



Community Development Division
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How can community foundations build on their successes?

Kalika Lacy, kindergartner at Little Turtle Elementary School in Columbia City, Ind., participates in the I Can See Club. Teacher George Clark started the club with Kalika, who is deaf, to teach sign language to others. Now more than 100 first- through fifth-graders are members. The Whitley County Community Foundation helped supply materials needed to teach sign language.

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Indiana’s community foundations: sustaining civic engagement

In the beginning, which in this case is circa 1990 A.D., few viable community foundations dotted the Indiana landscape, maybe fewer than a dozen. Now in 2004 every one of Indiana’s 92 counties is served by at least one community foundation. In the beginning few people even knew what a community foundation was, how such an organization could be a vehicle for philanthropic actions by its citizens for the good of its community and how building local endowments could ensure that their gifts would keep on giving indefinitely.

It was, therefore, appropriate that Lilly Endowment announced a now 14-year-old initiative called Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT), based on the Endowment’s conviction that citizens in local communities know best how to spend their philanthropic dollars for their own community’s benefit.

It was not a hard sell. What started in 1990 as a \$47 million program of endowment, project and operating grants (each of which had a matching component) was subscribed fully by eager participants. Within months, the Endowment added another \$13 million and GIFT was on its way. Through five phases and 14 years, the community foundations that have regularly participated in GIFT have built an aggregate asset base of more than \$900 million.

The Endowment has enthusiastically supported the development of community foundations as credible institutions throughout Indiana communities. They can ask and stimulate the development of answers to questions such as what are the highest priority needs in a community and what are the best ways to address them. As was described in its 2003 annual report, the Endowment has also supported United Ways throughout the state over a similar period to perform in complementary roles in their communities.

Basically all community foundations – there were nearly 650 of them across the country with combined assets of nearly \$35 billion at the end of 2002 – are tax-exempt public charities. They serve people who share a



Dave Knopp, executive director of the Noble County Community Foundation, works to familiarize citizens with the foundation’s mission. He also relies on his board members to be “emissaries” in building community awareness.



September McConnell is executive director of the Whitley County Community Foundation. The organization's headquarters is an 1860 home renovated for 21st century use. As with many foundations, this home base is a popular spot for community meetings.

common concern – the quality of life in their area. Individuals, families, businesses and other organizations create permanent charitable funds in the community foundations that help their region meet the challenges of changing times. The community foundations generally invest and administer these funds. Community foundations are overseen by a volunteer board of citizens and run by professionals.

Good board is key to success

“The key is that we’ve always had committed board members,” says September McConnell, executive director of the Whitley County Community Foundation. “When I came in 1997, the composition of the board did not change much from year to year. The passion and wisdom of a founding board is important. We had to think, however, about how to groom future board leaders, so we developed procedures for rotating board members.

“In selecting new members it’s important to find people who have an appreciation for what we do. Often we put potential board members on committees first,” she explains. “This gives us a great way to see how they work in a group, to get a sense of their feeling for the foundation. It is critical to have a fully engaged board.”

Beth Tevlin, executive director of the Wabash Valley Community Foundation in Terre Haute, agrees about the importance of board

engagement. The community foundation serves Vigo County (Terre Haute) and two neighboring counties (Clay and Sullivan counties) through affiliate funds. The advisory boards of these affiliate funds make grantmaking recommendations for their own areas. However, for economies of scale, the Wabash Valley Community Foundation handles the affiliates’ business matters, including finances, accounting, personnel issues, fund administration, resource development and the like.

“I’m now on my third generation of the board,” says Tevlin, who has directed the foundation almost 13 years. “Our board has 23 members who may serve two three-year terms; then they must go off for five years. This foundation morphs so quickly that over those five years it may be a totally different organization. For us to be successful, our board must be continually involved in advancing the community foundation’s objectives.”

What community foundations do

A principal function of all the community foundations is to raise funds for endowments from citizens in their local area, to create gifts that will be “for good, for ever.” A community foundation supports new or existing programs of other nonprofit organizations and agencies. Its main function is



Cheryl Yoder (left) and Viridiana Pizaña, fifth-graders at West Noble Middle School in Ligonier, stuff a backpack bear with Indiana souvenirs and a disposable camera. They ship the backpacks all over the world where their counterparts keep the goodies, take pictures of their homes, restuff the bears with their photos and items from their homes and send them back to Ligonier. Through the program youngsters learn about different countries and make new “worldly” friends. The Noble County Community Foundation helped fund the project.

to serve the community through donors' generosity.

