

The Foundation Review

Volume 9
Issue 3 *Global Community Philanthropy*

9-2017

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Recommended Citation

Khodorova, J., & Avrorina, L. (2017). Community Philanthropy in Russian Remote Areas. *The Foundation Review*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1376>

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Community Philanthropy in Russian Remote Areas

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Keywords: Philanthropy, community development, rural funds, community foundations, remote areas, Russia

Introduction

The nonprofit sector in Russia has been rapidly developing since the late 1990s. The first community foundations emerged in large industrial centers: the Togliatti Foundation in 1998 and the Foundation for Development of Tyumen in 1999. Along with a community foundation established in 1999 in Chaikovsky, a small town in Permsky Krai, they emerged as flagships and experimental spaces for local philanthropy development and were able to demonstrate that the community foundation model can respond effectively to local issues and develop relevant social initiatives. The development of private and corporate charitable foundations followed in the early 2000s, along with the emergence of state programs in support of certain NGO projects; these activities took place in regions where resources for such development were available.

Where financial and human resources are in place, there is a clear path to developing local philanthropy: Carry out a needs assessment, attract resources through donations from individuals and socially responsible businesses, and begin implementing a program. Essential to this process are people who can articulate topical issues and explain to the community why it is important to address those issues and how doing so will improve their quality of life. But what if such resources are scarce — or don't exist at all? What if the community is located in a remote territory, perhaps thousands of miles away from a major city or regional center? There, it might be considered strange to raise the topic of philanthropic development.

Many small towns and settlements in Russia were excluded from the changes brought about by perestroika. This was especially true for

Key Points

- Russia's "back country" — remote, nonindustrial areas that are home to almost 40 percent of the population — was largely excluded from the changes brought about by perestroika. People who live in these areas, where NGOs are almost never present, are often unaware of the resources available to address local issues. These regions require new development models that focus on fostering community engagement, and the community foundation model has proven to be the most useful and adaptable.
- This article is based on the results of research conducted by CAF Russia in 2016 on the development of community foundations in remote, rural communities and small towns in Russia. The goals of the research were to assess the current state of these foundations, analyze their activities, identify their characteristic features, and explore their role in community development as a unique phenomenon of local philanthropic activity in Russia. A number of case studies serve as examples.
- This research, carried out as a part of CAF Russia's Program for Development of Community Foundations and funded by the Global Fund for Community Foundations, found that the characteristic feature of Russian's small community foundations is that they often become an element of local self-governance, promoting cooperation between residents and local officials by bringing them together to discuss a community's needs and develop responses.

Many small towns and settlements in Russia were excluded from the changes brought about by perestroika. This was especially true for Russia's "back country" — largely nonindustrial rural areas that are home to almost 40 percent of the population.

Russia's "back country" — largely nonindustrial rural areas that are home to almost 40 percent of the population. NGO Resource Centres usually operate in major cities and focus their support on the development of NGOs, while paying little — if any — attention to community development. People who live in remote areas where NGOs are almost never present are often unaware of the resources available to address local issues or the opportunities to attract such resources. These areas require new development models that focus on fostering community engagement, and the community foundation model has proven to be the most useful and easy to adapt.

CAF Russia, a partner of the CAF Global Alliance, works to pioneer effective and sustainable ways of giving by supporting donors with a range of services, and works closely with NGOs to build capacity and fundraising capabilities. It started working in the field of local philanthropy development in remote territories as part of the Local Self-Government and Civic Engagement in Rural Russia project, supported by the World Bank. One of the key objectives of the project was to develop civic activism and engagement to help resolve local problems. At the outset, the project's objective seemed quite ambitious and CAF was not completely confident that it would be able to develop local philanthropy in such communities. Ultimately the project was successful in only one of the three regions, Permsky Krai with an initial implementation

from 2003-2005, but it also laid the foundation for development of rural community foundations in other regions of Russia.

More than half of the active community foundations in Russia are "rural funds," located in rural areas and remote, nonindustrial territories where there is little available funding and no large business presence. Significant advances over the past 10 years through the internet and other technologies have helped underdeveloped territories gain access to the common information space. Access to best practices and case studies accumulated by community foundations have stimulated development of the model and inspired local activists. Over the past few years, rural funds have seen the greatest development, and can be considered the main drivers of success for local philanthropy development in Russia.

