

# Framework for Building the Capacity and Impact of an Individual Community Foundation

## User's Guide 1.0

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### Introduction

This framework is the first effort to bring clarity to the definition and practice of community leadership by community foundations. Created by the National Task Force on Community Leadership, it represents a necessary first – and giant – step in creating a practical knowledge base.

The framework is extraordinarily versatile. It offers:

- ❖ A way to unpack complex issues and processes, focused on why things do or do not work
- ❖ A tool for planning that starts from analysis rather than intuition
- ❖ A tool for taking stock and evaluating progress
- ❖ A means to target exactly the right interventions to achieve desired results

This framework is specific to the practice of **community leadership by community foundations**. It breaks down into manageable bites what it takes for community foundations to make the shift from occasionally practicing community leadership to becoming community leadership institutions.

Can the framework be used in the design, implementation, and evaluation of specific projects and initiatives? Yes, and it should be. Its primary purpose, however, is to identify the **qualities and capacities** necessary to improve the success and sustainability of *every* project and *every* initiative a community foundation undertakes. While the framework is not the answer to everything, it will help you ask the right questions at each step along the way.

### Understanding the Framework

- ❖ Approach community leadership with a “practice makes perfect” mindset.
- ❖ A community foundation can enter community leadership work ***at any point*** – and regardless of its age, location, history or size.

- ❖ This framework describes the building blocks that make community foundations better community leadership institutions. The larger the number of building blocks a community foundation has in place, the more likely it is to be successful in its community leadership efforts and to sustain them over time.
- ❖ A number of the building blocks are interdependent. The best interventions can and will build capacity to address multiple building blocks.

### **Defining Community Leadership**

The framework begins with a definition of what community leadership looks like when it is happening. It is knitted together into a very long sentence where every word matters. Let's begin by unraveling it to reveal each strand of thought.

#### ***The community foundation (your name goes here!)***

***...is a catalyzing force.*** This acknowledges that the community foundation does not act in isolation. It acts in concert with others, sometimes taking the lead, sometimes following, 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, has some connection to the greater good.

#### ***...by addressing the community's most critical or persistent challenges.***

This acknowledges that the community foundation doesn't shy away from something because it's too hard or "it has always been that way" and it can be counted on in a crisis.

***...inclusively uniting people, institutions, and resources.*** This acknowledges how the community foundation goes about its business: in the open and with broad participation. It also recognizes that the community foundation is well-suited to assemble and leverage resources.

***...and producing significant, widely shared and lasting results.*** This acknowledges that the community foundation looks beyond quick fixes and innovative pilot projects, that it has the staying power to reach the outcomes it seeks.

### **The Significance of Building Blocks**

Beneath the definition of community leadership are first-, second-, and third-level building blocks. These describe the qualities and capacities that enable community foundations to fully realize their community leadership potential. It's worth reiterating that not all building blocks need to be in place for a community foundation to

successfully engage in community leadership, and that the very process of engaging in community leadership strengthens building blocks. Also bear in mind that while *qualities* (e.g., values, culture, and will) are internal to the organization, not every *capacity, resource, or skill* (e.g., expertise in economic development) needs to be in-house. Each community foundation will make different decisions about where to start based upon community context and stage of evolution. It often makes sense to focus first on those capacities essential to the community foundation's current priorities.

### ***First-Level Building Blocks***

Every use of the framework requires attention to all four **first-level building blocks**. They form the interrelated and interdependent basis for community leadership work. Simply stated, doing something aimed at one building block often affects other building blocks.

For example, the values and culture of your community foundation (building block A) affect both the depth and diversity of your relationships (building block B). It makes sense to gain clarity on your organizational values and culture before attempting to build relationships with those who have never interacted with the foundation and might, in fact, be skeptical about your motives. In turn, the relationships (building block B) you develop have an impact on your ability to act upon critical issues (building block D), attract co-investors (building block C), and engage in public policy (building block D).

Let's examine the first-level building blocks in a bit more detail.

#### **Building Block A: Values, Culture, and Will**

Does your community foundation have "fire in the belly" for community leadership? This is a fundamental requirement, even if it initially resides only in a handful of community foundation board and staff. While community foundations often enter this work incrementally, community leadership must eventually become embedded in the DNA of the organization.