Citizens may make donations of cash, stocks or bonds, life insurance policies, real estate, artwork, charitable remainder trusts and the like. Depending on the donor's wishes, the funds may go into an unrestricted endowment, operating funds, a donor-advised fund, a field-of-interest fund, and so forth.

"Sometimes an endowment is a hard sell," says McConnell whose foundation administers 142 funds, mostly scholarship funds, for her county of about 30,000. "But as we've grown and have been able to put more back into the community, that giving becomes proof. Making the case for an endowment gift is an important role for our

board members. They can help us say, 'Okay, here's why you do this.'" In the past five years, the foundation has made grants totaling \$4.2 million.

Tevlin down in Terre Haute echoes the sentiment. "So many people think that to give to the community foundation, you have to have \$20,000 or \$50,000, and you really don't. We request only \$5,000 to set up an endowment fund, but if you tell some people '\$5,000,' that will scare them off. So we've created an Acorn Fund to which people can make an initial donation of \$500, but with the commitment that they will build it to \$5,000 within the next five years. This is usually doable. Our board members are important advocates for this approach in our community," she emphasizes. The foundation administers 236 funds for all three counties and at the end of 2004 held total assets of about \$21 million.

On the road again

David Knopp, executive director of the Noble County Community Foundation, thought that after covering the county for 15 years as a reporter for the Kendallville Publishing Co., he knew pretty much about the goings-on of the 47,000



Cathy Fisher (left) and Nanette Campbell join forces outside Clugston on the Square, an old hotel that has been renovated into apartments for senior citizens in Columbia City, Ind. The Whitley County Community Foundation helped fund the project.

residents. But two years into the job, in 2002, he mapped out a 100-mile path around the county and started walking. For a week he visited grantees, talked to citizens and tried to get a handle on their aspirations and hopes for the area – and garnered quite a bit of coverage for the foundation.

As he explains, "Like all community foundations, we struggle to get people to know what we do and how we're structured. We have done fairly well in getting the word out," Knopp says. "And you know, some of it really depends on whether people care to know. Nevertheless, when you see the number of grants and the people who have been helped, we have made significant differences, and

our board members are important emissaries in helping build community awareness."

Based in Ligonier (pop. 4,300) the foundation, with assets of nearly \$20 million, in 2003 made almost \$900,000 in grants to groups ranging from the Humane Society to Junior Achievement and from the county public library to a youth drug-prevention program.

As a rule, most of the community foundation grants around the state go to organizations in education; social services; art, culture and the humanities; and economic and community development. Most directors agree that those are the primary areas of concern for their donors.

Being a "player"

Community foundations also perform another critical role: that of neutral convener. By so doing, many community foundations in Indiana have become major "players" in their communities. Along with their colleagues, partners and many diverse groups, they can bring people together to determine what needs are emerging, what the "big picture" in their county looks like.

Not unlike many other areas in the Midwest, the people

in Noble County have seen an influx of Hispanic workers – originally attracted by farming jobs, but more and more attracted to factory work. The Celebrate Diversity project was begun after a survey was taken to understand better how many Hispanics have moved into the county, what their needs are, and the extent to which the community is welcoming them.

“As a result of the survey,” Knopp says, “the main objective of this diversity project is to develop increased awareness in the community of the needs of the new Hispanic residents and the many contributions they can make to the community’s quality of life.”

Just south in Whitley County, McConnell sees the need to address the situation even before it arrives. “As much as I love this place,” she says, “it does have some areas where it needs to improve. Quite frankly, we’re a very homogeneous community with very little racial diversity. What’s fascinating about that is that we’re surrounded by counties that are faced with diversity issues, due largely to significant Hispanic immigration. We’re not seeing a huge influx now, but we expect to see it in the future. So that’s an issue that we talk about as a board and as a grants committee.

“Last year we asked, ‘What are we going to do to start preparing for this?’ No other organization seemed to be addressing it. So we put out our very first ‘request for proposals’ and asked people to propose programs to start creating a welcoming approach to people of all cultures. And we have already funded several,” she says.

“The most unusual one was bringing an African chief here to talk about his culture. He came in full regalia and entertained us all. The kids had the best questions for him and were really eager to learn from him. You know, for this community that’s a weird grant, but gosh we felt good about it. I think we’ll probably do it again,” she says.

