



COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA  
FONDATIONS COMMUNAUTAIRES DU CANADA  
ensemble pour tous.  
all for community.

# Building Community Vitality

*On the Brink of New Promise*  
Strategic Roles Assessment

**April 2009**

# Strategic Roles Assessment

## What is this tool?

This exercise will help you think through the roles that your community foundation has played in your area and what roles it might take on in the future.

Community foundations can choose from a wide range of strategic roles that make up the “building blocks” of community philanthropy strategy in the future. Community Foundations of Canada has developed 10 principles that guide the work of Community Foundations. These principles, with examples taken from community foundations across Canada, are used to frame this tool.

No single role or set of roles will make sense in all communities. A community foundation can mix and match from among these building blocks to meet the specific needs of its community and the capacity of its foundation, and complement the existing competencies of other community organizations.

## How to use this tool

Begin by reading about the types of strategic roles a community foundation can play. Take a minute and think about your community foundation.

Work through the accompanying questions. First try the exercise yourself. Then try it as a group with your board or your staff.

We intend this tool to be part of a suite focused on **Identifying Opportunities**. Done in conjunction with the **Prototyping Community Solutions** tool, the suite gives you a way of framing conversations about future possibilities from the perspective of your organizational capacity and from the perspective of community needs and opportunities.

## Who should use this tool?

This tool is most appropriate for discussions with foundation staff, board, and advisers. Make sure to incorporate the reflections and thoughts of community members and others that you gathered when using the **Community Change Discussion Guide** and/or the tool for **Prototyping Community Solutions**.

## Related resources

*Community Change Makers: The Leadership Roles of Community Foundations*, by Ralph Hamilton, Julia Parzen, and Prue Brown, Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, 2004.

[http://www.chapinhall.org/article\\_abstract.aspx?ar=1366](http://www.chapinhall.org/article_abstract.aspx?ar=1366).

*Making a Difference: A Community Impact Series*, Center for Community Foundation Excellence, Council on Foundations. <http://www.cof.org/Content/General/Display.cfm?contentID=2782>.

*Strengthening Community Foundations: Redefining the Opportunities*, by Foundation Strategy Group, commissioned by the Council on Foundations, October 2003.

<http://www.foundationstrategy.com/clients/community.asp>.

## CONTRIBUTING IDEAS AND INFORMATION

### **We build community vitality.**

Strong, vital communities are those in which everyone can participate. They are resourceful and resilient. Community Foundations nurture and build our communities strengths and assets. We respond to challenges and opportunities and support organizations and individuals to do likewise. We develop local leadership, invest in sustainability, champion justice, and mobilize civic participation and resources.

Over 75 people attended a meeting in Charlotte County hosted by the Fundy Community Foundation. They have conducted a survey of individuals living on low incomes and plan to present priorities identified at the meeting to the Province of New Brunswick.

### **We understand our communities.**

Sweeping changes to the economy, the environment and demographics are just some of the trends affecting our country and our communities. We actively participate in the life of the community, continually engage in consultation and discussion, track and report on local and national trends and respond to change.

The Winnipeg Foundation established a US corporation, The Winnipeg Foundation USA, to accept gifts from American donors and provide tax receipts in US funds. It also enables the foundation to process gifts on behalf of other Manitoba Foundations.



## FOSTERING STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS

### **We create opportunities for dialogue and inclusion.**

Nurturing a vital community means reaching out and ensuring that people with different experiences and points of view are included, especially those who are often excluded. We bring people together to create opportunities for respectful dialogue and joint problem solving. We enthusiastically participate when invited to dialogues convened by others.

The Sunshine Coast Community Foundation received a grant from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and Community Foundations of Canada to convene a summit for stakeholders to discuss issues surrounding their water supply.

### **We embrace partnerships.**

More can be accomplished when we act together. We believe in the power of collaboration and joint action to maximize our community's opportunities and respond to our challenges. We initiate, participate in, and support partnerships that build community vitality and are based on shared vision and mutual responsibility.

The Community Foundation of Nova Scotia convened the business community around environmental issues which lead to creating the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE-NS); the 3<sup>rd</sup> in Canada and 42<sup>nd</sup> network of its kind worldwide.

