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# Constancy and Change in the Women's Funding Network: International Horizons and Core Values

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*Keywords:* Women's funds, women's empowerment, social change philanthropy

## Key Points

- This article is a case study of women's advocacy funders and their network organization, the Women's Funding Network (WFN). WFN developed in the context of alternative (targeted) private funding sources emerging in the 70s and 80s to support newly formed social action and identity groups, some of whom had been encouraged by federal programs before the Reagan era, but that in those years were also not receiving support from more traditional funders like the United Way and many foundations.
- The author analyzes the evolution of the network and its member funds from 1985 to 2012 as they struggled for survival in a complex and changing environment, and examines tensions that exist between the ideals of a social-movement organization and its drive for money, the nature of women's organizational leadership, and what it means to view civil-society activities through a gender lens.
- This case study illustrates dilemmas inherent in the development of identity-based social-movement organizations as they seek resources for sustainability and prominence in a crowded field.

## Introduction

From the mid-1960s through the 1970s, there was a dramatic proliferation of nonprofit organizations in the United States; a significant number of new organizations emerged from the civil rights movement and other cause-driven groups (Weisbrod, 1988). Many of these organizations enjoyed support from federal initiatives such as

the Johnson administration's War on Poverty, but after the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980 federal funding for nonprofits decreased (Salamon, 1984), with advocacy and social-action organizations as particular targets. Funding from private sources, such as foundations, federated funds, and individual donors, became more urgently needed.

A variety of fundraising organizations developed to support the emergent advocacy groups and served as an alternative to more traditional sources like the United Way (Brilliant, 1990; National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 1986). Among the new funding entities were black united funds, environmental funds, and a group of women's funding organizations that united to become, in 1985, the National Network of Women's Funds.

This article presents a case study of these women's funds and their network organization, later renamed the Women's Funding Network (WFN). It analyzes the evolution of the network and its member funds from 1985 to 2012, as they struggled for survival in a complex and changing environment. Among the critical issues examined are tensions that exist between the ideals of a social-movement organization and its drive for money, the nature of women's organizational leadership, and what it means to use a gender lens to view civil-society activities.

The women's funds were created by women for women's empowerment and self-realization, and

can be considered identity-based social movements. At the same time, they were dedicated to obtaining resources for women's causes, and may be defined as social-movement organizations, used purposefully to mobilize resources for social change (Zald & McCarthy, 1987). Thus, this case study illustrates dilemmas inherent in the development of identity-based social-movement organizations as they seek resources for sustainability and prominence in a crowded field.

Concepts of resource mobilization and identity in collective movements inform this analysis of the evolution of the WFN. This article builds on the work of the social psychologist William Gamson, who wrote, "It is a task of all social movements to bridge individual and cultural levels ... by enlarging the personal identities of a constituency to include the relevant collective identity as part of their new definition of self" (1992, p. 60). Gamson argued that collective identity could be perceived as both a goal in itself and as a resource to be mobilized for collective action. He suggested a way of integrating new social-movement theories based on collective identity (Melucci, 1989; Pizzorno, 1978) with formal social-movement organization theory, centered on resource mobilization (Zald & McCarthy, 1987). Integration of these theories is now more widely accepted (Davis, McAdam, Scot, & Zald, 2005).

### Methodology

This is an embedded case study as described by Yin (2003), concerned with the central organization of the WFN as well as a range of member organizations embedded in the network and within the greater philanthropic organizational field. The network is also compared with an analogous organization, United Way Worldwide. Indeed, my interest in the women's funds developed out of my research on the United Way, when I discovered the emergent group of alternative funds. I was fortunate in being able to follow women's funds over a long period of time, being accepted as a participant-researcher and a "camp follower," if not fully an insider. In sum, this is a qualitative study, for which I gathered data over more than 25 years from a variety of sources, including:

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- participant-observation at nine annual network conferences between 1986 and 2011;
- site visits to eight network organizations and several nonmember but significantly related organizations – the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), Women's Way (at one point in time a member of WFN), and the United Way;
- more than 150 interviews with people inside and outside the network;

*Most of the women in the earliest funds, from the 1970s and 1980s, were already connected with the women's movement or to social-change philanthropy.*

- content analysis of hundreds of primary documents, including conference programs, speeches, workshop materials, annual reports, minutes of meetings, and research by the network and its member organizations;
- two surveys by this researcher – one, in 1995, of all grantmaking women's funds, focused on collecting basic data about their operations (61 percent returned), and a second, in 1998, of a stratified sample of 110 grantees (44 percent returned) to explore their attitudes toward supporting funds – that provided baseline data on the size and scope of network activities and on relationships between funds and their grantees;
- reports from the network and partner groups available on the Internet; and
- secondary sources, books, and articles written by scholars and practitioners involved with the WFN.

A critical element of this methodological approach was content analysis of primary source material, noting the words and phrases used to define issues and attitudes during the period covered by the study. I categorized themes signified by words and phrases used in conversations, interviews, speeches, and documents, marking key themes that emerged from notes of open-ended or semi-structured interviews and as I observed numerous local and national meetings. Three main phases in the development of the WFN were identified through this process.

