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Colton Strawser

Community Leadership, Engagement, and Research (CLEAR) Institute

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Community Foundations as Community Leaders: The Role of Community Leadership in Creating Change

Colton Strawser, Ph.D., Community Leadership, Engagement, and Research (CLEAR) Institute

Keywords: *Community foundations, community leadership, civic leadership, collective leadership, community engagement*

Introduction

Community foundations claim to play an integral role in fostering philanthropy at a community level across the United States. Arguably the most identifiable form of community philanthropy (Sacks, 2014), community foundations are often the institutions sought by communities when it comes to mobilizing philanthropic resources to meet community needs (Mazany & Perry, 2014). Various examples of community leadership by community foundations have appeared in academic (Easterling, 2011; Ranghelli, Mott, & Banwell, 2006) and practitioner (Bernholz, Fulton, & Kasper, 2005) literature, yet the underlying definitions of community leadership, the journey to becoming a community leader, and the metrics by which community foundations define successful community leadership have not been investigated adequately.

Community leadership is often the role most neglected in research on community foundations, yet it has the potential to be their most significant role. Community foundations can leverage their local knowledge, convening capabilities, and networks to create communitywide change. While remaining neutral on community issues was an option in the past, community foundations are now operating in a competitive market; therefore, acting as a community leader not only can provide an advantage in fundraising, but can also catalyze groups and organizations to enact change by leaning into that role.

While CFLeads (2008, 2013) and other organizations have shared frameworks for community

Key Points

- Community foundations claim to play an integral role in fostering philanthropy at a local or regional level across the United States, seeking to improve the quality of life for community residents. Their business model has three main components: grantmaking, fundraising, and community leadership.
- As the newest addition to the community foundation operating model, community leadership remains the least examined component in terms of how these foundations define and pursue it. This article seeks to contribute to the literature on the challenges and benefits community foundations encounter in pursuit of a community leadership role.
- Utilizing an exploratory design, interviews with leaders at 11 community foundations were conducted. The findings indicate that taking a community leadership role has a positive effect on fundraising outcomes for community foundations and elevates a foundation's local or regional profile.

leadership by a community foundation, there have been few evaluative components associated with the definitions. The community foundation field often has challenges with articulating a definition of community leadership. Therefore, to address these gaps and better understand community leadership as a process, this article utilized an exploratory research approach to investigate how 11 community foundations in California perceive and practice community leadership.

Community foundations are being forced to reconsider their value proposition in a time of increased competition from both for-profit companies, such as Fidelity Investments, the Vanguard Group, and Charles Schwab Corp., and nonprofits that offer lower-cost alternatives to philanthropic investments.

From Grantmakers to Community Leaders

Although community foundations have existed since the early 1900s, the role of community leadership was first introduced in the practitioner literature in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A Council on Foundations (COF, 1990) training manual laid out a five-point rationale for community foundations to take up leadership:

1. a community foundation is created to serve the community;
2. its board represents the community;
3. a community foundation is impartial in political matters;
4. leadership grows out of grantmaking, since the foundation is aware of community issues; and
5. unrestricted funds enable a community foundation to put resources to use for new and creative community solutions.

In their popular practitioner text *On the Brink of New Promise*, Bernholz et al. (2005) state,

Individual community foundations and the field as a whole will need creative and courageous leadership to thrive in the era ahead. Much of the mindset that has guided the field to this point needs to be replaced with a new set of assumptions about priorities, operations, and the definition of success. (p. 34)

The authors also present three leadership tasks for community foundations: shifting the organizational focus from the institution to the community, from managing financial assets to long-term leadership, and from competitive independence to coordinated impact (p. 35).

Community foundations are being forced to reconsider their value proposition in a time of increased competition from both for-profit companies, such as Fidelity Investments, the Vanguard Group, and Charles Schwab Corp., and nonprofits (Ragey, Masaoka, J., & Bell Peters, 2005) that offer lower-cost alternatives to philanthropic investments (Bernholz et al., 2005). Community leadership is both the value-add and unique role that community foundations can play that provide benefit to both donors (e.g., knowledge about the community, ability to track local trends) and the community by leveraging their position to raise awareness about various local issues (Bernholz et al., 2005; Community Foundations of Canada, 1996; COF, 1990).

