Editorial

Teresa R. Behrens
Johnson Center for Philanthropy, Grand Valley State University

Recommended Citation

Behrens, T. R. (2011). Editorial. *The Foundation Review, 3*(1). https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1060

This unthemed issue covers a lot of philanthropic ground, touching on many of the issues that are currently being discussed – sometimes heatedly – across the sector.

Many funders remain either skeptical or unsure about funding advocacy. Others have embraced it as a key tool to create sustainable change on issues they care about. Even those in the latter camp may hesitate to fund advocacy work because potential grantees may not have the capacity to carry it out. **Gardner, Geierstanger, Nascimento; and Brindis** share research that concludes that building organizational advocacy capacity can be done effectively, resulting in a significant return on investment. Previous work has shown that advocacy work can be effective and can be evaluated (see *The Foundation Review,* Volume 1, Issue 3, Advocacy and Policy Change Issue). With this new work by Gardner et al, funders now have a pathway from building grantee capacity, through analyzing policy targets, to evaluating the results.

Networks have become an increasingly important part of community change toolkits. Networks can serve a variety of roles in a change strategy, such as advocacy, knowledge sharing, and coordination. **Zerounian, Shing, and Hanni** share a tool that can be used to assess a network's readiness for funding.

Nayfack and Wohlsetter describe a partnership model adopted by the Weingart Foundation to address student achievement in four urban school districts. Linking the grantees to university support was a key part of the initiative, which met with some limited success. The authors share what was learned about structuring the partnerships.

As funders increasingly talk about the importance of partnerships and strategies, creating a different kind of relationship with grantees (as described by Nayfack and Wohlsetter) is usually necessary. **Crume and Villanueva** describe a curriculum for social work students that teaches the importance of seeing foundations as partners in social change.

Colby, Fishman, and Pickell share the journey of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as they developed their *Scorecard.* As demands for accountability and transparency continue, the *Scorecard* provides a way to make the work of the foundation more visible. Psychologists and management researchers long ago demonstrated that specific, measurable goals are more motivating than vague goals. Colby et al's work suggests one way to apply this knowledge in the philanthropic sector. Finding ways to include community members in setting those goals may be the next step!

Community foundations have often emerged as leaders in their communities, taking a more proactive, multifaceted approach to philanthropy. **Easterling** examines how the Social Capital Benchmark Survey supported this type of community leadership work. The juxtaposition

of these articles made me consider the important role CF's can play in creating "community dashboards" – an idea that also seems to be surfacing under different names in different areas.

Darling and Smith reflect on how difficult it is for foundations to learn from investments that didn't turn out the way they were intended. (Many funders shy away from the "F word" – failure is not considered an option.) To avoid being doomed to that Einstein version of insanity – expecting different outcomes from the same actions – funders have to be willing to take an honest look at their work, from the ground up. Darling and Smith offer some specific suggestions for *really* learning lessons from previous investments. The potential power of using a scorecard as described by Colby et al and then focusing on how efforts fall short of "moving the needle" is tremendous!

While many of the above articles may be more relevant for larger foundations, **Williams, West, and Klak** focus on the power of community philanthropy -- time, talent, and treasure invested locally. While much attention has been paid to the rise and fall of endowments during the Great Recession, people of both great and modest means in small communities continue to contribute to the greater good.

Connolly argues for a middle ground in the continuing debate between the supporters of technocratic/strategic funding and those who believe that philanthropy is a humanistic, values-based undertaking. He makes a compelling argument that there is room for both – and indeed, a need for both for different purposes. Viewing the two as a continuum rather than a dichotomy creates room for using the most appropriate tools from each.

Finally, **Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, Buck, and Dewar** offer a sobering look at what we're learning about comprehensive community initiatives and the implication for foundations. Interestingly, their recommendations for funders are aligned with Connolly's call for a middle ground between foundation-driven strategy and a responsive, humanistic approach.

Policy, networks, the role of community, partnerships, accountability, mistakes, strategy – these are all big and important issues in the sector. The articles in this issue make important contributions to the discussions.

Teresa R. Behrens, Ph.D.   EDITOR IN CHIEF

P.S. You have probably noticed that this issue also has additional physical size in addition to the intellectual heft. We are working to get on a calendar year cycle for *The Foundation Review.* This issue is a double one, combining Volume 3, Issues 1 and 2.