### Beginnings: 1965-1991

Although women at the first network conference were considered pioneers (Fischer, 2005), they drew inspiration from other progressive groups. Most of the women in the earliest funds, from the 1970s and 1980s, were already connected with the women's movement or to social-change philanthropy. By the late 1970s there were a few women's funds, such as the Women's Sports Foundation (founded by Billie Jean King) and Women's Way, and a small but growing number of progressive foundations, including the Haymarket People's Fund, the Wyndham Fund, and the Vanguard Public Foundation. By 1983, the Working Group on Funding Lesbian and Gay Issues, formed initially as part of the National Network of Grantmakers, had become an affinity group of the Council on Foundations. In 1984, the Ms. Foundation for Women awarded the Working Group its first "philanthropic support for lesbian issues" (Funders for LGBTQ Issues, 2012, p.1.); the group's research demonstrated the paucity of funding for lesbian needs. Around that time members of the Working Group were meeting with local groups in an effort to increase the visibility of lesbian and gay issues. Many of the participants at the first network conference were connected with organizations noted here: activist and philanthropist Tracy Gary, for example, had worked with Vanguard before joining the Women's Foundation in San Francisco and was involved with the Working Group (Gary, 2005).

In a parallel development, a group of women had joined in 1977 to protest inequities in foundation funding of women and girls and in the treatment of women professionals in foundations and corporate philanthropy. They formed Women and Foundations/Corporate Philanthropy (WAF/CP), later called Women & Philanthropy, and disseminated research showing that only 0.6 percent of private philanthropic funds were dedicated to women and girls (J. Lyman, *Exposition to a conference: How did it all start?*, as cited in Mollner & Wilson, 2005). Thus WAF/CP, although not grassroots oriented, had common interests with the network.

The first official conference of the women's funds took place in 1985 with support from the National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), which considered the funds to be part of the larger alternative-funding movement (NCRP, 1986). Seventy women were present, with representatives from more than 20 women's funds from across the United States and from Mama Cash, a progressive international women's fund based in Amsterdam. These women perceived themselves as a grassroots movement; still, they came for different reasons and with different available resources (Joh, 1997). And while they shared common passions, different viewpoints were evident (Joh, 1997; Mollner & Wilson, 2005). Of the American groups represented, only the Astraea Foundation could be characterized as involving people of color in leadership roles and extensive grassroots organizing. The leadership of most of the others – including the Sophia Fund, of Chicago; the Ms. Foundation for Women, of New York; and the Women's Foundation, of San Francisco – were progressive women with elitist backgrounds. This was also true of the Hunt Alternatives Fund, of Denver and New York, which was founded by two women but not organized as a women's fund. These early leaders were mostly white and mostly professionals; some were women of great wealth, struggling with ways to deal with their personal fortunes (Brilliant, 1992; Gary, 2005). They were also characterized by their convictions about social justice and anger at the way philanthropic giving discriminated against women and girls.

When the first conference ended, differences had been acknowledged over social class, financial status, and ideology. But members had decided to build a network that would connect women's funds and share information while allowing funds to maintain separate identities. The concept of a network built on notions of discursive politics suggested a difference from that of traditional masculine-oriented structures like federated fundraising systems – the United Way and the Jewish Federations of North America, for example (Brilliant & Young, 2004). Women's funds expected to work together based on a shared commitment to women's empowerment, multiculturalism,

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and social change; the network was to be driven by consensus and was not intended to be highly centralized (Joh, 1997). Notably, despite the presence of Mama Cash, the group signaled a national collective focus, choosing the name National Network of Women's Funds (NNWF). Confrontational tactics were downplayed, enabling the network to encompass a wider range of identities while adopting a more acceptable approach for fundraising.

The network's initial years were dominated by efforts to achieve sustainability while celebrating diversity. Funds began building a movement that was structurally ambiguous, geographically separated, and ideologically diverse. Gaps were evident between stated goals – e.g., “Changing the Face of Philanthropy,” the title of the Network's 1985-1992 Report (NNWF, n.d.) – and the resources to achieve them. Still, the number of funds increased, from an estimated 34 in some stage of development in 1985 to 63 in

*The second phase of the network's development began with accelerated growth in the number of funds and more ambitious goals. Keeping it all together became a challenge. There were increased tensions over priorities: What was the core identity of the network and its individual funds? What priority should be given to technical support for small and emerging funds over meeting the needs of the "stars" of the movement? Should emerging funds be encouraged to give small grants, or should they build up reserves or an endowment first? Was it possible to promote funding for controversial causes, such as lesbian or abortion rights, while maintaining ties to mainstream funders or more conservative donors?*

1992 (NNWF, n.d.). At the same time, individual women's funds faced problems in their communities with regard to self-identification (e.g., feminist or lesbian), projected image, and resource gathering (Mollner & Wilson, 2005). For many funds, the question of a collective nationwide

identity was less salient than their own struggles for survival. Yet founders of the network were committed to the larger movement idea, which necessitated both local fund development and stronger ties to the greater network. To support this effort, the network would have to enhance its central organization and capacity for technical support; the NNWF would have to become more structured.

As a first step in that direction, Carol Mollner, a participant in the first conference, was hired as a consultant to the network steering committee; she became executive director of the network after it separated from the fiscal shelter of WAF/CP and was incorporated, in 1991. By then the NNWF had moved its central office to Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn., where Mollner lived. With support from some original founders and foundations, it soon had a small staff (Brilliant, 2000).