In 2008, CFLeads released its first iteration of the *Framework for Community Leadership by a Community Foundation*, and updated it in 2013 with an acknowledgment of the potential for these foundations to lead within their communities. According to CFLeads (2008) “The community foundation is a catalyzing force that creates a better future for all by addressing the community’s most critical or persistent challenges, inclusively uniting people, institutions, and resources, and producing significant, widely shared, and lasting results” (p. 2). With the creation of the CFLeads framework for community leadership, the COF and CFLeads (2009) argued that community foundations are well-suited to act as community leaders because:

1. they are nonpartisan,
2. they have wide-ranging relationships,
3. they have convening power,
4. they have flexible resources,
5. they can flex their jurisdiction and tools, and
6. they have staying power.

While these points are more congruent with community foundations' current operating environment, there is a lack of clarity on how these foundations become community leaders since the definition is primarily focused on the result — or “outcome.”

The Council for Michigan Foundations (1998) offers similar observations:

1. Community foundations are neutral.
2. They focus on community betterment.
3. They connect people with means to issues of need.
4. They do not compete against other organizations for funding.
5. They are aware of community issues.
6. They operate freely from politics.

Among these rationales for community foundations to serve as community leaders, there appears to be little agreement beyond the fact that community foundations are politically neutral or nonpartisan. There appears to be a slight shift in language over time to indicate that community foundations may have become more aware of their power — changing rationales for grantmaking as leadership and awareness of community issues to a greater focus on convening and on responsiveness to community-identified issues. These shifts also appear in CFLeads' (2013) most recent iteration of its community leadership framework and in

recent publications on community foundations as community leaders.

A Conceptual Model of Community Leadership

Community foundations have an inherent responsibility to serve as community leaders since they are often local or regional philanthropic powerhouses (COF, 1988, 1990). They have opportunities to convene conversations around issues that can be challenging for other nonprofits and community organizations to address. Leadership is often a response to a particular context; therefore, the form of leadership taken by community foundations will depend on such factors as their service region. The choice for a community foundation, therefore, is not whether it wants to be a leader; but rather of how its leadership is expressed within its operational framework.

While the CFLeads (2008) framework on community leadership for community foundations is promising, it omits the various activities the literature provides as examples of community leadership, such as how to convene different groups, strategies for collective impact, and other methods of participatory action within communities. This creates a gap in defining community leadership, which prevents the establishment of a standard for excellence in community leadership. Upon extensive review of the literature, the theories of civic leadership and collective leadership, along with the act of community engagement, are likely the facets of community leadership that community foundations are often referring to in their practices. (See Figure 1.) As the name implies, collective leadership is focused on achieving collectively defined goals that require collaboration, civic leadership is focused on making a difference in communities and enhancing the quality of life, and community engagement is an encompassing term describing how organizations are actively working within the community.

Civic Leadership

Civic leadership is focused on action, rather than positions or appointments (Couto, 2014;

FIGURE 1 Definition of Community Leadership

Kibbe Reed, 1996). Kibbe Reed argues that followers can often be considered leaders in their own right since they are part of the community where the leadership is executed and have agency as followers that authorizes them to follow or not. Civic leadership is defined as activities focused on empowering others to contribute to the greater good of society; challenging the norms of traditional leadership, civic leadership is intentional, without position and power (Couto, 2014).

Couto (2014) argues that nonprofit organizations provide civic leadership in various ways, including cultural enrichment, social services, and other programs that seek to improve the human condition and the broader community. Couto's argument aligns with the definition of civic leadership developed by Kibbe Reed (1996): "the 'art and science' of leading in the public arena where one engages in the affairs of society through public advocacy, debate, education, and the fostering of dialogue and group reflection" (p. 100).

Civic leadership provides an opportunity for community foundations to not only lead, but also prepare other individuals and organizations to lead. While a civic leadership approach may advocate for the greater collective, it is more often focused on achieving outcomes by creating positive change through shifting thoughts and policies (Couto, 2014; Kibbe Reed, 1996).