The shift to a primary focus on community leadership can lead to difficult conversations at the board level. One community foundation reported several board members saying "this is not what we signed on for" when the subject was broached. With perseverance on the part of the CEO, the board explored and eventually embraced community leadership, limiting attrition to one member. Other community foundations have gradually reconstituted their boards, recruiting each new member with explicit expectations around community leadership. To ensure that community leadership remains the pivot point, some community foundation boards evaluate their own performance in addition to the CEO's on an annual basis.

Don't underestimate challenges at the staff level. One of the unintended consequences of organizational silos (donor services, finance, program, etc.) is that clearly marked territory makes people territorial. Blurring functional lines so that community leadership becomes the organizing principle of the community foundation can surface tensions. A repeated reference to "my donors" was an early indication to one community foundation CEO that there were turf issues in the organization. This suggests a need for some employee performance measures that place value on cross-functional integration.

These incidents underscore the importance of internal preparation to increase external impact. One approach is to define the criteria that will be applied to community leadership efforts. This has the advantage of grounding often lofty values statements within a decision-making framework. It brings home to board and staff alike how community leadership is being operationalized. One community foundation tied all leadership efforts to a single metric, but it also developed a dozen criteria that fine-tune the concept in relation to the community foundation's role. The CEO reports that, without the clarity and objectivity provided by these criteria, the board would never have ventured into dismantling racism by improving civic dialogue and closing gaps in housing, education, and health care.

### **Building Block B: Relationships**

The true wealth of a community foundation lies in its relationships. Everything from the ability to attract donors to having a beneficial and lasting impact in the community depends in part on the breadth and depth of the relationships a community foundation cultivates. All community foundations have abundant relationships, but they tend to be weighted toward certain professions (law, financial advisors) and the top rungs of the socioeconomic ladder. This building block speaks to *continuously* building relationships in recognition of both the changing demographics of our communities and the need to develop a broader set of relationships to engage in community leadership.

Community foundations are addressing relationship building in a multitude of ways. For decades, community foundations have operated neighborhood-based grants programs whose primary purpose is increasing social cohesion and problem-solving capability; in this instance, grants are simply a means to a larger end. Others have suspended policies prohibiting certain activities, such as buying tables at fundraising events, when the event is hosted by a group with whom the community foundation does not have trusted relationships. A growing number have launched major initiatives aimed at building personal relationships across ethnic, religious, and racial boundaries. None of this is taking place from behind a desk: community foundation staff and board members are active participants in relationship building throughout the community.

Relationship building is also taking place inside community foundations. Board members, donors, and volunteers are receiving more information about the foundation's community leadership efforts and more personal attention from foundation staff. Staff members are also building new relationships with each other because community leadership requires an integrated, cross-disciplinary approach to almost every function formerly performed, if not in isolation, in a relatively homogeneous fashion.

### **Building Block C: Resources**

Resources include more than money, but money matters. People gravitate to community foundations because they attract, manage, and distribute money. Those functions provide the platform for community leadership.

By the same token, community leadership places new demands on resources, both human and monetary. It requires a more sophisticated understanding and tracking of the relationship between costs and revenues. It requires new ways of thinking about how to use the foundation's human and financial resources to leverage change.

For example, some community foundations are providing loans to small businesses in distressed areas, some are investing in Earned Income Tax Credit campaigns that put millions of federal dollars in the hands of the working poor, and some are placing resources in credit unions that serve economically-disadvantaged populations.

Community foundations are also actively participating in the community leadership efforts they support, simultaneously acquiring new skills and expertise while building and strengthening relationships. Many have provided senior and administrative staff to collaborative efforts, along with meeting space and amenities. They have served as fiscal agent when no other collaborative member could, and at no cost. They have loaned in-house expertise, such as communications staff to increase the visibility of community leadership efforts. In many instances, community foundations board and staff members alike sit on steering committees and the governing bodies of community leadership collaboratives. Expectations about participation in community affairs are finding their way into job descriptions, CEO selection, and performance evaluation.

Community leadership is labor intensive, and the knowledge base on how to fund community leadership is in its infancy. Most community foundations are struggling with this issue. Some are building endowments, others depend upon annual fundraising, others seek grants from private foundations, and others seize opportunities unique to their geography and circumstance. Different models for providing adequate and dependable levels of support for community leadership need priority attention at the field level.