#### **Identity Politics and Organizational Development: 1992-1999**

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In these years, the numbers of new funds increased while financial resources grew slowly; amounts were small relative to the greater world of philanthropy. By 1994, 28 women's funds reported assets of \$40.27 million and fundraising of more than \$24.59 million. By comparison,



2,100 local United Ways reported raising more than \$3.1 billion that year, and total voluntary giving in the United States was \$128 billion (Kaplan, 1995, pp. 121-2). Network figures did show a dramatic rise from the previous year: \$30.67 million in assets, \$16.41 million raised. Those figures were problematic, however; not all funds were included, and the total raised was distorted by a \$5 million Ford Foundation grant to the Ms. Foundation for Women (Brilliant, 2000). Larger funds enjoyed new successes: the Ms. Foundation, for example, led by Marie Wilson, was one of the leaders in program development; in 1993 Wilson launched the attention-getting Take Our Daughters to Work Day, which became a media event. The Atlanta Women's Foundation successfully engaged cohorts of professional women – businesswomen, attorneys, civic leaders – in fundraising activities.

Meanwhile, Mollner was dedicated to increasing solidarity among the various funds; at a 1996 regional meeting in New York, network leaders stressed collaborative arrangements. This idea was encouraged by grant makers like the W.K. Kellogg Foundation; larger women's funds were among their major recipients. The power of bigger funds was becoming more evident. The Ms. Foundation, for example, became the exclusive recipient of a 1995 Ford grant, following discussions in which WFN had originally participated, and after which apparently it had been expecting to play a key role in distributing the grant funds to other member funds. (personal communication, August 16, 1999).

To aid smaller funds, Mollner provided technical assistance through site visits and conference workshops, and developed a network clearinghouse for information from funds across the country. Many smaller funds had budgets of under \$100,000 and gave either very small grants or none at all through the 1990s; startups were fragile and some funds did not survive. Although these losses were not surprising, given the difficulty of creating a new funding movement, Mollner was concerned. Many women's funds were volunteer<sup>1</sup> driven

<sup>1</sup> "Volunteer" was actually not a term used prominently by the women's funds; it did, however, enjoy wide usage by the United Way.

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and value oriented; this was a valued American approach and meshed with women's beliefs (Acey, 2005). Many of the volunteers, however, were unsophisticated organizationally and not prepared for the task of fundraising in a larger and often unfriendly community. Funds also faced leadership difficulties; some chose feminist-egalitarian approaches or shared leadership,<sup>2</sup> thereby risking sustainability (Ferre & Martin, 1995). Many women, and many local funds, struggled with what feminist identity meant in the presentation of self and in the community; they said so at annual meetings of the network.

Even in stronger funds, women did not always agree on significant issues; questions arose in particular about supporting lesbian groups or abortion rights. Some funds were clear on these issues from the start: the Women's Foundation of Colorado was founded with the understanding that those controversial causes would not be funded and was criticized for it (Odendahl, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Notably, at the network's 1990 conference, Judy Remington, gave a speech "Running with the Breaks On". Remington was a local Minneapolis activist and knowledgeable about women's organizations in the "twin cities," Minneapolis-St. Paul; her book on that topic was published in 1991. Remington spoke about women's fear of using power effectively and her speech was controversial at the time.

*Local issues were reflected in national meetings of the network as it struggled with being all things to all funds. Up to now the network's conferences had left space for storytelling, and individual women shared personal struggles, such as being a rich philanthropist or an "out" lesbian. The stories helped to build an esprit de corps among women with different identities. But by the mid-1990s, tensions were developing about time allotted to the business of the funds – the nuts and bolts of fundraising – and energies spent on ideological and values discussion.*

On a site visit in 1999, I observed the Women's Fund of Miami-Dade County in Florida struggling with the idea of feminism; its members enjoyed sociability and the fund projected a rather conservative image.<sup>3</sup>

Other funds developed inside community foundations to enable gifts from many donors and to ensure administrative stability; community foundations, however, generally derive legitimacy from a broad appeal (Anheier & Leat, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> By 2011 the Women's Fund of Miami-Dade County had changed considerably, and its chief executive officer was a woman of color.

Network leaders claimed that being part of a community foundation did not limit a fund's capacity to support controversial causes. But my interviews with key respondents (personal communication, April 9, 2011) and observations during a site visit to Atlanta in 1999, suggested otherwise. In any case, a number of funds, including ones in Minnesota, Atlanta, and Milwaukee, did leave their community foundations. These separations could be adversarial; the one in Atlanta was not without controversy.

In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, ideology and issues of identity led to fissures despite the network's overall commitment to ideological purity. The bottom line was defined as ensuring that funds went to organizations led and staffed by women for women's causes; most funds were determined to support advocacy activities more than services. Benchmarks of success involved diversity of board members and staff, in addition to progressive grantmaking practices.<sup>4</sup> By mid-decade, the network, working with the Los Angeles Women's Foundation, initiated a Women of Color Institute to promote leadership of women of color in the network (WFN, 1996). Still, a gulf remained between espoused goals and reality. The Bucks County Foundation was one example; its location in an affluent, not densely populated area in Pennsylvania seemed to limit capacity for diversity. Such funds were told to look harder, particularly with regard to lesbian board members, but questions were raised about how to do this.

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<sup>4</sup> Around this time, the Ford Foundation was also requiring grantees to demonstrate board and staff diversity. In these years the WFN was pursuing support from Ford.



included both; funds were encouraged to learn from each other and support collaborative activities. Yet it appeared that only a few funds were directly involved in social advocacy, and not all gave many grants for this purpose.<sup>5</sup> At this point, a notable “face” of advocacy action in the funds was Katherine Acey, executive director of the Astraea National Lesbian Action Foundation, a network board member (1996-1997) and champion for social justice and lesbian and gay rights. (She was also professionally trained, with a Master of Social Work degree.)