Collective Leadership

Sometimes referred to as shared leadership, the concept of collective leadership posits that leadership in groups is often a collective phenomenon (Contractor, DeChurch, Carson, Carter, & Keegan, 2012). As communities often come together to solve social issues, this framework notes that formal institutions that seek to help guide this change, such as nonprofit organizations, cannot single-handedly solve a social challenge. Compared to the more instrumental civic leadership concept, which focuses on accomplishing tasks and goals to create improvement, collective leadership is more

expressive through its drive for inclusion and ensuring that everyone is heard.

The concept of collective impact, defined as a group of actors from different sectors gathering around a common agenda to solve a specific social problem, illustrates collective leadership in action (Kania & Kramer, 2011). According to Kania and Kramer (2011), five conditions must be met for collective impact to move beyond simple forms of collaboration:

1. a common agenda,
2. shared measurement,
3. mutually reinforcing activities,
4. continuous communication, and
5. backbone support.

As community foundations seek to lead in communities, they must recognize they cannot do so alone; it takes multiple stakeholders from all sectors to create social change.

Community Engagement

Community engagement is often considered a physical presence within a community, yet simply being in the community does not necessarily transition to actionable leadership. Foundations in general have been accused of focusing solely on the intentions of donors (Buchanan, 2017; Healy, 2018; Somerville, 2013); therefore, community foundations have intentionally sought to understand community challenges (e.g., homelessness, arts and culture, education) from a variety of stakeholder perspectives and through various participatory methods. As some may look to community foundations as knowledge hubs that are well acquainted with local nonprofits, these foundations must be deeply embedded in various aspects of community conversations and initiatives (COF, 1988, 1990).

As community foundations seek to lead in communities, they must recognize they cannot do so alone; it takes multiple stakeholders from all sectors to create social change.

Methodology

Study participants were purposefully recruited from both Northern and Southern California in order to investigate how community foundation executives contextualize community leadership in different locations. Variation in foundation assets (low, medium, and high dollar amounts) and the types of donor-imposed conditions on assets (unrestricted, temporarily restricted, and permanently restricted) were also considered when selecting potential interviewees. The sampling was purposeful: Only officials from community foundations that claimed a community leadership role in their mission statements were recruited.

The participants were selected from among California's 81 community foundations. The selection criteria yielded 26 community foundations (32.1%) qualified for an interview based on their mission statement's reference to community leadership. A majority of these (21) were contacted via email to participate in an interview. The study's goal was to conduct all interviews in person; therefore, five foundations were eliminated due to their remote rural locations and lack of access to public transportation. Of the 16 interviews scheduled, 11 were conducted; the others were canceled or indefinitely postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In-person interviews accounted for nine of the interviews, and the remaining two were conducted via Zoom.¹

¹ The original study design was to be face-to-face; however, this research took place between February and March 2020; therefore, two of the scheduled interviews previously scheduled to take place in person were changed to virtual interviews for safety precautions.

The study was designed to include in-person interviews to capture possible nuances more difficult to observe when conducting interviews via telephone or videoconference.

The Sample

The median number of years in operation for the foundations in the study was 37, with an average of 45 years. Seven (63.3%) were established before 1990 (preceding the COF's fieldwide best practices for community foundations); the remaining four (36.7%) were founded in 1990 or later. Nine of the foundations selected for interviews (81.8%) were accredited by the National Standards for U.S. Community Foundations Accreditation Program. Fourteen individuals, including 12 staff members and two board members, were interviewed. The median number of years in their role was seven-and-a-half years, a majority (71.4%) were female, and many had a background in public service or had worked at another nonprofit before taking on their current role at the foundation.

Data Collection

The study was designed to include in-person interviews to capture possible nuances more difficult to observe when conducting interviews via telephone or videoconference. California was selected as the site for this study as it has community foundations that vary by age, geography, and size, but primarily because it was the state where the researcher resided and had access and opportunity.