The geographic spread of community foundations in small settlements is quite broad; they operate in 29 constituent entities of the Russian Federation that vary in socio-economic condition, financial opportunities, culture, and civil-society development. At present, there are 70 community foundations in Russia. (See Figure 1.) Nineteen of them are in regional industrial centers; another 51 (73 percent of the total) are in small towns (35) and rural areas (16). (See Figure 2.) The majority of small-town community foundations are located in Siberian Federal District, where 18 of the district's 24 community foundations are in small towns.

Rural community foundations work in settlements with populations ranging from 3,500 to 14,000. The community foundation most remote from Moscow is located in the Plastun Settlement, with a population of 4,500, in Permsky Krai. Founded in 2014 in the northwestern Karelia Republic, the Pryazha Settlement, which has a population of 3,500, is the smallest settlement with a community foundation.

The Role of Community Foundations in Remote Regions

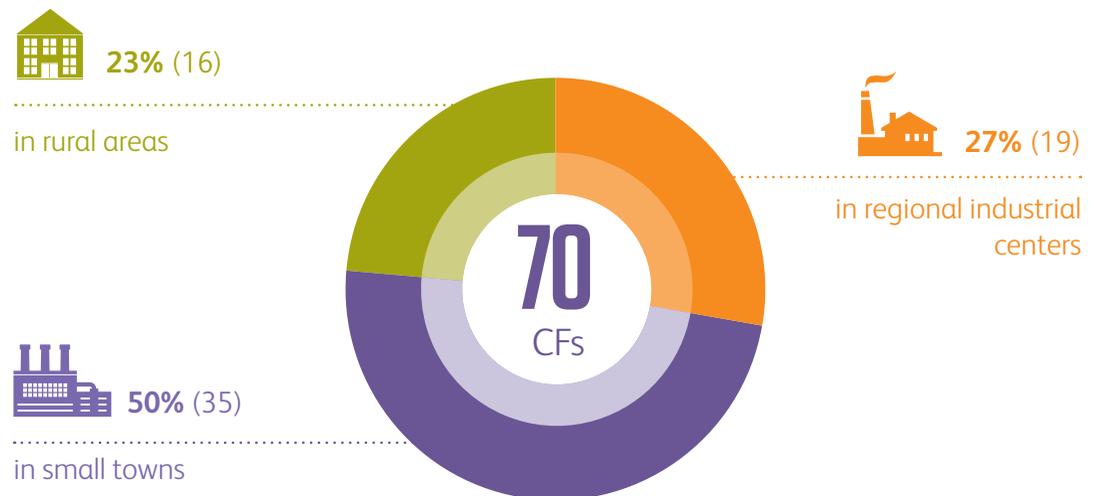
Community foundations in rural areas and small industrial towns play a central role in the

FIGURE 1 Number of Community Foundations in Russia



Reflective Practice

FIGURE 2 Geography of Small Community Foundations



Local improvement is a priority for more than 80 percent of small community foundations in Russia. The foundations locate and obtain resources for restoration and renovation of municipal buildings such as libraries, museums, clubs, and sports arenas; clean parks and public gardens; and improvements to other public spaces.

development of local self-governance, attract and mobilize resources for the creation of community centers and other public spaces, and foster civic activism, new cultural traditions, and the revival of local artisanship. (See Figure 3.)

