

Collaborative Philanthropy Trending in 2018

04.05.18 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



Back in January 2017, Jamie Serino, the Director of Marketing for Blackbaud's Corporations & Foundations division, made predictions for the coming year. In *The Year Ahead in Philanthropy: 2017 Trends to Watch*, his picks for charitable-sector trends to watch were: (1) donor-advised funds; (2) "community foundations expanding beyond local community"; and (3) "measurement" (data-driven decision-making).

Regarding community foundations, Serino explained his expectation about a significant change of focus. "As more communities recognize that certain issues are larger than their localities and we continue to challenge the traditional definition of 'community,'" these influential organizations will respond by "looking outside the boundary lines of their towns, cities, counties, and even our country." In 2017, the critical element will be "collaboration across the entire philanthropic ecosystem."

A few months later, in April 2017, writing for the Council on Foundation's blog, Serino revisited – and confirmed – his earlier predictions in a new post: *Three Trends for Community Foundations to Consider*. It will be, he wrote, "a time of significant opportunity." Sharing knowledge and resources, including opportunities for funding, is accelerating. "Organizations such as the Council on Foundations, Exponent Philanthropy, and the National Center for Family Philanthropy ... work to convene foundations and philanthropists alike by providing them with the tools and opportunities necessary to advance their mission."

Co-Impact: A Major Collaborative is Launched

In mid-November 2017, Olivia Leland, the Managing Director of The Rockefeller Foundation and founding director of the Giving Pledge announced the exciting launch of *Co-Impact*, a "new global collaborative for systems change."

Ms. Leland is founder and CEO of Co-Impact. Initial core partners include Bill & Melinda Gates along

with other billionaire philanthropists – Richard Chandler, Jeffrey Skoll, and Romesh & Kathy Wadhvani – as well as The Rockefeller Foundation.

Writing in the prestigious [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#), Ms. Leland explains the concept and dramatic plans of this major collaborative which will invest “deeply and over the long-term in systems change to improve the lives of millions by advancing education.”

In [A New Model of Collective Philanthropy](#), she sets the scene for a new paradigm in philanthropy: There are more billionaires than ever including many who want to have “massive and enduring impact” instead of “naming a business school after themselves.”

But there’s a critical obstacle: “few effective mechanisms to match [social change] leaders ...with the philanthropists interested in providing the right size and kinds of capital...” Philanthropy leaders, she explains, are “often conditioned to think small...” to work within a single organization’s annual budget. “Visionary philanthropy” is different: It “challenges us to think bigger – to envision changing the whole system.”

The Co-Impact philosophy is that “(h)umanity’s greatest challenges are actually solvable” when “organizations with practical and scalable solutions are linked with the transformative funding required to truly pursue” them.

Co-Impact’s first project is investing \$500 million over the next few years in “high-potential systems change efforts, conceived and driven by proven social change leaders working in the areas of health, education, and economic opportunity for underserved populations across the developing world.”

Community Foundation Leaders Pledge Collaboration

The Council on Foundations, [Community Foundations of Canada](#), and [Comunalia](#) (Mexico) sponsored the first-ever [North American Community Foundations Summit](#) in Mexico City on February 5-6, 2018. Among the purposes of this gathering was to “discuss shared issues like education, health, economic development, integrating diaspora communities, [and] immigration....” It was set against the background of the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#): a platform adopted in 2015 by 193 countries to “end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all...”

During this inaugural Summit, leaders representing more than 80 community foundations across North America “[signed a written pledge](#) to collaborate toward reducing continental poverty, increasing opportunity, furthering other United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and addressing related challenges.” The pledge was the first agreement of its kind “among philanthropic leaders in North America committed toward working toward meeting the SDGs by their 2030 goal date.”

The pledge reads, in part:

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In 2018 and beyond, we must connect with, learn from and share our experiences with peers around the world. More than ever, the challenges we face are universal and span across geographic borders. Today, we are also more connected globally than ever before. Rather than succumb to any desire to turn inward, we believe our collective power lies in building learning bridges across the divides that often disconnect us, and empowering a global community where solutions span not just borders, but cultures, ethnicities, religions, politics, racial and economic backgrounds.

“Cross-national collaboration has been percolating for several years,” according to the head of the Council on Foundations. But enthusiasm has spiked recently; for example, the Summit attracted more than double the original number of attendees expected.

The pledge “grew out of an understanding that politics and policies might be different, but there is a lot of momentum on how we can move forward . . . People felt compelled to document it with a shared statement.”

Collaboration for Affordable Housing Launched

According to an often-cited recent [study](#) by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, nowhere in the United States – not in a [single state](#) – can a minimum-wage, 40-hour-a-week worker afford to rent a simple two-bedroom apartment.

In a [press release](#) on February 20, 2018, nine large private foundations in the United States announced a new funding collaborative: [Funders for Housing and Opportunity](#). The goal: “catalyzing [system change](#) to address the shortage of safe, stable, and affordable rental housing nationwide.” Launched by the [Melville Charitable Trust](#) and the [Annie E. Casey](#), [Gates](#), [Hilton](#), [Ford](#), [MacArthur](#), [JPB](#), [Kresge](#), and [Oak](#) foundations – who collectively had invested more than \$65 million in domestic housing-related activities in 2017 – “the new collaborative will [help them align their strategies](#), leverage their funds, and extend their reach beyond what they could support individually.”

According to Susan Thomas, senior program officer at the Melville Charitable Trust and chair of the collaborative, “[h]ousing is much more than a roof over our heads — it is a [basic human need](#) and it bolsters entire communities....”

Jeanne Fekade-Sellassie, the new project director for Funders for Housing and Opportunity, adds: “Any one foundation, working alone, can have [only limited impact given the scale of the problem](#).... We need a monumental shift in how rental housing security and its impacts are addressed at the national level. By working together, Funders for Housing and Opportunity and our partners can be a powerful force for change.”

Coinciding with the announcement, the collaborative announced the first set of grants totaling \$4.9 million over three years to four U.S. organizations.

Conclusion

We look forward to reporting on many more innovative, collaborative projects: “visionary philanthropy” that seeks to create systemic, transformative changes in society in the United States and worldwide on a scale that may only be possible with combined talent and resources.