Interviews were conducted with the executive who oversaw the foundation's community leadership efforts — most often, the chief executive officer. The interviews followed the seven stages of interview inquiry, as outlined by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015): thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and

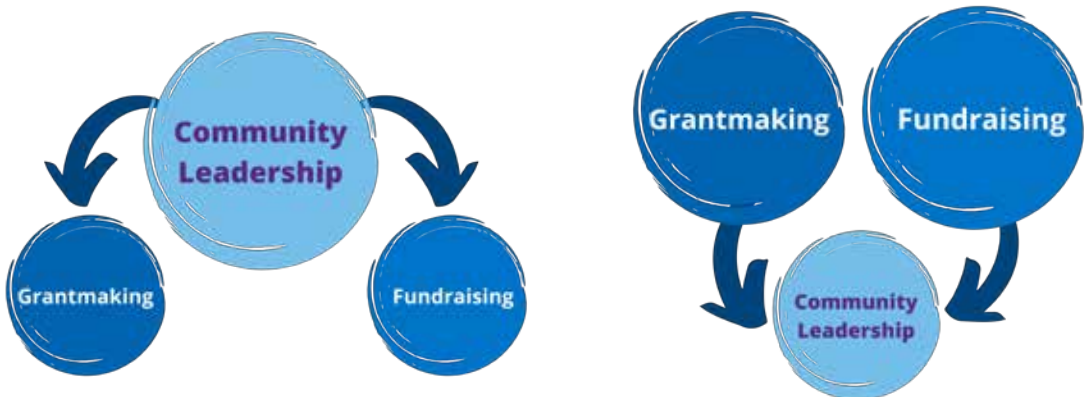
reporting. The semistructured interviews relied on a template to ensure data were collected consistently. The interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed per IRB protocol and participant consent procedures. During the interview, interviewees were asked to sort the three roles of community foundations (fundraising, grantmaking, and community leadership) by order of importance, areas of strength, and areas for improvement.

Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes, with a primary focus on the community leadership role of foundations. They examined how the foundation began serving as a community leader, shifted its strategies toward creating systemic change, engaged donors in its new approaches, and explored the various challenges associated with pursuing a community leadership agenda.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, each participating foundation was treated as a case. An inductive process was utilized to analyze the interview transcripts as well as interview field notes for each case — per Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) — and focused on identifying emergent themes and patterns, extracting categories from the data, and assigning a code to each category (Saldaña, 2015). The coding was completed via Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis software, specifically the NVivo software package. Due to the large amount of data gathered, NVivo was used to examine multiple transcripts and associated secondary materials (e.g., annual reports, brochures, newsletters) from the foundations.

Because the study utilized an interview guide, the first round of qualitative coding included provisional coding (Saldaña, 2015) to link back participant responses to the particular questions being asked from the guide (i.e., grantmaking strategies, community leadership approaches). As additional themes emerged, descriptive coding was utilized to group various topics (e.g., diversity, equity, and inclusion comments), along with in vivo coding to group various dimensions of categories around topics such as capacity

FIGURE 2 Two Operational Approaches to Community Leadership

building, homelessness, and housing. The in vivo coding process was also utilized to identify participant quotes that might be of interest in including in a results section or future practitioner report.

Findings

The role of community leadership looked different at each community foundation. Yet, for a vast majority, their leadership approaches or initiatives were a result of one of two motivating factors: community needs or the types of available funding. (See Figure 2.) In all the selected cases, the foundation's leadership work appeared to be in the community's best interest. Still, as nonprofits themselves, community foundations only have so much control over the funds they have available and whether they can meet the community's evolving needs. Many foundation leaders stated that they lean into their mission statement when it comes to community leadership; and many interviewees observed that community leadership sets community foundations apart from other philanthropic investment opportunities.

Community leadership efforts within the participating foundations focused on a range of topics, including access to affordable housing, cradle-to-career education outcomes for students, transitioning scholarship programs from merit-to need-based, access to health care careers,

The role of community leadership looked different at each community foundation. Yet, for a vast majority, their leadership approaches or initiatives were a result of one of two motivating factors: community needs or the types of available funding.

building nonprofit capacity, and eliminating human trafficking. In all of these, community context was a driving force in selecting the community leadership agenda.