Local Self-Governance

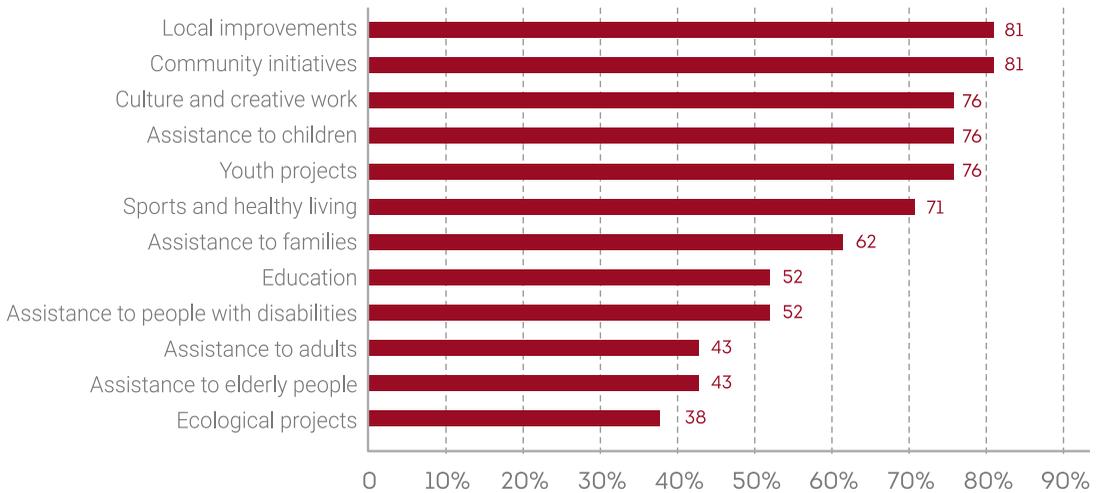
Community foundations in remote territories far from Russia's regional centers work in close connection with local authorities. The emergence of a community foundation is often in response to municipal administrators who are seeking local partners to implement NGO-supported programs; these officials often lack the knowledge and experience to work effectively on social projects with other groups. Unlike the NGO model, community foundations are in a position to influence a range of community and regional development issues. As a rule, leaders of a community foundation are well-known and have earned a reputation that inspires trust among local people.

Community foundations also have the potential to attract funding from both local sources and regional and federal grantmakers; they are members of various regional and federal networks, which enables them to share information and

methods, and to access what new resources are available to local communities despite the current economic crisis. The wide range of foundation activities, their knowledge of fundraising methods, the ability to tap the undiscovered potential of local community members, and the opportunities these foundations have to attract additional external financial resources make the cooperation between foundations and local administrators mutually beneficial. In rural areas, the community foundation itself often becomes a participant in the functions of local self-governance. Community members unite to identify local issues and create a management infrastructure to address these issues and thereby improve the quality of life in the community; the community foundation provides the institutional structure to support these activities.

An example of this can be found in the locality of Maksimovka, located on the outskirts of Ufa, the capital city of the Bashkortostan Republic. Maksimovka is considered remote and abandoned, and has very poor infrastructure. The local community foundation conducted a street-by-street needs assessment that analyzed the availability and condition of buildings, roads, and pavement; recreational facilities and playgrounds; public lighting; the water supply; and other assets. The assessment found that the area lacked a kindergarten, a pharmacy, accessible public transport, and trash collection; the children's outpatient clinic was in terrible condition and local roads were in poor shape.

There are 10,000 residents in the Maksimovka area, the majority of whom are pensioners, and many people there were ready to work together on local improvements. Four local pensioners organized an initiative group, and local and regional authorities were notified that the group had been established to oversee the renovation of dilapidated infrastructure. Street committees were formed to energize local residents, and the committee chairs received training. Competitions were sponsored to encourage involvement in improvement efforts; local volunteers conducted regular campaigns to clean up the Maksimovskoye Lake waterfront and other areas.

FIGURE 3 Areas of Activity for Small Community Foundations (Percentage Participating)

The effort succeeded in uniting local residents to work on common problems. There are mechanisms to identify infrastructure needs, provide information about them to street committee chairs, and explore possible solutions. Pensioners are involved in these activities, which gives them a renewed sense of purpose and agency. The appearance of the residential area improved significantly: the waterline is clean, a recreation area was organized, a trash-collection system was implemented, and roads were repaired. Most notably, there is now an active community life that features celebrations, contests, performances, and other events. Relationships among neighbors improved with these additional opportunities to spend time together. The quality of life in Maksimovka improved significantly.

Public Spaces and Community Centers

Local improvement is a priority for more than 80 percent of small community foundations in Russia (Avrorina & Khodorova, 2017). The foundations locate and obtain resources for restoration and renovation of municipal buildings such as libraries, museums, clubs, and sports arenas; clean parks and public gardens; and improvements to other public spaces. The projects require the involvement of local

stakeholders, administrators, and business representatives; the community foundation is in a position to act as coordinator, initiator, and facilitator. But the role of community foundations is not limited to the renovation of infrastructure and other physical improvements. They also sponsor social projects that lead to further development of public spaces, and they organize important community events. The role of the foundation is to stimulate community life through local activities and to create an environment for the development of new initiatives.

