

REPORT ON THE 2007 CONFERENCE OF
PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATIONS CANADA

At the Heart



of Philanthropy

OCTOBER 22-23, 2007 • MONTREAL, QUEBEC





PETER WARRIAN

Preface

It was very exciting for us to welcome over 200 foundations, donors and philanthropic advisors to Montreal in October 2007 to talk about issues and strategies at the “heart of philanthropy”.

Over a stimulating two days of conversation, many stories were told and many insights were articulated. This report is an attempt to give you a flavour of the conference. As you can imagine, it was difficult to select specific sessions from among the many hours of discussion to highlight in these pages. We have chosen to illustrate certain themes that were threaded throughout many sessions: engagement, accountability, risk-taking, making change and measuring results. Luckily, many of the sessions were recorded and the proceedings are available from PFC. As well, some of the talks were made available as written texts which are posted on the PFC website for members.

In our view, the conference successfully realized its purpose of giving participants the opportunity to fully explore the many roles that foundations can play, and to share some of the common challenges that we all experience. We hope that this report will give you a sense of what was discussed in Montreal, and of the sense of engagement and challenge that we took away with us from the conference. We look forward with anticipation to our next gathering, in October 2009 in Calgary.

PETER WARRIAN

Chair

Philanthropic Foundations Canada

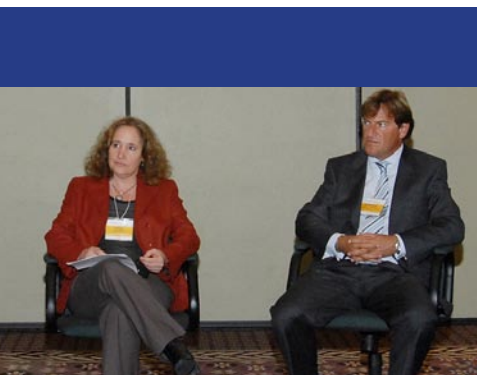


The Engaged Donor

A central theme of the conference was donor engagement in foundation philanthropy. In both the opening plenary and in sessions on the engaged donor and on the dynamics of family foundations, philanthropists with very different missions and outlooks spoke about the common challenges and realities of their engagement. Six characteristics of engaged donors emerged clearly from these conversations.

1. Engaged donors invest their money *and* their time.

Donor engagement means a lot more than cheque writing. “What motivates me, and undoubtedly, most philanthropists, is the desire to give back—to become agents for change—to create a civil and caring society,” said the Honourable Margaret McCain of the Margaret and Wallace McCain Foundation, one of the opening plenary speakers.



CAROL NEWELL AND
STEPHEN R. BRONFMAN



RICHARD IVEY

Truly engaged donors distinguish themselves by coupling their financial investments with active volunteer involvement.

“I give my time and its subsets—my experience, my expertise and my passion—to a lot of causes,” said Richard Ivey, a board member at the Ivey Foundation.

Similarly, philanthropist Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien, said that he makes sure his foundation matches every dollar it gives with a handful of volunteer hours. Investing time is daunting but worthwhile. It allows donors to gain a first-hand appreciation of the cause they’re funding and, as a result, to develop a strong sense of what’s needed.

2. Engaged donors address both personal passions and public needs.

Philanthropists with constant exposure to social issues face a common problem: how do you choose your cause when you want to do it all?

“One thing I have to learn—and I am not there yet—is how to say ‘no’ to very worthwhile projects without angst” said Margaret McCain. Yet marrying generosity to focus is crucial to ensuring impact. Many foundations, including the Margaret and Wallace McCain Foundation, stress the importance of focusing on one or a few closely related issues in order to generate real, lasting change.

Striking a balance between personal aims and public needs enables the donor to leave a mark while doing something he or she loves. The Endswell Foundation’s Carol Newell explained that she chose British Columbia’s striking natural environment as her focus, not only because it reflects one of her deepest passions—conservation—but also because it fills a gap in funding of creative, eco-friendly solutions to environmental challenges.

3. Engaged donors take risks but know their stuff.

Philanthropic foundations occupy the privileged position of deploying funds without the constraints of shareholders or voters, making them ideal calculated risk-takers.

“With my capital base, if I can’t take risks, who can?” said Newell, whose foundation supports many environmental organizations. “I decided on the Johnny Appleseed approach—broadcast widely and then nurture the sprouts.”

“Do things that people don’t dare to try, then prime the pump, and try to interest others to take on what you’ve started,” said Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien.