During this period, a suggestion of internationalism emerged in the network. Chandra Budhu of the Canadian Women's Foundation chaired its board in 1992; in 1995, the network dropped the word “national” in its name, becoming the Women's Funding Network.<sup>6</sup> Also in that year, members of the network participated in the International NGO Forum on Women, in connection with the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing (Mollner & Wilson, 2005). Yet not much attention was paid to this at the 1996 WFN conference (WFN, 1996); for most of this period the network was focused on creating a stronger network and enhancing local fund capacity.

In the late 1990s, the WFN received a grant from the Aspen Institute for a grants-classification system to compile adequate data on the work of the funds. Yet neither the WFN nor most of its member funds had the computer capacity that such a system required, and agreement over definitions and terms was problematic. At a lively session in the WFN 1998 annual conference, Acey argued for the need to insure, amid the rising sentiment of third-wave feminism, that the full range of gay and queer identities would be reflected by delineating a lesbian, bisexual, gay, transvestite, and intersex (LGBTI) category.<sup>7</sup> After more than

<sup>5</sup> In the mid-1990s, Congress was considering greater limits on the advocacy activities of 501(c)(3) organizations.

<sup>6</sup> At the 1996 regional network meeting in New York City, Budhu made the point that “names are very important”: with the WFN this has always seemed to be so, except for ambiguity in the terms “foundations” and “funds.”

<sup>7</sup> A 2009 report (Foundation Center & WFN) on women's funds redefined this category as LGBTQ, with the “Q” signifying queer identities. The report also profiled six types of women's funds, using Astraea as the sole signified “identity-based women's fund.”

*Diversity in class and racial leadership still appeared to be a hurdle for many funds in the late 1990s; the network also suffered from “founder's syndrome:” founding women continued to influence local decision-making even when formal leadership changed (Schein, 1983). In the mid-1990s, network boards overall were at least 50 percent white and executive officers were reported to be predominantly white.*

a year of discussions, the grants-classification system was initiated. Local funds had differing capacities and commitment to reporting, but collection of network data as a whole improved. Still, when the WFN and the Foundation Center issued a comprehensive report a decade later analyzing activities of women's funds, the WFN's survey data were supplemented by Foundation Center data (Foundation Center & WFN, 2009).

As part of the pursuit of inclusion, surveys were sent to local funds seeking data on the ethnic/racial and class/income levels of their boards and staff. The WFN's stated values included diversity, and since it was receiving significant support from large foundations with similar values (e.g., Charles Stewart Mott, Ford, Kellogg), it needed to make a case that it was practicing those values. Data were gathered at network meetings about who was present; attempts were made to identify race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and physical disability. The issue of self-identification was discussed. In addition to capacity building and social justice, sessions were devoted to enhancing

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diversity. Diversity in class and racial leadership still appeared to be a hurdle for many funds in the late 1990s; the network also suffered from "founder's syndrome:" (Schein, 1983) founding women continued to influence local decision-making even when formal leadership changed. In the mid-1990s, network boards overall were at least 50 percent white and executive officers were reported to be predominantly white (WFN, 1996; Brilliant, 2000). By this time some members were expressing dissatisfaction with ideologically focused meetings or with what one woman suggested was "navel gazing"; another participant reflected the attitude of fellow conference attendees in stating that she knew enough about diversity and wanted more workshops on raising money more effectively (Brilliant, 2000).

While white women and professionals continued to hold a majority of leadership positions during this period, the network was certainly a safe place for lesbians. Women straight and gay spoke openly about their sexual identity at WFN conferences; women went dancing together in the evening at lesbian-friendly places. Conferences usually ended with powerful, unifying, often spiritual ceremonies embodying African, Native

American, or other traditions. As part of the effort to counter any form of exclusion in communication and praxis, the network also promoted the concept of "allies," which allowed "white allies" to join in the conversation with women of color or straight women to be seen as "allies" of lesbians. Physical groupings were actually made at one conference.

The scope and nature of women's funds varied significantly. Funds targeted specific issues, large geographic areas, or smaller localities; some foundations (e.g., the Sister Fund) were supported by a few major donors; others (e.g., the Sojourner Foundation in Detroit, the Boston Women's Fund) were more grassroots oriented (Ostrander, 2004).<sup>8</sup> By the end of the decade there were also notable signs of change in some funds. The Astraea National Lesbian Action Foundation changed its name in 1996 to the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, began making international grants, and started an endowment (Astraea, n.d.). Astraea and other smaller funds became increasingly concerned about the small size of their grants and sought new ways to fund raise; the Boston Women's Fund accelerated its giving, almost doubling average grant amounts to \$5,000. As one insider expressed it, ... "the women's funding movement and individual funds had reached the ability to scale up in the late 1990s" (Otis, 2005, p.104). Still, the gap between leading funds with large financial resources and the majority of smaller funds remained an issue. In January 1999, interviewees openly expressed concerns to me that the WFN was not adequately addressing the interests of the larger, more program-driven funds, such as the Chicago Foundation for Women, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, and the Atlanta Women's Foundation.

### **Third Phase: Money Moves the World (2000-2012)**

By the late 1990s, after a serious threat, limitations on advocacy activities of nonprofits failed to pass

<sup>8</sup> The IRS differentiates between foundations and public charities; foundations are defined under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code, and are required to give away annually amounts equivalent to 5 percent of their assets. Many of the women's funds, despite calling themselves foundations, are actually public charities as defined under IRS Code section 509 (a).

in Congress. At the same time, the United States enjoyed a new period of prosperity. Network members realized that the environment for philanthropy had changed significantly from that which women's funds had emerged. The selection of a new leader at the end of the decade, with the resignation of Carol Mollner, signaled that the WFN was ready to seize new opportunities. Encouraged by some network insiders, the board named Christine Grumm, executive director of the Chicago Foundation for Women, as the WFN's new CEO. Under Grumm, the Chicago Foundation had become one of the biggest women's funds, in assets and in grants; and it was apparent to me during a site visit to Chicago in 1998 that it was well connected to people of influence.