Two case studies illustrate these functions:

- In the Plastun Settlement, a project was developed to renovate a sports facility and complete construction of a community center whose building was the central piece of architecture in the settlement, but had remained unfinished for several decades. The local community foundation attracted a significant partner to secure part of the funding, and raised the remaining funds.
- In the Pryazha Settlement of the Karelia Republic, a summer garden for the enjoyment of residents and to host local events was the first open space in the settlement

Community foundations are a substantial influence on the development of volunteering in their regions — because volunteers are their key resource, foundations actively seek to recruit and motivate them.

created by residents, who planted flowers and trees and supplied toys and books for children. The project fostered mechanisms for cooperative efforts within the community, involved residents in identifying shared values, and facilitated an act of self-governance within a small community. The foundation also organized an effort to build a skating rink that has become a center for community life, obtaining funding from settlement funds, local residents and entrepreneurs, and a subsidy from the republic.

Civic Responsibility

Community foundations are a substantial influence on the development of volunteering in their regions — because volunteers are their key resource, foundations actively seek to recruit and motivate them. Volunteer activities and public events are the most widespread formats for community foundation work, and almost 80 percent of small community foundations use them.

In the Chastinsky District of Permsky Krai, for example, an ecological program called Rural Eco-Controllers relied on the involvement of many volunteer youth. The controllers inspected four settlements in the district that were suffering acute environmental problems, including illegal timber extraction and unsanctioned waste disposal and wastewater discharge. As these inspections were being conducted, a group of district activists emerged that included young people and veterans. About 50 people took part in another ecological initiative, Clean Chastye, which cleaned up recreational areas on the banks

of Kama River. Unsanctioned waste disposal was eliminated, garbage was collected for recycling, and the district's oldest well was renovated.

Grant competitions are another approach to developing civic activism and dissemination of ideas generated through the project to the broader community. Despite small budgets, almost all small community foundations (90 percent) use grant competitions to support charitable projects and resident initiatives, usually one or two each year.

The “My Village” competition in Permsky Krai, for example, seeks to boost community involvement and overcome the lack of integration among self-governance bodies and residents in the territories of Perm CF Alliance (a formal alliance of CFs and other NGOs of the region that broadens the horizontal networking of organizations working in the field of support for socially oriented NGOs, development of civic activism and philanthropy). It has helped develop leadership and activism among rural residents and foster social change in rural areas. The competition, held among settlements, features such categories as best settlement in the district; most socially active village; friendliest village; most attractive village for tourists; and most sporting village; as well as a category for children: “the village of my dreams.” One of the key features of the competition is the display of community spirit — residents exhibiting concern for their village and a willingness to remain active citizens, working together (applicants are required to demonstrate community support by convening fellow residents or collecting their signatures). In short, the best village is defined more by the commitment of its residents than by the condition of its buildings and roads.

Reviving and Establishing Traditions: Creative Community Work

Faced with limited available resources, small community foundations use creative approaches to encourage social change. Involving the arts to raise funds, inspire local participation, and encourage tourism — by organizing performances, proposing new events, and restoring abandoned traditions — is a noteworthy

FIGURE 4 Case Study – Pryazha Karelians' crafts – 'Art village' project – North of Russia

example. Organizing new civic events is an important element in enriching community culture and has a long-lasting effect on regional development by forming an image and brand for external audiences and attracting the attention of business and local authorities.

A case study of this approach can be found in the Maima Settlement in the Altai Republic, a southern Siberian community of 11,000 people located almost 2,500 miles from Moscow. The Perspektiva Community Foundation sponsored a musical — *Two Stars* — that featured local teachers, doctors, administrators, and business owners. These community leaders volunteered their time, rehearsing at night for several weeks and challenging themselves in a new role — as performers in a fundraiser for the local community. Residents celebrated the show as the local event of the year. Most importantly, these fundraising performances brought together a range of social groups in the community and gave many people a chance to discover new talents — some of the local artists have been recognized at international competitions — while raising public awareness of charitable giving as a form of civic

engagement. Proceeds from ticket sales funded grants for youth social projects, which led to the creation of a youth bank to fund new ideas and projects — a new phenomenon in the community which places youth in decision making roles to decide about funding for new projects.

