



A Framework for Community Leadership in Canada's Community Foundations

Community foundations do three key things to build community vitality:

- Vitality takes long-term resources, so we work with donors to build endowment and other funds that ensure vital futures for our communities.
- Vitality comes from all corners of the community, so we grant funds to the widest possible range of organizations and initiatives.
- Vitality needs leadership, so we bring people together from all parts of our community to stimulate new ideas, build participation and strengthen community philanthropy

- Community Foundations of Canada, *All for community* brochure

Over the past 20 years, we have defined community foundation work in Canada through three fundamental roles: endowment building and donor service, grantmaking and community leadership. We have worked hard to build our assets and forge strong relationships with new and existing donors. But it is the third of these core roles – community leadership – that has challenged us the most.

Each of us thinks about and defines community leadership in a different way. And each community foundation, as an organization, thinks about, and defines, our community leadership role, in a different way. There are lots of reasons for this – our foundations differ widely in scale and size; our communities vary even more so. And, unlike endowment building and grantmaking, 'community leadership' is an inherently vague concept – exactly what IS it, anyway? We have also hesitated to more clearly articulate and define our community leadership role because we perceive our communities and our foundations to be so very different. In reality, we have much more in common than what is different.

What do we have in common?

All of us are passionate about the communities in which we live, work, learn and play. All of us believe that our communities have inherent strengths and assets upon which we can build, to make them even better. All of us believe that community foundations are a powerful vehicle through which community

betterment can happen – that by collectively investing assets, investing the proceeds of these assets into community organizations, and providing the leadership in our communities to bring diverse groups together to face common issues and challenges, our communities are better places to live.

We take the long term view.....we identify long-term needs and opportunities and invest in sustainable solutions, helping our communities become resilient, resourceful and ready for the future they want.

- Community Foundations of Canada, *All for community* brochure

And so there is a commonality to our role as community leader as well. All of us have the ability to serve as leaders in our communities: to convene diverse parties around shared issues; to develop knowledge that helps the community to better understand itself; to collaborate with like-minded partners in order to improve quality of life; to find innovative and novel solutions to shared challenges. We share common values, have the ability to build and sustain strong relationships, can access and marshal resources and know and understand our communities.

The global economic decline has brought some of our assumptions into question. For most of us, our assets have declined with declining markets. The ability to do grantmaking has therefore lessened, too. And with fewer assets to manage, and less money to grant to community organizations, some community foundations are asking, ‘so what do we do now?’ The **opportunity** for community foundations to be *community leadership organizations* has never been more apparent; the **need** for our community leadership abilities has never been more profound. The challenges our communities face – socially, economically and environmentally – are deep. And community foundations have the power to convene, to collaborate, to bring ‘strange bedfellows’ together, to mobilize philanthropy in creative ways, and to engage parties in meaningful dialogue, around complex issues.

Some community foundations are already explicitly doing community leadership work. For some of us, it is in the convening work we are doing. For others, it is the leadership role we are taking on a particularly compelling issue. For still others, we are providing *Vital Signs* reports to provide a knowledge resource that can mobilize the wider community to act, and to provide a clear focus for our own grantmaking and collaborative work.

Some community foundations are also doing community leadership work but it is more implicit – we are doing it, but we don’t always ‘name it’ as ‘community leadership’. Yet the community-wide meeting that

we sponsor for non-profits who want to talk about the impact of the recession on their funding base, or the study that we fund, with others, on homelessness – these are indeed kinds of community leadership.

And finally, some of us may think ‘we are not doing community leadership – we are too small/don’t have staff/are stretched too thin’. But if we stop and think about how we spend our time as a community foundation, about where our resources are going, about the power and potential of our role as a funder, catalyst, convener, partner and (sometimes) leader.....then almost invariably we are doing community leadership. *We just need to think about it that way.*

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.