Said Richard Ivey, “Whatever we consider to be the best practice, the better model or the leading edge—many of us are in pursuit of it as we seek to improve upon what we consider to be the most effective and efficient means to invest philanthropic dollars.” The Ivey Foundation is 60 years old and still learning.

4. Engaged donors recognize their influence.

Engaged donors face the reality that, with growing government cutbacks, philanthropy is playing an increasingly vital role in funding the community. Through their work, foundations not only forge social networks, they also shape the moral and cultural values of their communities at local, national and even global levels. Accordingly, foundations are accountable for assessing the possible impacts of their projects and for keeping up with changes in the philanthropic world.

5. Engaged donors connect with likeminded colleagues.

While recognizing their own influence, successful foundations acknowledge and count on the expertise of their peers. Donors who maintain ties with likeminded colleagues re-inspire their own energy and drive.

Ivey believes that established foundations have a responsibility to pass on their insights to start-up foundations: “The important thing for us is to continue to set great examples, to be open to the new players and vehicles, to engage with them—and encourage them and others—as we continue to pursue our enormous common cause.”

When foundations work together, they benefit not only in terms of fulfilling their project goals, but also in terms of solving structural and methodological problems within their organization.

6. Engaged donors engage and inspire the young with their vision.

With family foundations, the challenge is to engage the next generations despite possibly waning interest, geographical distance and changing philanthropic contexts. Denise Paré Julien, of the de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation, believes it is crucial to “help younger generations accept their wealth and develop responsibility for it.”

For Jonathan Wood of the Lawson Foundation, effective tactics range from enlisting younger members of the family on the board in their family foundation, and providing matching funds for projects initiated by the young, to going to philanthropic conferences, holding family reunions and using the Internet (web site, email) as a tool for communicating with distant family members about what is happening at the foundation. Family foundations must open themselves to change while preserving the identities of their founding donors.

Stephen Bronfman and James Good, both sons of foundation philanthropists, were motivated by a sense of charity instilled as children, pride in their families’ impact and the excitement of seeing their ideas come to life. Stephen Bronfman explained that he had been engaged in his family’s foundation since his early 20s and learned from his father about how to follow his passions and turn them into reality. James Good noted, “my father set up a foundation in 1974 which was a courageous act at that time... he wanted his family to make a contribution to the community in which they lived... I brought in my sons to the foundation when they were eighteen”. But, as he also commented ruefully, it is crucial for the oldest generation to disengage at the right time in order to retain the interest of the youngest and not to bind succeeding generations too tightly to the specific mission of the founder.

Some engaged donors inspire the public at large by raising awareness about philanthropy and community action. Newell urged wealthy Canadians to invest in worthwhile causes. “Philanthropy is a place where we can repurpose our money,” she says. “It is bridging the gap between business and charitable dollars.”

Cirque du Soleil’s Guy Laliberté’s approach is to help people see how causes affect them. “The planet is rich with good things—people, wealth, resources,” he says. “We have to educate people about feeding the circle of life so that the circle can continue to feed them... small gestures have big effects.”



PETER WARRIAN AND
MARGARET MCCAIN



GUY LALIBERTÉ AND
ANDRÉ CHAGNON

Accountability in Philanthropy: For What and To Whom?

Beyond engagement, a second important theme of the conference running through many individual presentations and sessions was that of accountability. At the “heart” of philanthropy lies not only commitment to doing good but also commitment to doing good well and to be accountable for it. Speakers discussed foundation accountability in all its senses, including being true to donor intent, making an effort to understand impact (or lack of impact at certain times), and articulating publicly the how and why of foundation work.

A wide-ranging panel discussion on the subject of accountability featured Joel Fleishman, a professor at Duke University and author of a recent book *The Foundation: A Great American Secret*, David Elton,



PROFESSOR JOEL FLEISHMAN

Executive Director of the Max Bell Foundation of Calgary and Luc Tayart de Borms of the King Baudouin Foundation of Belgium.

Professor Fleishman suggested that accountability could be defined as “to give a report of oneself”, noting that there are three questions that follow: to whom? For what? And why? He noted ruefully how little Americans (and, he suspected, Canadians) know about philanthropic activity. “Foundations don’t pierce the veil of social consciousness with what they do,” he said. “This becomes a problem because they have no well of support if they come under attack.”

In his view, while foundations may find transparency burdensome or overly time consuming, they need to publicize their work in order to maintain their legitimacy and obtain public approval. By sharing their goals, their results and even their mistakes with the communities they serve, foundations give themselves greater credibility to fulfill their important role in society.