Signs of Grumm's different approach were soon evident: colorful artifacts (e.g., fuchsia-striped conference bags) appeared, the network office moved to San Francisco, and a change in the wording of the WFN's mission labeled women's funds "the investment of choice." Grumm's strong persona helped define this as a transformative period in the WFN's collective identity. In a conference talk, she used the term "silos" to describe separations inhibiting cross-fertilization and growth; her focus would be to bridge those separations. Funds were being encouraged to articulate their commitment to social-justice advocacy; at the 2001 conference, some funds suggested that openly giving to controversial causes helped market their work and even led to more contributions.

In this period the women's funds of San Francisco and Los Angeles merged to become the Women's Foundation of California. With support from some big foundations, women's funds were encouraged to raise endowments and give larger grants; between 2004 and 2006 many did give bigger grants (WFN & Foundation Center, 2009). And as the big foundations sought evidence of the impact of their grantmaking, in the middle of the decade, WFN launched "Making the Case," a template for demonstrating the impact of individual funds; member funds were urged to use it. Women's funds were by now also actively

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encouraging philanthropy by girls; formation of a National Network of Girls' Funds had already been discussed at the WFN's 2000 conference.

An expanded vision of women's philanthropy brought another change: more women's funds confronted the reality that they were in the business of raising money. The small funds had become more cognizant of the power of money, in addition to voices, in creating social change. In this third phase money became a more important part of the collective identity of the women's funding movement, and in this area the WFN began to follow the lead of more traditional fund-raising organizations.

#### *We Are All Global*

By 2000, globalism had become as critical an aspect of philanthropy as it was in other areas of life (Anheier, Glasius, & Kaldor, 2001; de Courcy Hero, 2009; Hawkesworth, 2006). As one scholar expressed it, "The increasing integration of the world's economies into a vast global market ... provided further fuel for the growth of a [global] civil society" (Batiwala, 2002). Although the greater women's movement included an international reach, the WFN had moved slowly in that direction. Mama Cash was represented at the first WFN conference, but it was only after a 10-year gap, with the guidance of a network consultant

*With an expanding philanthropic consciousness in the prosperous late 1990s, another development, built on the concept of donor choice, gained prominence: giving circles. Donors' interest in controlling their own money led to this new way of giving, based on an old idea: people getting together informally to pool and allocate their resources.*

and assistance from the Ford Foundation, that some network members fully participated in NGO meetings held in conjunction with the U.N.'s Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. In the next few years representatives from women's funds in other countries, including Semillas from Mexico and Tewa from Nepal, were present at Network Conferences, but these funds were not, like the Canadian funds, members of WFN. Indeed in these years, international identities were not easily absorbed into the WFN culture and it appeared that women from other countries felt somewhat isolated at WFN conferences.

Still sisterhood was global, and WFN would soon have to embrace this notion. In 1998 an International Network of Women's Funds (INWF) emerged, independent of the Women's Funding Network; it was formalized in 2000. Tewa and Semillas were affiliated with it, and also Astraea and The Global Fund for Women. When Christine Grumm assumed leadership of WFN in 2000, it seemed as though the need to move more internationally had become a first order of business. Steps in this direction were clearly signaled

when Semillas was honored at the WFN's 2001 conference.

By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the WFN was projecting a serious global image. The network's 2011 conference, whose theme was The Power of Global Networks, featured several panels of women from other countries. And in a dramatic last session, the concluding speaker was Michelle Bachelet, the former Chilean president, who the previous year had been named head of U.N. Women, the newly established United Nations entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women.<sup>9</sup> In her address, Bachelet suggested she would welcome support for her work from women's funds or wealthy women directly.

In 2011 the network included at least 155 member organizations from 25 countries<sup>10</sup> (WFN, 2012), supporting the WFN's new identity as a global organization. But while all these organizations were activist oriented, they were not all actually women's funds: Hunt Alternatives and the International Indigenous Women's Forum are two examples. Still, by 2011 more than 20 percent of the 25-member network board came from funds based outside of the U.S.<sup>11</sup> Several WFN-member funds in addition to Mama Cash had their own global reach, and two of these – the Global Fund for Women and the Fund for Global Human Rights – are global networks within the WFN.

#### *The Importance of Donors*

There have been times – certainly in the history of local United Way funds – when grantee demands or community-identified needs were seemingly more significant factors than the wishes of donors in the allocation of grant funding (Brilliant & Young, 2004). By the 1970s, local and state discretion were built into government funding efforts for social services, particularly through Title XX. But emerging cause- and identity-based groups were becoming more insistent; in the next decade they coalesced as an alternative funding

<sup>9</sup> In 2013, Bachelet was again elected president of Chile.

<sup>10</sup> Membership seems to fluctuate. The 2010 report, available at the 2011 conference, and online materials listed 166 members from 26 countries.

<sup>11</sup> There was also one man on the WFN board at that time.

movement and began to have an impact on philanthropy more broadly. The United Way changed in response to such demands; by the 1990s local United Ways had incorporated donor-designation plans in workplace fundraising and donor choice was increasingly used for fund allocations (Brilliant & Young, 2004). While such options presented problems for the community-oriented United Way system, it was to become a significant characteristic of new philanthropy.

