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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

DEAR READERS

As usual for unthemed issues, Volume 6 / Issue 4 covers a broad range of topics in philanthropy.

While charter schools continue to be a hot-button issue, many foundations have adopted funding of charters as a key strategy and the body of research and evaluation of charter schools is growing. **Carr and Holley** reviewed the investments of the Walton Family Foundation in charter schools and found that their investment strategy was more likely to lead them to fund charters where school-level outcomes were better than those of similar schools. This research doesn't directly assess the outcomes of charter schools, but rather whether a foundation can identify and support more successful charters. This article is a good example of how a foundation strategy can be rigorously evaluated.



In another education-related article, **Donham and Kessel Schneider** describe how the MetroWest Health Foundation was able to partner with schools to implement, on a biennial basis, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey. At this point, every high school and middle school student in the foundation's 25-town region is participating. The survey provides data that can inform school and community policies and programs. One key to the success has been that the schools maintain the control of their own data, rather than the foundation. By allowing the data to reside with those most able to use it for change, rather than insisting the foundation own the data, greater results were accomplished. As foundations seek to evaluate their own work, there is increasing pressure to provide them with more data; this article provides an important lesson.

Mack, Preskill, Keddy and Jhavar discuss how The California Endowment has used a midcourse strategic review to refine Building Healthy Communities, a 10-year, billion-dollar effort to create equitable conditions across the state so that children are healthy, safe, and ready to learn. The review also surfaced tensions created by the design and implementation of the strategy that could impede progress. This provides another example of how foundations can evaluate their own strategies and approaches.

Castro Felix and DuPree provide an international perspective on supporting grassroots organizations. The Action in Solidarity Fund has found that philanthropists can reach small grassroots groups in Mexico and provide support not only for programs, but also to strengthen the social fabric for communities to act on their own behalf. This article shares lessons from the fund's experience that could be applicable in dis-invested communities anywhere.

Norris-Tirrell, Connolly Knox, and Blessett look at another type of disinvested communities. Rural communities face issues of high poverty rates, food insecurity, low-paying and low-skill jobs, and a limited economic base. The authors examined how Florida's rural private foundations invest their funds in order to strengthen our understanding of rural-foundation grantmaking and its potential impact on unique challenges to rural communities.

In a look at the structures of giving in other contexts, **John** examines the phenomenon of giving circles in Asia and describes both indigenous and transplanted models. The concept of formal philanthropic vehicles for addressing community issues is relatively new in much of Asia, but is developing rapidly. This article sheds light on some of the ways in which context interacts with structure to create culturally appropriate ways of giving.

Philanthropy can be stressful and emotionally demanding work. Despite all of the focus on strategic philanthropy, there is always a strong element of passion and values. **Mohammed and Thomas** discuss a leadership style that supported collaboration and co-ownership of the staff at the Fetzer Institute. Their framework for employee empowerment was grounded in weekly three-hour sessions of open discussion of the intersections of personal and organizational goals. While the money is important, a staff that is motivated and connected to the overall foundation goals and values is needed in order to use that money most effectively.

We'd love to hear how you've used what you learned through *The Foundation Review* – be in touch with us (behrenst@foundationreview.org or nanzerp@gvsu.edu)!



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EDITOR IN CHIEF