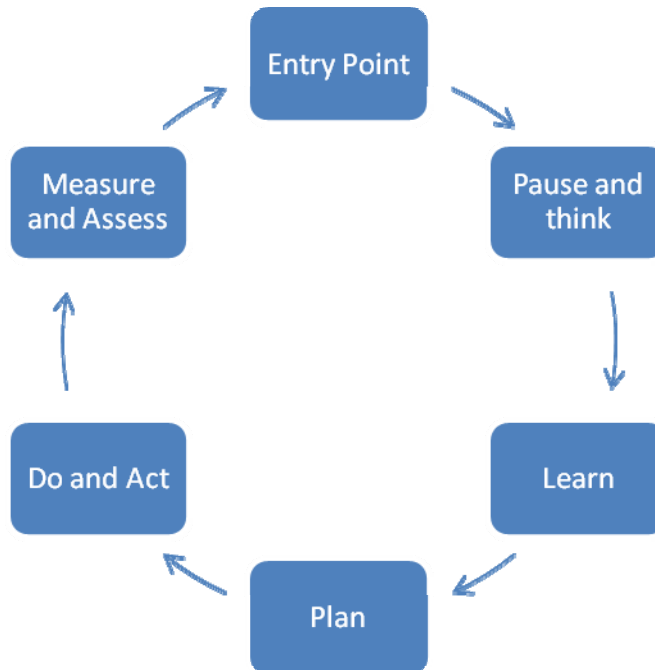
- CF LEADS Framework for Community Leadership

So where can we start to think and reflect about how our community foundation approaches community leadership?

Start by thinking about this as a journey.....and as the saying goes, it is often less about the destination than it is about the journey itself. This work, community leadership, really is about taking a journey as a foundation, and it is not as complicated as it seems. There is a lot that small foundations can do just as effectively as larger foundations – it depends on your vision and your clarity of purpose.

This toolkit is intended to give you the appropriate tools for your foundation, regardless of size. We have a variety of tools to help you ask questions of yourself, your organization and those with whom you work. We help you to assess your capacity to undertake this work, your desire to do so, the results you want to achieve, and help you to find ways to make that happen.

This community leadership Framework helps you ask yourselves some questions, and find the appropriate tools for your foundation’s capacity, whatever that might be. Think of this framework as the first planning tool to use for your foundation, and move forward from here. This diagram may be a place to start in thinking about community leadership at your foundation.



Entry Point:

There is sometimes a ‘moment’ in which your CF finds itself, in which your presence, from a community leadership perspective, is valued. Something happens. An opportunity comes forward and you are asked to respond – will you engage? Will you join? Will you lead? Or, maybe an issue is identified in your community, or your Board and/or staff realize that your CF can make a difference. Do you want to? Can you? Should you? Who else would be involved?

Or, you may have several initiatives underway at once, all at different points on this diagram, and so this circle may be useful to think about for each initiative so you are not missing a step. It may also be useful as a mapping exercise to see where, on the journey of leadership, your different initiatives are ‘at’, how your resources are being deployed, where your capacity is strong (or maybe not?).....

For a Group I foundation, this might help the Board to think about a first-ever community leadership project, given the capacity of resources (people and time) at your foundation.

For a Group II foundation, this might help you and the Board to think about making choices – given that your capacity is somewhat limited, choices need to be made about where to put resources so they can have the most impact. Where will yours go? The tools in this kit can help you to decide that.

For a Group III foundation – you may be active in several community leadership initiatives at once. They are at different stages of development, might be resourced differently, might be an interesting cross-section of issues, and this set of tools can help you see them as a whole, so that you better understand what you are wanting to achieve with each, how they complement one another, and how they fit into the overall strategic plan for your foundation.

What we think or what we know or what we believe is, in the end, of little consequence. The only consequence is that we do.

- John Ruskin

Pause and Think

Now that have found yourselves on this journey, or think you might embark upon it, there are some questions to ask:

As a community foundation, where do you **want** to go?

Where do you want to ‘be’? What is your desired **destination**? (What is the desired result you seek?)

What do you **need to do** to get there?

What do you want to accomplish along the way?

Think about this as if you are looking at a map – you are going from “A” (where you are now) to “B” (where you want to be). What does that route, or journey, look like?

When you are planning a trip, you usually know the destination you want to get to; what do you need to think about in order to plan this trip and get to your community leadership ‘destination’? Is this an issue that is important for your community foundation to be involved in (the destination)? If so, why?

