couldn't some other organization be doing this?

Community foundations typically are uniquely positioned to take on critical community issues and significant community opportunities. In many places, no other organization is as well suited or can be as effective as a community foundation to play certain roles that are pivotal to making things happen. Your colleagues in the community foundation field have found several reasons they might emerge as the right organization to take on certain community leadership challenges:

- **Community foundations are nonpartisan.** People often trust community foundations to take on issues because they feel community foundations will listen to and weigh all the relevant interests and viewpoints in a fair way. That's because the board, staff, donors, grantees and volunteers of a strong and well constructed community foundation reflect just about every side on most issues.
- **Community foundations have wide-ranging relationships.** Donor advisors and boards provide community foundations with wide access to the business and traditional leaders in the community. Through their grantee relationships, community foundations build connections across the nonprofit, education and government sectors. Board members are widely respected community citizens with their own substantial range of contacts and relationships. In publicizing grants, giving opportunities and community issues, community foundations often establish credibility with the media. Few – if any – other community organizations can claim as wide a range of strong positive relationships.
- **Community foundations have convening power.** The combination of reputation, relationships and resources gives community foundations the power to serve as trusted conveners on almost any community issue – no matter how complex or fractious.
- **Community foundations have flexible resources.** Where else can a community find as wide a range of resources it needs to act together on a community issue or opportunity? Community foundations have resources – or can more easily assemble resources – that are flexible enough to bring to bear where and when needed. Most government resources are tied up in categorical funding streams, constrained by narrow enabling legislation, or take a long time to access. Nonprofits scrambling for

resources to meet day-to-day needs seldom have anything to spare, and are often focused only one issue or constrained to certain activities by their funding agreements. Community foundations – even those with very small unrestricted endowments -- usually have some flexibility to allocate or redirect funds or to know which donor advisors they can count on to help when needed.

- **Community foundations can flex their jurisdiction and tools.** In many places, community foundations are often the *only* institution that spans the many jurisdictions and issues in a natural economic and cultural region. Indeed, in some places, community foundations become *the* key player that pulls the region together, sometimes by collaborating with neighboring community foundations. And because they match resources with community opportunities, community foundations can handle all the sides of a program transaction as necessary -- from convening to study a problem, to establishing funding streams to address it, to leveraging in resource partners (outside foundations, government, business), to identifying and building the capacity of organizations to carry out the work, to offering fiscal agency to the effort, or even to operating programs themselves.
- **Community foundations have staying power.** Elected leaders come and go, nonprofits and businesses are born and die, but community foundations are designed from the ground up to be permanent community resources. This gives community foundations staying power – and staying power is often essential when taking on important issues or capitalizing on major opportunities. Often the reason a problem persists in the first place is that no one has taken a long-term view!

What does the Community Leadership Framework Toolbox offer?

The National Task Force on Community Leadership started by defining community leadership. Their next step was to develop a **Framework for Leadership by a Community Foundation**. The **Framework** starts from the definition, and constructs a detailed outline of “building blocks” that community foundations can strengthen if they want to get better at community leadership.

This **Community Leadership Framework Toolbox** is the next step. It has been developed as self-help for individual community foundations as they examine and strengthen their own community foundation’s community leadership role and capacity.

We mentioned it earlier: For some community foundations, community leadership is a new way of thinking and acting. For most, community leadership is about systematically getting better at what has always been one of the most important aspects of our work.

This **Community Leadership Framework Toolbox** is designed with all these starting places in mind. It will help those new to community leadership begin the process of thinking about how it applies to their foundation’s work, and will help the “old-hands” who have always exercised their foundation’s community leadership to be more thoughtful and effective..

The point is that *anyone* can do it. Regardless of its age, location, history or size, a community foundation can enter community leadership work and get better at it. In fact, it is best to approach community leadership with a “practice makes perfect” mindset.

This **Toolbox** can help your community foundation:

- *Understand community leadership – and your foundation’s will to take on community leadership*

- *Conduct an inventory and analysis of your foundation's community leadership status today, and determine which building blocks you want or need to strengthen*
- *Plan specific new community leadership initiatives – and determine what capacities you need to develop or strengthen to successfully take them on*
- *Collect and tell the stories of your community leadership efforts in a way that both prepares you to effectively communicate them to stakeholders and the media and helps you do better with future community leadership initiatives*
- *Assess and measure your community leadership initiatives – looking at both the community leadership initiatives' progress and outcomes, and the effects that your work has had on your foundation.*

This **Toolbox** is organized into five easy tool pieces:

- **Understanding Community Leadership.** This tool offers a series of readings and discussion questions that you can use with your foundation's board, staff or partners to better understand community leadership, and to consider your own community leadership role and will to do more.
- **Framework for Community Leadership by a Community Foundation.** Once your foundation determines it wants to get better at community leadership, you can use this **Framework** as touchstone for strengthening your community leadership capacity and results. The remaining tools in this Toolbox are organized around the Framework and its building blocks to help community foundations think about and improve their work.
- **Community Leadership Framework Status Assessment Tool (CL SAT).** This tool is designed to help you gauge your community foundation's community leadership strengths at a particular point in time, to identify the priority community leadership capacities that you want to strengthen, and to set you on a path toward doing so.
- **Community Leadership Action Planner Tool.** This tool can help your foundation plan how it will either work on a specific community leadership issue or strengthen a particular **Community Leadership Framework** building block – or both – within the time frame of one year or less.
- **Community Leadership Story Tool.** This tool will help you profile, learn from and sharpen one of your foundation's **specific** community leadership efforts.

Who developed this Community Leadership Toolbox?

This **Toolbox** was developed by CFLeads and the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group for the Community Foundations Leadership Team of the Council on Foundations.

Please share your stories, critiques, applications, adaptations and ideas with us. Help us understand where we're on target and where we're missing the mark.

Please send your feedback and ideas to:

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Appendix 1

The National Task Force on Community Leadership

The National Task Force on Community Leadership (NTF) met over ten-month period beginning in September 2007 to determine what is needed to make community leadership a defining characteristic of community foundations and a core competency of the field. The National Task Force was staffed by CFLeads and the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group. The work of the Task Force was supported by the Council on Foundations Community Foundations Leadership Team, with generous funding from the Ford Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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