With an expanding philanthropic consciousness in the prosperous late 1990s, another development, built on the concept of donor choice, gained prominence: giving circles.<sup>12</sup> Donors' interest in controlling their own money led to this new way of giving, based on an old idea: people getting together informally to pool and allocate their resources. Giving circles spread in a variety of ways; many would remain free-standing, others became dedicated funds within larger community foundations (Eikenberry & Bearman, 2009). Some women's funds incorporated giving circles as part of their donor base; women's giving circles in community foundations were also encouraged to become women's funds. In 2003, with the encouragement of the WFN, the Chambers Family Fund (2006) began helping to form women's funds within three community foundations in Montana, Wyoming, and Oklahoma. Both certainly expected to enable small women's groups and individual donors to more easily create women's funds. Community foundations were also connected with banks and trust officers. Apparently, WFN leaders hoped that even within a community foundation, women's funds would be able to address social-change issues.

As women's funds were finally assuming a primary identity as dedicated fundraisers, philanthropist and WFN stalwart Helen LaKelly Hunt and her sister Sewanee Hunt launched the Women Moving Millions campaign in 2006, with Grumm's assistance. Helen Hunt was sure there were women with millions of dollars, but she believed they did not know how to give money away at that level. Raising large donations from individual women would be a way for women's

<sup>12</sup> Tracy Gary was a promoter of women's giving circles, and organized other groups for women's philanthropy.

*More available money and million-dollar gifts meant bigger grants and enhanced sustainability, and helps explain why some of the more established network members, such as the Ms. Foundation for Women and the Atlanta Women's Foundation, suggested that women's funds were going mainstream. This was so even though most funds were focusing support on low-income women, women of color, and human rights, including reproductive and LGBTQ rights.*

organizations to move away from extreme dependence on grants from other foundations. This grand fundraising scheme, which was launched with great fanfare, fit the ambitious new image for the WFN expressed by the slogan, "women's funds would change the world;" it could also mean that women's funds might do less "regranting" of funds from other foundations, sometimes considered an issue. Grumm and Helen Hunt took the campaign on the road. By 2009, with considerable media attention, they helped launch the Women Mobilising Millions campaign in Australia. At the WFN's 2011 conference, Grumm and Helen Hunt danced on the stage as they announced that 46 women from around the world had given more than \$180 million to the campaign; that figure reached \$198 million by 2010 (WFN, 2011). There was great excitement about gathering the money but less clarity about



*As we have seen with Astraea, the Women's Foundation of Colorado, and the Ms. Foundation for Women, leaders were critical in shaping the development of individual funds.*

the actual allocation of the funds being raised. Public statements suggested the money would go to women's funds nationally and internationally, but it was not certain how it would be apportioned, and there was concern that not all of it would go to members of the Women's Funding Network (personal communications, April 9, 2011).

That was to be Grumm's last conference. In October 2011, the WFN had a new president and CEO: Michele Ozumba would serve until the fall of 2014.

### Discussion

*Is WFN still a movement?*

For women's funds, the first decade of the 21st century began with the idea of more and bigger. More available money and million-dollar gifts meant bigger grants and enhanced sustainability, and helps explain why some of the more established network members, such as the Ms. Foundation for Women and the Atlanta Women's Foundation, suggested that women's funds were going mainstream. This was so even though most funds were focusing support on low-income women, women of color, and human rights, including reproductive and LGBTQ rights (Foundation Center & WFN, 2009). Still, the gloss of money and the sense of being big and being global, offered opportunities for reframing the collective identity of women's funds while enhancing their external image in the world of philanthropy. In line with new feminist views (Hawkesworth, 2006), the WFN was enjoying an expanded sense of inclusiveness.

Yet, if by inference, the women's funds were mainstream, then they might no longer represent a counterthrust in society – they might no longer be considered a movement. There is evidence to support this interpretation. Other gay and lesbian funding groups were growing in number and money raised; acceptance of gay rights had reached the point where marriages of gay and lesbian couples were being noted in the Sunday edition of *The New York Times*. Moreover, the focus on women and women's issues was being widely copied even in a variety of mainstream institutions. In 1996 the first local United Way women's leadership council was formed, in Greensboro, N.C.; by 2000, United Way Worldwide (UWW) had created a national United Way Women's Leadership Council (United Way Worldwide, March 7, 2011). In addition to the general proliferation of women's circles, in 2007 the American Red Cross created its Red Cross Tiffany Circle of women donors, which in its first year raised \$3 million. By then women in philanthropy groups were also being created by administrators and development officers in universities and colleges across the country. Carol Mollner's observation at the 1996 WFN regional meeting in New York was proving prescient: "The larger field of philanthropy [is] seeing women's funds as big issues."

*Who Influences Whom?*

Isomorphism is evident in philanthropy as in other organizational fields. For women's funds, however, isomorphism affected form more than substance – it shaped ideas about how to get money, but not the nature of grants given. This was evident in the WFN's global spread, use of public language, and new affinity with business interests. For example, at the 2011 network conference, there were panels on social entrepreneurship and micro businesses, suggesting member funds could benefit from connections to business-related investments and charitable trusts. Still, as already noted, influence was multidirectional, and by 2012, both the WFN and the UWW had adopted language of international leadership groups like the United Nations and the World Bank, labeling their conferences "summits." Going global was important to the WFN ideologically; but, as with the United Way, globalization



would also increase the scale of the organization's resources. Grumm (2011) highlighted the importance of "bigger" in her final speech at the 2011 conference.