Reinforcing this argument, Luc Tayart de Borms said that “foundations are about change—especially public and social change. To be accepted as change agents, they must have a good name or brand.” Beyond building trust in foundation activity, accountability promotes collaborative efforts with other like-minded organizations. “Foundations are just small players but they have a responsibility to other players: each other. They can’t just throw money at things.” When it comes to involving stakeholders, Tayart de Borms recommended that foundations create advisory committees that reflect the makeup of the community, and include a variety of professionals, from academics to program officers.

Foundations can report to many audiences – government, donors, grantseekers and grant recipients, and indeed to the whole nonprofit sector. The reasons for reporting range from complying with the law to communicating clearly with grant seekers to fulfilling a moral obligation to carry out the intent of the donor.

For David Elton of the Max Bell Foundation, respecting the legacy of a donor represents the highest level of accountability. “Family foundations exist for one reason only: someone wanted to use their money to help, to contribute a public good,” he said. “So how do we realize the dreams of such an individual, particularly after he or she is gone? We reflect their spirit and intent to improve society.”

Elton suggested that one of the biggest changes in philanthropic accountability in recent years is being brought about by the growth of the Internet. In his view, this is having a dramatic impact on the opportunities and obligations for accountability. Technological tools such as email create two-way dialogue with existing and potential grantees. The Internet itself provides much more information on foundations both from regulators such as the Canada Revenue Agency and from foundations and their critics!

Tim Brodhead of The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, summing up this discussion, concluded that the increasing visibility of foundations, whether chosen or not, will provoke more and more questions about who foundations are and why they make the decisions that they do. The increasing level of questioning about who is effective and why leads to more calls for objective measurement of the performance of foundations (and charities in general). It may be incumbent on foundations to do this work of measurement themselves through such organizations as the Center for Effective Philanthropy, rather than handing it over to government or having arbitrary judgments made by the public at large.

During another conference session on the “art of failure”, about how foundations can learn from grants and initiatives that fail, it was suggested that foundations make themselves accountable and improve their performance by telling stories about their successes and their failures. But very few foundations admit failure publicly. “Why not confess we are human?” said Joel Fleishman, a panelist in this session. “The public will never believe what we claim about our successes if we are not open about our failures.”

According to Bob Wyatt of the Muttart Foundation, “private foundations can accept risk in a way that no-one else can. If we don’t try new things, we won’t find new solutions,” he says. “Some might not work, some might—that’s reason enough to try. If every project we fund succeeds, we’re funding the wrong projects.”

Even so, foundations must strive to avoid what Fleishman calls “naïve failures,” when a project flops because its intended benefits were not properly assessed and the foundation did not think carefully enough about what it intended to accomplish. In order to gauge the promise, potential and outcomes of new projects, foundations should establish evaluation systems or seek the help of professional assessors.

Wyatt suggested that foundations can calculate their risks by establishing realistic expectations about the benefits brought about by their grantees’ projects, the capacities of these grantees to fund themselves over time and their grantees’ abilities to carry out the project.

“If a project fails, it is not the end of the world,” says Wyatt. “But funds and energy are wasted if we don’t know *why* it failed. We need to know that and the organization needs to know that... we need to share the information so that we don’t repeat each other’s mistakes”.

The third panelist, Charles Pascal of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, differentiated between absolute failures and temporary setbacks, which almost every funded project experiences. “Our money is risk capital. It also has to be patient capital. Every project we fund has failures along the way,” he says. But it is important not to declare either success or failure too soon, he warns. “You have to give yourself a chance—if you’re crippled by a fear of failure, you don’t accomplish anything.”

Fleishman noted that successes and failures can also be much more difficult to declare for foundations involved in advocacy work, such as Atkinson advocating for national child care. For many foundations, he suggested, success can only be determined after they have stuck to it for a very long time, citing the example of the Rockefeller Foundation’s investment in the “green revolution” of the Third World over 25 years. “Sticking with it is absolutely indispensable for bringing about major social change”.



TIM BRODHEAD
JOEL FLEISHMAN
LUC TAYART DE BORMS
DAVID ELTON

Global Philanthropy: Looking Out to the World

A third important theme built in to the conference program was that of the globalization of philanthropy. Plenary talks by American and European speakers as well as a special session on the challenges of global philanthropy gave the conference participants an opportunity to gain an impression of events and trends in philanthropy beyond Canada's borders.

The first day of the Conference wound up with a plenary panel discussion featuring three prominent European guests, including Gerry Salole, chief executive of the European Foundation Centre in Brussels, Luc Tayart de Borms, director of the largest foundation in Belgium, the King Baudouin Foundation, and Bharat Mehta, chief executive of the City Parochial Foundation in London. Moderated by Patrick Johnston of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, the three panelists had a wide-ranging conversation about the similarities and the greater differences between European philanthropy and North American models.