In many cases, practicing community leadership provided visibility and legitimacy for the work of a foundation, and the leadership can both be respected and contested by community stakeholders. In short, social issues are community-based challenges or gaps within the social fabric of a community. Many community foundation leaders stated they generally do not experience pushback from residents when they state their foundation is pro-education or

Change is often hard to accomplish, so community foundations must be mindful of how they wish to seek change while recognizing that promoting change does not come without obstacles or scrutiny[.]

pro-housing. Still, tensions can often arise when a foundation selects a specific issue and works to eliminate barriers that divide the community. As one foundation executive remarked,

I'm going to go out on a limb and say, just being in leadership roles makes our partners and people out in the community feel more comfortable with us. Even if they don't agree with us on whatever stand we're taking on something, they respect us because they know that we're not doing it to line our own pockets.

Another executive observed that community leadership is often a process that occurs over time and involves having conversations with various stakeholder groups, and that community leadership must be guided by the needs of grantees and other community stakeholders for it to be impactful:

I think the big challenge in foundation leadership is [that] the only really legitimate foundation leadership comes with [being] very grounded in what the grantee and other ... end-users of your grant think. And you really have to have created situations where folks feel free to disagree with you. And you ask the question multiple ways and multiple times and multiple venues, and you listen.

Interviewees also identified a need for foundations to be courageous and strategic in their community leadership. Change is often hard to accomplish, so community foundations must be mindful of how they wish to seek change while

recognizing that promoting change does not come without obstacles or scrutiny:

When you are advancing a cause, you are going to make people upset. And so, people have to be comfortable with what that feels like. You have to be OK if your organization shows up in the paper, and it's like you flip a coin and some people like it, some people won't. ... The point is to advance an agenda and mission and a purpose, recognizing there are some status quo interests that are going to get upset in that process. And as you're trying to maneuver in a way that minimizes that to the greatest extent possible, ... you're not afraid to trip those wires that need to be tripped.

When a community foundation practices community leadership, it often creates disruptions by inviting nonprofit organizations, elected officials, and other stakeholders to question the status quo and envision a brighter future for all residents in the community. Interviewees argued that community foundations must have a clear vision of what and how they want to change something to ensure they can achieve the desired results via community leadership practices.

Donors Reactions and Engagement

Community foundations are institutional forms of philanthropy that can often only grow due to donor investments. In some cases, these foundations can see gains in the stock market, but that is a prolonged growth process; therefore, fundraising is essential for a community foundation that strives to increase the number and size of grants it makes each year. Grantmaking and fundraising have historically been the lifeblood of community foundations and is what most are known for in their communities. As foundations begin to pursue a community leadership agenda, they also must consider how their primary source of revenue — donor contributions — may change as a result of the bold steps they may choose to take. As one executive said,

Look, I have a fund for Planned Parenthood, and I have funding for folks that want to find organizations that help pregnant women ... I will service them both because they're both donors, and I don't impose my views on donors as far as to where they give.

In many cases, community foundations are facing unprecedented competition in the field of community philanthropy. They have long been one of the only local institutions, other than the United Way, offering philanthropic services. Changes in the private sector have created opportunities for philanthropists to create donor-advised funds or other giving vehicles, such as a range of charitable trusts, with financial or investment firms. The interviewees indicated that most of their organization's operating funds stem from fees charged on the various funds they hold. Some donors have begun to shop around for lower fees — especially when for-profit agencies give donors more discretion over their distributions. When asked to describe their potential sales pitch to a donor, one community foundation executive explained that fees support the foundation's leadership work (an attitude shared by many other interviewees):

OK. I get it; and I get that we're more expensive, but here's what we're doing in the community. And have you ever thought of the fact that the fees that you're going to pay to Vanguard and Schwab and Fidelity are going to go to New York City, they're going to stay in L.A.? They're not going to this community; they're not doing one thing for this community. Whereas the fees that you pay, 100% of them stay here in this community, and 100% of them go into the work that we're doing.