#### *Women's Leadership?*

As we have seen with Astraea, the Women's Foundation of Colorado, and the Ms. Foundation for Women, leaders were critical in shaping the development of individual funds. The influence of some founders, like Tracy Gary, continued for many years with local funds and beyond. From the beginning, allies in key foundations also offered important support for development of particular funds and the network as a whole. Still, given the diversity of women and the range of funds in the network, the WFN's leadership was hardly without controversy and changed direction over time. Mollner's style of "mothering" weaker funds and her attention to process and identity issues were appropriate for the WFN's early development. But to move the network to another level, Mollner was replaced by the more hard-driving, businesslike and outcome-oriented Grumm.

Under Grumm's leadership, more executive directors of member funds served on the WFN board, and she increased the visibility of major donors, including Barbara Dobkin, Abigail Disney, and Helen Hunt. In contrast to an earlier feminist ideology of "flat" groups and despite initial uncertainties about the role of leadership, as many feminist scholars recognize (Ferre & Martin, 1995), identified leaders were crucial to the WFN – as they are in general to all organizations.

#### **Conclusions**

Women's funds began with efforts aimed at empowering women participants while developing new resources for social change. This article shows that this dual thrust continues. The evidence also demonstrates that the funds, and the network, continually faced dilemmas in mobilizing resources through social-movement organizations while maintaining the diverse, value-driven identities of various subgroups. Along the way, the balance between a collective identity of women as women and their other specific identities – black, wealthy, lesbian – shifted

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from one side of the line to the other even as women's funds expanded their place in a competitive philanthropic field. As member funds grew bigger and the WFN extended its global reach, WFN leaders were able to forge a more inclusive collective identity for all members of the network. The data suggest that in its third phase, the WFN was successful in using the collective identity of its members to enhance the mobilization of resources. Ultimately, it was able to cope with the inherent dilemma of maintaining a movement while raising increased amounts of money.

A second conclusion follows. Being a movement, with a collective identity and passion for social change, has been vital to the sustainability of women's funds and the WFN and continues to be so. This is true even though some women's funds perceive themselves to be mainstream. Both small funds and larger ones remain focused on advocacy efforts of their own and through the WFN, and continue to support difficult and unpopular causes; the funds retain a social-change perspec-

tive. And in terms of new movement theory, despite the local orientation of most funds the WFN's linkage to global activism and the worldwide women's movement enables the network to maintain its stance as champion for "outsiders" and marginalized women.

The data lead to the conclusion that based on the standards of continuous growth, sustainability, and its impact on philanthropy, the Women's Funding Network achieved considerable success from 1985 to 2012. It is clear that women's funds have made a difference. They influenced change in the greater philanthropic field; they sensitized other donors to women's needs and influenced the amount of philanthropic dollars going to women's causes. From 1990 to 2006, the rate of foundation funding for women and girls increased more rapidly than overall foundation giving (Foundation Center & WFN, 2009). With a push-pull effort, the network had an isomorphic impact on other philanthropic organizations. It brought about changes in philanthropic practices, but also adapted its own identity to new opportunities. The WFN has also given voice, as well as support, to women of varying income levels, classes, and identities – it has empowered these women through collective action.

Furthermore, women's funds have given considerable support to "outsider" causes, social-change efforts, and social-justice programs. The network has continued its campaign to ensure leadership roles for women of color and new groups of young people, and has developed programs to promote this leadership. In 2011, the WFN board also made a real and symbolic statement when the face of the network became the face of a woman of color.

Another conclusion emerges that was not anticipated in my original framing of the research: the importance of support provided by private foundations, both those perceived as outside the network and some members of the WFN, such as the Global Fund for Women. Foundations, mostly large and prominent but also some smaller ones, played an essential role in the evolution of individual women's funds and even more so in

the creation of the WFN as a sustainable, national network. The crucial role of these "external" progressive foundations and individuals within them is a significant discovery. These foundations deserve more recognition than they have been awarded publicly and in nonprofit literature.<sup>13</sup> Their contribution to the work of women's funds and the WFN was essential to their development and has been an inadequately recognized aspect of the women's funding movement.

Finally, although by many measures women's funds appear to have achieved considerable success, they have not yet attained the golden ring. At her last conference, Grumm (2011) said she had not achieved her financial goal for the network. Moreover, funding for women and girls consistently remains below 7.5 percent of all foundation giving, and the total resources of women's funds are still relatively small. In short, philanthropic parity for women and girls has yet to be achieved.

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<sup>13</sup> Some, but not all of these are named in this article and in the Appendix.

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#### APPENDIX The Evolution of the Women's Funding Network: A Timeline