In his introduction, Patrick Johnston noted that many Canadians look for new ideas and models in philanthropy south of the border. But it is equally the case that there is a deep affinity for models in Europe. Gerry Salole gave a perspective on the different developments across Europe, noting that while there is kaleidoscopic diversity to be found among foundations, there are three elements that European foundations have in common: a purpose (doing public good), an independent source of income, and autonomous governance. The biggest contingent of foundations in Europe is in Italy. Some of the largest of these are foundations of banking origin, dating back to the 16th century. Indeed, some of these foundations are creating foundations of their own to work on community or regional issues. Across Europe, there is a great difference among national legal frameworks but not all foundations have liquid assets or work within disbursement requirements. Many behave as operating agencies with their own programs.

Salole noted that Europe is seeing much more collaboration among foundations although still not to the degree seen in North America.

Mistakes of the past are being

acknowledged and governments and foundations are willing to collaborate to learn from these mistakes. He cited for example the changes taking place in thinking about European international development work. "People actually are stretching each other's boundaries as they work together... foundations are able to do much more collectively than they could do singly". Another area of collaboration and engagement is developing around how to deal with cross-border illegal migrations.



PHILANTHROPY CEO'S FROM
THE U.S., UK, CANADA,
EUROPE AND NEW ZEALAND

Bharat Mehta of the United Kingdom concurred but noted that collaboration is very different depending on the nature of the work being done: collaboration across approaches (evidence based research and support to front line civil society organizations) or collaboration to extend resources within an approach, or collaboration among foundations with different tolerances for risk. The nature of the collaborators is crucial to pushing the work far enough. He suggested “choose your bedfellows appropriately”.

Luc Tayart de Borms noted some of the paradoxes in European philanthropy. The brand name of “foundation” has great credibility even though there is no commonly accepted definition. European foundations are not generally wary of collaborating with governments (compared to North America) even though they are challenged by working with multiple levels across the continent. Foundations with their brand credibility are called on to play the role of facilitator between sectors but they can only do so if they retain their independence and so find it hard to realize their potential as social advocates. Even though they have more potential to use assets for good, too many foundations think they are just grantmakers. “I am always amazed by how reductionist we are in talking of ourselves as grantmakers... why put ourselves into one box when we can do so much more?” Many of these paradoxes certainly resonated for Canadian foundations in the plenary session.

ONE DROP FOUNDATION

To celebrate the Cirque du Soleil’s 25th anniversary, founder Guy Laliberté is starting a philanthropic initiative to address a global issue very close to his heart: access to clean water. Using circus arts, folklore, music, dance and visual arts, the newly created One Drop Foundation hopes to raise awareness about water issues both in Canada and abroad.

“Our reserves are not bottomless. Canadians may have access to water now, but without drastic intervention, the supply will rapidly dwindle,” says Laliberté. “Our future depends on our capacity to preserve water.”

One Drop Foundation is a Cirque du Soleil initiative drawing on arts-based approaches to generate social change. Laliberté cites One Drop’s community water projects in Nicaragua, one of the world’s poorest countries, as a good example of One Drop’s impact.

“Five million kids die yearly from lack of drinking water,” he says. In response, One Drop has helped in Central America by building rain water reservoirs for the dry season, teaching agricultural techniques to rural populations and helping families achieve food self-sufficiency.”

For Laliberté, philanthropic endeavours are about passion and engagement. Driven individuals engaging in philanthropy can bring about extraordinary results.

“If everyone gave one percent of their revenue, and every business gave one percent of their profit, it could fix the world’s water problems,” said Laliberté. The secret? “One drop at a time, one step at a time.”



Community-based Philanthropy and the Challenge of Making Change

A fourth theme of the conference was that of making social change at the community level. There are as many approaches to this topic as there are communities, as illustrated by a plenary session on community-based philanthropic efforts to address the challenges of poverty in three different cities, Hamilton, Montreal and London, UK.

Carolyn Milne of the Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF), highlighting the high rates of poverty in the Hamilton area, described the convening role played by the HCF in its Tackling Poverty Together program undertaken in 2004, and in the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Prevention co-convened with the City of Hamilton in 2005, bringing together over 40 members representing all three levels of government, local residents and the business community.