All the community foundation leaders that were interviewed indicated that community leadership was directly tied to their asset growth in recent years. They remarked that bold community leadership has often led to increased visibility, accountability, transparency, and additional donor contributions over time — from current and new donors. Community foundations can no longer elect to be neutral in the face of community challenges, since they make grants toward specific causes. Ultimately, they speak with their dollars if they elect not to speak up about community injustices:

I think the reason they say that is because they want to be neutral, and they don't want to piss off any donors in their community. That's very old school. If you want to attract a very specific donor,

then OK, play that vanilla role, and maybe that'll be the only donor you ever have. But ... our asset size in 2012 was \$12 million. Our asset size in 2019 at the end of last fiscal year was at \$41 [million]. So I think that's data for you on community leadership: [It] actually underwrites your development goals. It's also the right thing to do. What the hell are we here for? Like I don't understand why we even exist. They can open a fund at Fidelity with a way better fee. But otherwise, there's no reason for you to be here. Like literally our sales pitch for donors ...: If they're fee sensitive, we literally tell them to go somewhere else.

To understand the accuracy of interviewees' statements about how their community leadership role positively influenced the foundation's fundraising efforts, financial data from all 81 California community foundations for 2008 through 2017 were gathered to run simple comparisons. The mission statements of all community foundations (n = 81) were analyzed; those that stated an element of community leadership (n = 25) were categorized into one group, and those that did not have the element (n = 56) were placed in another group. (See Table 1.) It should be noted that the statement of community leadership in the mission statement of the community foundations was used as a proxy for true community leadership, and the effectiveness of community leadership was not an examined factor.

While these data do not indicate causality, the apparent correlation indicates that the community foundations that claimed community leadership within their mission statements saw a higher growth in their annual asset growth rate, total asset growth rate (10 years), and average unrestricted assets. Interviewees indicated unrestricted dollars provided their foundations with the opportunity to be strong community leaders by allowing them to flexibly deploy assets for various purposes.

Challenges in Community Leadership

Overall, the interviewees did not report challenges associated with the actual act of leading, but instead with challenges related to the cause they elected. For example, individuals were not upset when an interviewed community

TABLE 1 Change in Assets at Community Foundations (2008–2017)

	Claiming Community Leadership ^a	Not Claiming Community Leadership
Average Annual Growth Rate ^b	8.88% (n = 23)	7.64% (n = 45)
Average Annual Unrestricted Growth Rate	10.2% (n = 21)	9.34% (n = 20)
Total Asset Growth Average	70.64% (n = 15)	74.75% (n = 32)

Note: Dollar value adjusted for inflation utilizing the 2018 Consumer Price Index.

^a Mission statement coding was utilized to identify community foundations claiming community leadership role.

^b One outlier removed from the analysis.

foundation became involved in increasing affordable housing, but merely addressing the social issue came with expected challenges. Furthermore, many interviewees reported that though they perceived community problems as growing, especially in smaller communities, their community foundation assets were not.

One foundation executive stressed the importance of considering how the community foundation serves the community, not just donors and the nonprofit sector. An integral part of community leadership appears to be doing what is in the entire community's best interest. While donors and nonprofits are part of the community, they are not the only stakeholders:

I think that the nonprofit sector is an invaluable and extremely important component in what we do. But that sector also needs to answer to the community, to the constituency that they serve. And sometimes those connections can get a little bit fuzzy, can have a little tension to them, ... can have gaps to them.

Many of the interviewees expressed frustration with the fact that while many individuals may be aware of what a community foundation is and does, they do not understand its business model. One leader remarked:

For nonprofits, I think it's helpful if they understand our business model because you don't just have this large corpus that we have complete control over. So we try to be as strategic as we

possibly can with the resources that we have at our discretion. ... I do think sometimes that nonprofits get frustrated ...: "Why aren't they funding us? Why aren't they funding this?" And sometimes it's just because we literally have no money.