## EXPANDING RESOURCES

### **We grant for breadth and impact.**

Grant dollars are community capital for seizing opportunities, finding solutions, sustaining what works, providing needed services, expressing ourselves and taking calculated risks. We grant broadly across the spectrum of community life, supporting organizations and programs that are making a difference.

"Tackling Poverty Together" was the name of the Hamilton Community Foundation's initiative where 15% of its total grantmaking budget went to fighting poverty. They co-convened a roundtable with the City of Hamilton to create a long-term plan to address the problem of poverty.

### **We tackle pressing issues.**

We believe philanthropy has a role to play in addressing some of the most pressing issues of our time. We tackle tough problems on many fronts through our grantmaking, investments, research, convening, communication and participation in the public policy process. We work with other foundations, organizations, business and governments in our region and across the country on problems that require shared action.

The Edmonton Community Foundation along with the City of Edmonton and the United Way of Alberta Capital Region have joined forces to deliver the Social Enterprise Fund which expands sustainable business ventures or social or affordable housing projects.

## LEVERAGING SYSTEMS CHANGE

### **We build community assets and champion philanthropy.**

Permanent endowments and other philanthropic funds are vital community resources now and for the future. We are passionate champions of philanthropy and engage donors of all ages and from all walks of life and traditions. Our donors work with us to find the best ways to serve their communities while meeting their charitable goals.

The Dauphin Plains Credit Union has created a "Green" fund at the Dauphin and District Community Foundation. Starting with a \$5000 donation, it is committed to increasing its fund

in the Dauphin Foundation to \$50,000 and to \$10,000 in Gilbert Plains.

### **We embrace diversity and foster renewal.**

We believe there is strength in diversity. As our community's foundation, we have a responsibility to reflect its diversity. We continually renew our boards and staff, reach out to understand different points of view, and engage the broader community in our deliberations and decision making.

Realizing that there were challenges within the Aboriginal community that they were not addressing, the Red Deer

Community Foundation became one of the first funders of a conference organized for the Aboriginal community with a special emphasis on youth. The conference has become an annual event.

## PROMOTING PERFORMANCE

### **We learn and share what we know.**

We have extraordinary opportunities to learn from the groups we fund, our donors, our partners and our colleagues around the country and the world. We gather data, question, reflect, and evaluate so that we can have impact on the important issues in our community. We share what we learn with others.

First published in 2001, Toronto's Vital Signs is an indicator report developed by the Toronto Community Foundation. It helps the foundation to make connections between issues and trends, and is being replicated in cities across Canada through Community Foundations of Canada.

### **We are responsive and accountable.**

We are reputable stewards of community resources and are committed to being accountable, responsive and transparent. We continually look for the best ways to invest our assets to meet our mission. We are open and accessible, fair and objective, flexible and timely as we work with grant seekers, donors, volunteers and others in the community.

The Board of the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia adopted the goal "to promote rural leadership that will blend traditional community values with emerging community needs" following the recognition that there was a growing divide between the issues of rural Nova Scotia and those of urban areas.

What experience, if any, do you have in playing each role in your community?

### CONTRIBUTING IDEAS AND INFORMATION

Building community vitality

Understanding our communities

### FOSTERING STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS

Creating opportunities for dialogue and inclusion

Embracing partnerships

### EXPANDING RESOURCES

Granting for breadth and impact

Building community assets and championing philanthropy

### LEVERAGING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Tackling pressing issues

Embracing diversity and fostering renewal

### PROMOTING PERFORMANCE

Learning and sharing what we know

Being responsive and accountable

What roles does your community foundation *currently* play in your community?

What factors position you well to play those roles?

Which roles are now played by other organizations in your community?

Which roles can the community foundation *not* take on effectively?

Which roles are currently *not* being served in your community?

Which roles are likely to be most needed by your community in the future?

Given your answers above, what are the most promising roles for your community foundation to play in the future?

What sort of internal capacity does it take to play each of those roles (in terms of staff, money, skills, knowledge, networks, and other resources)?

What will the foundation need to stop doing in order to take on each of these roles or parts of some of these roles?