## **Building Block D: Understanding and Skills**

Among the most important qualities that a community foundation can cultivate is curiosity about the community it serves. Among the most important skills it can develop is the ability to forge consensus. Community leadership issues often require understanding and skills beyond the foundation's ken. Skills can be acquired internally on-the-job or through specialized hires and externally through consultants and community partners. Many community foundations acquire the knowledge they need by commissioning studies, by creating indicators projects, by conducting stakeholder interviews and focus groups, or by convening all of the known organizations and entities that deal with a particular issue. It is important to remember that expertise comes in many forms and includes the practical knowledge gained by people whose daily lives are affected by the issue being addressed.

The transition to community leadership necessitates increased sophistication in communications. Many community foundations maintain a profile so low that it barely registers on the public's radar screen. Interestingly, a number of community foundations report that assets increased dramatically when communications staff was added. The field of communications, however, covers a broad spectrum of activities. Community leadership extends beyond traditional communications efforts designed to polish your image or increase your visibility. For example, one community foundation invested in storytelling training for its staff. Another hired a journalist to write compelling stories about its leadership work. Others are investing in social networking software to increase information and idea sharing among community members focused on a particular issue.

### **Second- and Third-Level Building Blocks**

This is where the framework becomes both more specific and more actionable. The framework points you in directions you may never have ventured, and urges you to look beyond the usual suspects in both the learning and doing phases of your community leadership work. It is intended to stretch your thinking. While it is a check-list, it is not of the "been there/done that" variety. It should be revisited again and again as you tackle new challenges or stub your toes on old ones.

## Using the Community Leadership Framework

Community foundations can use the framework to:

- examine general readiness for community leadership
- stimulate thinking and discussion about what needs to be in place when embarking on a specific community leadership activity
- assess what contributed to the progress and success of a community leadership effort, and
- reflect on what should be strengthened to make the next community leadership effort more successful.

Described below are three tools that you'll find in the Exhibits to the user's guide. While similar in many respects, they offer three different entry points to the framework.

### **As an assessment tool**

Community foundations can use the framework to assess community leadership strengths and gaps. One easy way to start is by reflecting on a specific community leadership experience – it may be completed or in progress. *Use the Community Leadership Story Tool included as Exhibit A. This exercise is best completed by a board and staff team. Different community leadership efforts require or emphasize different capacities. To get a good baseline, apply this exercise to more than one story. Repeat the exercise periodically to track ways in which the foundation is building its community leadership capacity.*

### **As a community leadership readiness inventory tool**

The framework can be used as a checklist for considering in general the attributes and capacities the community foundation has in place to engage in community leadership. *Use the Community Leadership Readiness Inventory Tool included as Exhibit B. Assemble up to twelve board and staff members and break the group into four teams; assign each team one of the first-level building blocks. Have each team review its relevant second-level building blocks, referring to the third-level building blocks for detail. Identify second-level building blocks or two or three third-level building blocks that are priorities for foundation capacity-building.*

### **As a planning tool**

Community foundations can use the framework to strengthen a community leadership initiative or project you're planning to undertake. *Use the Community Leadership Plan*

*Strengthening Tool included as Exhibit C. For each second-level building block, ask “do we need this to succeed in our community leadership effort?” If the answer is no, move on to the next second-level building block. If the answer is yes, then ask, “do we have this?” If the answer is anywhere from “no” to “sort of,” then focus on the corresponding third-level building blocks to figure out what is missing and what needs to be strengthened. Simply highlight relevant third-level building blocks until you’ve completed the process of reviewing all second-level building blocks.*

*Once you’ve identified all of the second- and third-level building blocks germane to your community leadership challenge, it’s time to think about action steps: how you’re going to develop or otherwise acquire the attributes and capacities you’ve identified. The reason it’s important to take the time to complete your inventory of the entire framework before undertaking this process is that the best interventions address multiple building blocks. You have limited time and resources, and this tool is intended to assist you in making informed choices about the best “bang for the buck.”*

### **Moving from 1.0 to 2.0**

This user’s guide and accompanying tools are early efforts to assist you in operationalizing the community leadership framework. They’re works-in-progress and we hope to learn with and from you. Share your stories, critiques, applications, adaptations, and frustrations with us. Help us understand where we’re on target and where we’re missing the mark. Brilliant ideas are always welcome. Please send your feedback to:

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