

## **Community Foundations as Knowledge Banks**

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With years of experience working with local organizations, community foundations serve as knowledge banks on philanthropy in their communities and offer expertise to professional advisors. The knowledge can be as low-tech as, for example, an advisor calling a program officer to find out who's doing great work in early-childhood development. On the other end of the spectrum, many community foundations have a searchable online database of opportunities in the community. Advisors can leverage this knowledge to deepen their relationships with existing clients.

### **Deep Ties to Local Giving**

When Seattle attorney Wendy Goffe has a question about philanthropy, she contacts the Seattle Foundation, with whom she has worked many times. "I often call them because I have clients who want to make a gift for a particular cause and don't know who the appropriate recipient is," she says. According to Goffe, community foundations are the go-to resources for local philanthropy because of the depth of their knowledge about local needs and programs.

"We're a donor services organization, not a fund-raising organization, and our value-add is knowing the community, knowing the needs, and sharing that knowledge with our donors," says Bill Sperling, the Seattle Foundation's Vice President, Foundation Affairs. At the Seattle Foundation, he explains, the grant-making group and donor services group are combined, so donors work with a personal donor services officer who is also a grant-making officer. "Advisors and their clients can talk to people who have been in the field, done site visits, and help in the process of making grants, and advisors know they can call these people at any time," Sperling says.

### **Online Resources**

Many community foundations have a database of local organizations on their websites, which advisors can use to research funding options for clients. On the Seattle Foundation's site, for example, advisors and their clients can learn more about funded programs in the area and evaluate prescreened proposals from local organizations. The website also provides informational material that advisors can pass on to their clients, as well as extensive resources for advisors.

"I use their online research probably daily," Goffe says. "Sometimes it's stuff I can print and give to a client to explain a proposed transaction, and sometimes it's more technical for me, like a private letter ruling that walks through a particular transaction."

### **Knowing a Community and Its Needs**

Another way that many community foundations work to deepen their base of knowledge is by undertaking comprehensive studies of local needs. The Seattle Foundation, for example, recently published an exhaustive survey called *A Healthy Community: What You Need to Know to Give Strategically*, which is a vision for long-term improvement in the community through philanthropic investment. The publication highlighted more than 50 effective programs in the Seattle area and identified 175 promising charitable strategies. It also narrowed the most important local needs to seven key categories:

- Basic Needs
- Health and Wellness
- Education
- Economy
- Arts and Culture
- Neighborhoods and Communities
- Environment

By focusing intently on the key needs of the local community, the foundation can better serve donors who request information about needs in the community.

### **Added Value for Advisors**

Professional advisors should take advantage of the robust resources that community foundations offer. Many community foundations offer CLE seminars and regular donor briefings and informational sessions. They also serve as a valuable resource for advisors whose clients ask about needs in their communities. “If an advisor is sitting with a client, and the client asks, ‘Who’s doing good work with youth in the Central District?’, the advisor should feel free to call us and we’ll discuss charities providing services in that area,” says Sperling. “We may or may not ever see the client or the client may not ever open a charitable fund, but we feel we’ve provided a valuable community service to foster philanthropy in our area. And we’re pleased with that.”

Though community foundations have traditionally deep ties locally, their expertise and network extends to statewide, national, and even international giving. For Goffe, this proved particularly useful when some clients wanted to establish a donor advised fund to benefit organizations that support emerging playwrights. The clients had a particular idea of what the term “emerging” meant to them, and wanted to be sure the organizations shared their view. “The Seattle Foundation provided us information on a number of organizations across the country, and explained what the term ‘emerging’ meant to each one,” Goffe says. “My clients were delighted.”

*Morgan Jacobs is a freelance writer based in New York City.*