John Carreon, president of the Hancock County Community Foundation just east of Indianapolis in Greenfield, feels the same way about the foundation’s role as a convener and “player.” “The challenges,” he says, “are to be more scientific relative to needs assessment and know how to use resources at our disposal to develop responses that meet those needs.



Beth Tevlin is executive director of the Wabash Valley Community Foundation, based in Terre Haute, Ind.

“We should be able to tell you the top need in our community. I can anecdotally tell you that it’s health and human services, but I can’t say to you, ‘Here are the statistics.’ There’s no one place to get a broad range of statistical information.

“The community perceives us as a mature organization, and it expects a higher level of effectiveness now than it did at the beginning. We’re asked to take on more complicated problems that require more resources.

We need a board that is fully engaged and sophisticated in dealing with the increasing complexity of our affairs.

“Also,” he notes, “our board needs to be integrally involved in raising funds. Foundation boards need to emphasize that fund-raising is an ongoing process, not a one-time activity,” says Carreon, a 1994 master’s of philanthropy graduate from the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy. The foundation held assets of almost \$12 million at the end of 2003 and generally makes between \$600,000 and \$800,000 in grants each year.

What’s next?

So what lies ahead for Indiana’s community foundations? After 14 years and an investment of \$404 million, the



High Tech Academy at Mount Vernon High School in Greenfield was made possible by a CAPE grant (see page 16) from the Endowment. Students use equipment in a virtual-reality classroom provided by funds from the grant. The Hancock County Community Foundation was instrumental in convening citizens to prioritize the area’s educational needs and form the grant proposal.



John Carreon, president of the Hancock County Community Foundation, visits Edelweiss Center, an equine-therapy facility that has received grants from the foundation.

Endowment has launched Sustaining Resource Development (SRD), a program for Indiana community foundations to design and implement strategic resource development plans.

The Endowment has posed the question: How best can

these community foundations continue to sustain their successes and build on them for the future? The Endowment hopes that SRD will help each community foundation develop an endowment asset base and annual fund-raising programs to support the personnel, facilities, equipment and programs required to operate at a level commensurate with its county's needs. Educational programs developed by the GIFT technical assistance staff of the Indiana Grantmakers Alliance, in cooperation with the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy in Indianapolis, have been offered before the foundations begin to prepare their three-year strategic plans.

For a community foundation to receive up to 50 percent of a plan's implementation costs (maximum grant of \$250,000 for each county served) there must be significant board engagement in the plan. Accordingly, the educational programs will offer suggestions for increasing board engagement in the affairs of a community foundation.

Dinosphere: You Can't Miss It

About four years ago Lilly Endowment asked officials at the Children's Museum of Indianapolis (the world's largest) what project would have the most impact in further raising the museum's profile even more across the country and contribute to the goal of positioning Indianapolis as a cultural destination.

The result: Dinosphere: Now You're in *Their* World, billed as "the most immersive, scientifically accurate dinosaur exhibit ever created." Literally bursting from its museum confines, Dinosphere has been a unique experience for the half-million children and families who have visited since it opened in mid-June 2004.

Armed with a lead gift of \$15 million from Lilly Endowment, museum officials worked with scientists and paleontologists from all over the world to assemble the exhibition that allows visitors to journey in time back 65 million years to the Cretaceous Period, when dinosaurs last roamed the earth.

The star of Dinosphere is "Bucky," the teenage Tyrannosaurus rex, the first juvenile T. rex ever placed on permanent exhibition in a museum. His Cretaceous compatriots include "Baby Louie," the only fully articulated dinosaur

embryo fossil ever discovered and a previous *National Geographic* "cover boy," and "Kelsey," one of the most nearly complete Triceratops skeletons known to science.

Visitors can stop to experiment and explore at interactive learning stations where they can touch real fossils, piece together dinosaur anatomy, go on a dinosaur dig and serve the appropriate dinner to a cast of hungry creatures.

The ever-fascinating world of dinosaurs will undoubtedly draw many of the 4,600 museum officials and exhibitors who will come from all over the world to Indianapolis in May 2005 for the American Association of Museums Annual Meeting and MuseumExpo™ (Attendees will have their fill of other excellent museums in Indianapolis: the newly renovated and expanded Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, the Indiana State Museum and the "reborn" Indianapolis Museum of Art, among others.)

And Dinosphere will surely be a highlight of the annual meeting in April 2005 of the international Association of Children's Museums which will be hosted by the Children's Museum of Indianapolis.

Photo courtesy of the Children's Museum of Indianapolis