In Maima, local donors now regularly support social projects. By using creative approaches to mobilize resources and inspire community participation, the foundation demonstrated how the community's quality of life can be improved and how undiscovered community resources can be developed and put to socially beneficial use. Maima's experience soon spread to other districts of the republic and beyond. Similar productions are being presented at the State Theatre in Gorno-Altaysk, the capital of the Altai Republic, where there is great public interest in taking part in the performances — and thus in supporting charitable projects.

Another example of using creative community work to foster local development can be seen in the Pryazhinsky District of the Karelia Republic. The Art Village Project, begun in

June 2014, is aimed at the revival of traditional Karelian crafts as a way to attract tourists. More than 100 residents learned to make traditional gifts and souvenirs at workshops and courses in weaving; ceramics; knitting and needlework; spinning; natural dyeing; and cooking held in all the district's settlements. An artisan shop was opened in the district's Ethnic and Cultural Center, along with an online shopping site, to sell goods made by local residents. (See Figure 4.) The project has produced multiple benefits — creating a new income source for villagers, providing space for the demonstration of traditional crafts, and fostering an opportunity for the preservation and development of the local historic and cultural heritage.

Small Community Foundations: Organizational Development

The survey research by CAF Russia (Avrorina & Khodorova, 2017) also captured data on the organizational development of small community foundations: their sources of funding and other resources, how they are staffed and managed, their approach to designing and structuring initiatives, and the specific and sometimes unique needs of foundations serving Russia's remote rural areas:

- *Local resources:* Regional authorities are much less likely to support community foundations than are municipal authorities, community organizations, and local residents. In addition to their reliance on volunteer support from community members, CAF Russia found, 76 percent of community foundations get funding from businesses; 57 percent receive grants from NGOs and individual donations; 38 percent receive funding from regional or federal grantmaking programmes, and 19 percent receive government subsidies and grants (Avrorina & Khodorova, 2017).
- *Management structure:* Most community foundations in Russia's small towns and rural areas were established by small groups of people or individual activists. These foundations usually have one or two paid staff

members (e.g., director, accountant), who often work part time; most of the work is done by volunteers. The board of trustees of a small community foundation, where work is done in close cooperation with local authorities and businesses, plays a much more important role compared with those of foundations that operate in bigger cities. Almost 80 percent of small foundations have boards that include local officials, business representatives, and community members. An active board of trustees can act on behalf of the foundation, raise funds, and enhance the foundation's reputation in the community, but only half of the community foundations surveyed reported having boards that work actively.

- *Social activity mapping:* A new strategy launched by CAF Russia's Program for Development of Community Foundations, social activity mapping uses data obtained through a survey of local residents asked to evaluate the most urgent problems facing their community (e.g., public health, education, employment) and to describe how they might participate in solving them. It provides practical analysis of the social capital of a particular community, and identifies potential leaders and points of growth. The map provides the community with evidence that lays the foundation for transformation and a new resource that helps foster initiatives and build relations, as well as systems to manage them. The mapping method itself revealed that the act of seeking input from local residents motivates them to support problem-solving activities — creating a new community resource.
- *Foundation needs:* Improved management and strategic planning skills, as well as financial and legal literacy, are in demand among small community foundations, along with access to seminars and conferences that address organization and management.

Also important is training in project management skills, social-impact evaluation, new

fundraising techniques, and new skills to work with donors and communities.

Conclusion

By utilizing new methods for attracting resources, mobilizing community assets, and generating social change, community foundations in rural areas and small towns in Russia are encouraging volunteerism and community activism among residents with a range of interests and priorities. The development of the foundations themselves depends greatly on the availability of national and regional organizations that can be sources of consulting and infrastructure support.

By participating in grantmaking programs, community foundations not only attract new external resources, they also motivate residents of remote territories to take advantage of new opportunities for civic participation and creative cultural expression and commerce. Projects that support civic initiatives mobilize community resources that had gone unrecognized or unused, a function that is especially important for regions located far from central areas.

The characteristic feature of small community foundations is that they actually become an element of local self-governance, promoting cooperation between residents and local officials by bringing them together to discuss local needs and problems. In this way, community foundations themselves become an important resource for local development.

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