##### **First Phase: Beginnings of Women's Funds in the U.S. (1965-1991)<sup>1</sup>**

- 1965-1970: With the civil rights movement in full swing, social-justice issues gain attention.
- 1966: The National Organization for Women is founded in New York City.
- 1968: The Brotherhood Crusade, a black united fund, is created in Los Angeles.
- June 1969: The Stonewall Inn raid by the New York Police Department draws attention to gay and lesbian issues.
- 1970-1985: Social-justice concerns and women's issues lead to the development of women's funds across the country.
- 1972: The Ms. Foundation for Women is created in New York; the Vanguard Public Foundation is established in San Francisco.
- 1973-1975: The Filer Commission discusses the nonprofit sector and publishes a report; a donee group is formed and writes a separate report.
- 1974: The Ford Foundation publishes its first report on its funding of women and girls; the Haymarket Foundation is established in Boston.
- 1975: In a Filer Commission research paper, M. J. Tully asks, *Who's Funding the Women's Movement?*
- 1975-1985: The United Nations Decade for Women.
- 1976: The National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) is created, and criticizes foundations and the United Way workplace monopoly.
- 1977: The Astraea Foundation is created; the Vanguard Public Foundation publishes *Robin Hood Was Right*, a manifesto for young people of wealth to fund social-justice causes; Women and Foundations/Corporate Philanthropy (WAF/CP) is established.
- 1981: The Women's Foundation is founded in San Francisco; the Global Fund for Women is established.
- 1983: The Working Group on Gay and Lesbian Issues becomes an affiliate group of the Council on Foundations.
- 1984: The NCRP and the National Black United Fund invite women's funds to their conferences.
- 1985: Twenty women's funds meet in a first national conference; the National Network of Women's Funds (NNWF) is initiated; an estimated 34 women's funds exist in various stages.
- 1986: Carol Mollner becomes a consultant; NNWF, located in St. Paul, Minn., becomes a special project of WAF/CP.
- 1990: The Astraea Foundation is renamed the Astraea National Lesbian Action Foundation.
- 1990-1991: The NNWF separates its finances from WAF/CP; incorporates, with Carol Mollner as executive director; and obtains 501(c)(3) status.
- 1991: The NNWF issues *Multiculturalism: Accomplishments and Plans*, a report to membership; the theme of its annual conference is violence against women.

<sup>1</sup> This timetable does not include earlier, separate incidents of women's organizational and fundraising efforts, which, while significant, are not demonstrably connected directly to this more recent history.

**Second Phase: Identity Politics and Organizational Development (1992-1999)**

- 1992: *Changing the Face of Philanthropy, 1985-1992*, discusses the NNWF's finances and activities and describes individual member funds; Chandra Budhu of the Canadian Women's Fund becomes chair of the network.
- 1993: Ms. Foundation for Women launches Take Our Daughters to Work Day, gaining wide media and public attention.
- 1994: A network report, based on responses from 28 operating funds, indicates total collective assets of \$40.27 million and more than \$9 million in grants given.
- April 1995: The 11th annual conference, *Social Change and the Women's Movement*, is held in San Francisco; the NNWF is renamed the Women's Funding Network; two conference sessions address the upcoming U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, including the final plenary, *Beijing and Beyond – Our Connection to Women Activists Locally and Nationally*.
- 1995: WFN members attend the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women and the International NGO Forum; threats to nonprofit advocacy efforts re-emerge in Congress with the Istook Amendment.
- 1996: Astraea changes its name to the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, starts an endowment, and makes international grants.
- 1996: The WFN annual conference is held in Atlanta; the program does not list sessions on Beijing, but includes meetings for "white allies" and "heterosexual allies."
- 1996-1998: The WFN's grants-classification system is implemented, funded by a grant from the Aspen Institute.
- 1997: The Women's Philanthropy Cluster, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to strengthen organizational capacity and collaboration, includes the WFN, Women & Philanthropy, the Global Fund for Women, Resourceful Women, and the Michigan Women's Foundation.
- 1999: Carol Mollner resigns as chief executive officer of WFN.

**Third Phase: Money Moves the World (2000-2012)**

- 2000: Christine Grumm becomes CEO of the WFN, which moves its offices to San Francisco; the network's new mission statement recognizes that women's funds are "the investment of choice"; new WFN goals are to raise collective assets to \$250 million by 2004 and to \$450 million by 2008.
- 2001: The WFN's annual conference honors the Semillas women's fund of Mexico.
- 2002: The Women of Color/International Development Incubator program is established to develop leadership of women of color and global youth; a WFN survey, *The Donor Research and Marketing Project*, finds the majority of 1,200 diverse women respondents could not distinguish between women's funds and other women's organizations, such as the YWCA.
- 2003: Funding from the Kellogg Foundation enables the WFN to give venture fund grants to member funds for social-change projects; 93 member funds are now counted.
- 2004: The WFN's collective assets total \$266 million, surpassing its goal.
- 2006: After extensive testing, *Making the Case: A Learning and Measurement Tool for Social Change* becomes available for use by WFN member funds; Sewanee and Helen LaKelly Hunt donate toward the launch of the Women Moving Millions campaign to seek million-dollar gifts from women, with WFN involvement.
- 2007: The American Red Cross launches its Tiffany Circle, becoming, like the United Way, another organization to feature groups of women donors.
- 2008-2009: Recession leads to an estimated decline of more than three percent in giving in the U.S.
- 2009: Women Moving Millions inspires a similar campaign in Australia, with WFN help; the Black Women Action Group, a systemic-change program, is started by the WFN in partnership with the Global Fund for Women (now the largest of women's funds); *Accelerating Change for Women and Girls: The Role of Women's Funds*, a report from the WFN and the Foundation Center, states that more than 145 member funds of the WFN have collective total assets of \$465 million and give an estimated \$60 million a year in grants.
- 2010: The WFN annual report lists 166 member funds in 26 countries, with \$565 million in assets, making grants totaling more than \$70 million.
- 2011: The theme of the WFN's annual conference is *The Power of Global Networks*; 40 international funders give more than \$180 million to Women Moving Millions; Grumm resigns and Michele Ozumba, an African American, becomes the WFN's new CEO; the WFN annual report cites 155 member organizations.
- 2012: The first "girls grantmaking" conference is co-hosted by the WFN, the Chester County Fund for Women and Girls, and Bryn Mawr College.