The nonprofit sector is often tasked with handling many community challenges. Yet, it is clear that a lack of resources is one of the many barriers to achieving a society where individuals have, at minimum, their basic needs met. The community foundations included in this study attempt to do their best to raise resources to address community challenges, but there often seems to be more challenges than philanthropic dollars available to solve them, or at least not enough donors or funders interested in taking on a particular issue. Furthermore, community foundations have an institutional structure that has both benefits and challenges; there have been various calls from the field for foundations to consider how to decolonize philanthropy and work to engage marginalized groups both as donors and recipients of philanthropic funds.

Advice to Peers

Interviewees had the opportunity to share their community foundation's journey to community leadership—where they are today and what advice they would give to colleagues seeking to improve their community leadership. Many interviewees reported that the work of being a community leader is not easy. Yet, it is often the work that has helped these community

foundations grow into what they are today. As one interviewee put it, community foundations must be aware of the power dynamic between a funder and a grantee. In most cases, they need to listen with openness and humility.

However, community foundations should not be threatened by the power they hold as grantmakers, as this provides them with a unique platform to highlight and address community challenges. In many cases, residents look to a community foundation for guidance on what is happening in the nonprofit sector and how they can help. Community foundations should embrace all that comes with being a learning organization and look to various stakeholders for insights; then, they can serve as network weavers to bring the right people together.

Interviewees also discussed the importance of exit strategies. It might be the right move for a community foundation to be engaged in a coalition for only a few years until it must transition to other issues that affect its service area's quality of life. Community foundations have the opportunity to be quite innovative in incubating community ideas, but they must pass the torch in order to continue fulfilling its role. Community foundations are not experts in education, human services, health care, or other community issues, but they can help establish networks to address those specific issues, and others. As one interviewee observed, “the sign of good leadership is that you do some work, you create excitement, you create this container — and that you can pull yourself out and it holds on its own.”

Limitations

The interviews with community foundation executives in Northern and Southern California provided much-needed insight into the definition of community leadership and how it is interpreted and implemented by various community foundations. While this study included perspectives from several foundation leaders, some study limitations can be opportunities for additional research.

As one interviewee put it, community foundations must be aware of the power dynamic between a funder and a grantee. In most cases, they need to listen with openness and humility.

First, this study only considered community foundations in California that included “community leadership” in their mission statements. This likely resulted in the exclusion of foundations that may be excellent community leaders but did not meet the selection criteria.

Second, inclusion of community leadership in mission statements was utilized as a proxy for authentic leadership. The extent to which community foundations were successfully practicing community leadership was outside the focus of this study; therefore, additional research into community leadership's effectiveness is needed.

Conclusions

The interviews with community foundation executives have demonstrated that at its core, community leadership involves selecting a particular issue, advocating for that issue, and seeking to make a positive change. Interviewees highlighted the collective action needed to pursue a community leadership agenda, yet some community foundations had clearer visions than others — indicating a lack of measurable change by not having a specific intended outcome to track or strive towards.

While goals like “end human trafficking,” “ensure all kids are reading at grade level,” or “ensure all nonprofits are successful” are ideal aspirations that can inspire particular initiatives, a lack of effective measurement allows a foundation to attest they are working on improving something while remaining unaccountable for change or the lack of it. While internal measures

may be in place that define the “success” of community leadership, the foundation executives interviewed did not indicate what civic outcome was to be achieved.

Nonprofits are often under pressure to provide funders with evidence that the money they receive is being used for a useful purpose and that an organization’s mission is advancing. In the case of the community foundations included in this study, there appears to be a lack of external pressure for performance and accountability. The findings from the interviews suggest that as community foundations deepen their work, they need additional tools to guide the creation of effective leadership agendas that clearly articulate civic outcomes and communicate the impact of community foundation grantmaking and community leadership.

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Colton C. Strawser, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of the Community Leadership, Engagement, and Research (CLEAR) Institute. Dr. Strawser is also a Visiting Scholar in the Mulvaney Center for Community, Awareness, and Social Action at the University of San Diego. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Colton Strawser, CLEAR Institute, 2305 Cherry Sage Drive, Arlington, TX 76001 (email: cstrawser@sandiego.edu).