We must become the change we want to see.

- Ghandi

Learn

Using our analogy of a journey, you need to learn a little bit about the destination you are going to, and the route(s) you have chosen to get there.

What are the different routes you can take to get to the destination you seek? What are the pros and cons of each route? What are your choices and options? How much does each option cost (what resources will it require)? How much money (resources) do you have?

What is the best method for you to get there? Using our journey analogy, is it best to go by car? plane? train? (What kind of process do you need to get there? Should you take the quickest approach, or one that will take longer, but may be better overall? What are the cost/benefit implications of these different processes?)

What will the weather be like? (What do you need to anticipate in terms of positive and negative ‘fallout’?) What timing do you need to think about? Is there a specific time of year that would be better to ‘take this trip’ than other times of the year?

Is this like other trips you have taken in the past, or is this really new ‘terrain’ for you? (What are the ways you lead now? What are you already doing that is similar to this from which you can learn? What could you be doing that is new for you, in terms of community leadership?)

Finally, think about the different tools you use to plan a trip. Some of us like to look at maps and atlases; others are into guidebooks and brochures. Likewise, there are different learning styles at your foundation. Some of us are visual learners, some are text-oriented learners, and others are auditory learners. We have things on the BCV web site for all kinds of learning styles.

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

- John Quincy Adams

Plan

If we were taking a real trip, we would plan ahead and think about things like clothing, weather, food, maps, guidebooks, packing our bags.....

In this community leadership journey, you need to think about these things, too. You need to plan how you are going to make the journey, who will be involved, the resources it will take, etc. You need to make sure the journey is manageable.

I think a major act of leadership right now, call it a radical act, is to create the places and processes so people can actually learn together, using our experiences.

- Margaret Wheatley

Do/Act

So – you hit the road. You sponsor the meeting, fund the program, bring the players together, host a community dialogue, engage with a group of philanthropists.....some of these steps might feel a little bit unfamiliar....yet you take those first few important steps.

Remember that sometimes it might not go as you expect: there is a block on the road, or the flight is delayed, and this is OK. You adjust course as you go, choosing a different route, or adjusting the time of arrival – this is natural and expected. You make ‘pit stops’ along the way – to make sure you are on the right road, to nourish yourselves with a ‘snack’, to pick up friends that you see along the way. And you learn things as the journey moves along – the road signs keep us on track. There are highway signs that alert you to trouble on the road. New information pops up along the way that helps you make sure we are on the right road or if you need to choose another one. You may even choose a slightly different destination, because the one you had originally chosen turns out to be different than you had thought.

Mostly, however, you stop talking about doing it and you do it. You get on with the journey. You convene, create a space for the community to have a conversation, bring together people who would not normally find common ground, because our community foundation brought them together. **This is community leadership.**

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Measure/Assess

Your journey is underway. And while you are busy making sure that you are on the right road, and that everyone who should be on the bus is on the bus, you also need to create a bit of space within the foundation to make sure you are on the right track. You need to make sure that you have not gotten lost. You need to know if you need to adjust your course, and if so, how. You need to know if there are people missing. And some of those at the back of the bus keep asking, “are we there yet?”

How will you know if and when you are (nearly) there? What changes are you making in the community? What ‘tracks’ are you leaving behind? Are you having the results we desire?

Well, in a perfect world, you would have drawn a map, with an itinerary and travel plan, before you left on our trip. But usually we forget to do that...we make some of our plans, and have some of our stuff, but usually something gets left behind, or we don’t make all of the plans. It is all right to do some of these things as you are on the journey.

You also have the benefit of being able to look in the rear view mirror, as you go. So you can see that you have come farther than you had thought.

This is Community Leadership

See? It isn’t quite the mystery you thought. Once you are ‘on the road’, you settle down and enjoy the journey! Many of us are ‘doing’ community leadership already; this Toolkit helps you to think about it in a more intentional way. For others, taking some first steps can open up a whole new set of donors, partners, allies and friends for your CF. Taking those steps – of bringing together people, resources and organizations - shows your community that you are a vital catalyst in making change – for the better – happen.

*If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.*
- African proverb