BHARAT MEHTA

As she explained, through this collaboration “we shifted our emphasis from alleviation to prevention and reduction; we focused on root causes of poverty; and we decided to work collaboratively across all sectors”. She noted that all partners determined to “abandon blame, to commit to innovation, risk and long-term change and to engage people and families living in poverty directly in solutions”. The Roundtable decided to focus on poverty and children in particular, and to provide a frame for the investments and strategies used by various partners in the Hamilton area working on different aspects of child poverty.

The HCF has learned that having partners with complementary strengths is crucial to its efforts, as well as successful communication of its goals and impacts.

Lyse Brunet of Centraide of Greater Montreal described the community-based approach to poverty reduction in a particular neighbourhood of Montreal, St-Michel, one of the poorest in Canada (40% of families in poverty) with a profile of single-parent families, recent immigrants and many youth dropping out of school. A local community coalition (table de quartier) has existed there since the early 1990s to address issues of poverty. Centraide decided four years ago to work with this coalition which had a track record of engaged leadership. Centraide’s role was to work to enhance the capacity of this coalition to work with other partners (such as Cirque du Soleil which is headquartered in St-Michel) to develop social housing and youth centers, to combat street crime and to further mobilize citizens to develop a commercial heart to the neighbourhood. Centraide has learned from this experience that it is essential to work with local structures with credibility and influence, to find effective local animator-leaders, to create many opportunities for local resident participation, and to involve a network of “co-conspirators” to make the link between local and regional resources. She also noted the fact that funders must take a long-term perspective with this strategy. Centraide has become much more knowledgeable about community-building, much more involved as a strategic partner with local organizations and much better equipped to act as an intermediary between these organizations and the business community.

After briefly outlining the work of City Parochial Foundation which focuses on improving the condition of the urban poor in London, Bharat Mehta of the United Kingdom described the efforts of the Foundation to work with many different partners to help community groups in poor neighbourhoods take control and to regenerate themselves. During his remarks, he posed some questions which he felt were equally relevant to European and Canadian foundations: what is the role of foundations, to influence policy or to enable others to do so? How can we make the most of the money that we have? How can we encourage local philanthropy and local community empowerment? How can we use our ability to take risks to address the niche social issues? “Ask yourselves in Canada... where are your blind spots, your underserved niches? Ours in London were the undocumented migrants, and conditions for the poor white working class. If you shut your eyes you can forget a lot of people.”

In a separate session moderated by Katharine Pearson of The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the subject of innovation and risk-taking in making large-scale social change was explored.

Frances Westley of the University of Waterloo described the notion of “critical transitions”, how people and organizations can get stuck in those transitions as they work on issues, and how funders can help get them unstuck. Foundations need to recognize when it is happening although this is difficult to do. In the transition when social innovators move from idea to exploration, funders can support them by having a high tolerance for risk. When innovators move from exploration to conservation or consolidation, funders have to be prepared to support capacity building to help them evaluate and articulate. When innovators move from consolidation to the next stage of dissemination, funders can help innovators deal with the burnout and fatigue which often occurs at this stage by encouraging reflection and knowledge harvesting. Professor Westley suggested that this is a framework that is helpful for any foundation interested in supporting comprehensive and systemic approaches to community poverty reduction with other partners.

PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION: SANTROPOL ROULANT

To Montreal locals, Santropol Roulant is synonymous with positive community action—the “Roulant” is Quebec’s largest independent meals-on-wheels program, staffed by predominantly young volunteers on bicycles. It also cultivates a rooftop garden producing all-organic foodstuffs, and offers a bike workshop promoting eco-friendly transport.

Much of Santropol’s remarkable growth over ten years has come from an exceptional group of volunteers and staff who have thought and acted in innovative ways about their mission of connecting generations and breaking social isolation through interaction around food. The opportunity to think, reflect and innovate has come about with a helping hand from The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Since 1996, the Foundation has supported the efforts of Santropol Roulant staff to plan strategically, reflect and evaluate their own work and continually develop and disseminate their own brand of social innovation.

“Good partnerships lead to good work,” said Santropol’s Executive Director Jane Rabinowicz. “Our relationship demonstrates a strong sense of mutual respect and reciprocal learning... our collaboration has value-added on both sides”.

The Santropol and McConnell collaboration has helped Santropol transition into a volunteer-based model that invests in learning and skills building for its staff and that networks successfully with other organizations who share its purpose. Such long term relationships with

foundations offer historical continuity and strong core operational capacity that enables organizations to realize their full potential. Jane concluded “Your gift to the people we work with is that you listen to us, you support us and you challenge us, and you connect us to the bird’s eye view that we need access to in order to do our work well”.



JANE RABINOWICZ

Telling Our Stories: Communications for Foundations

Shira Herzog of The Kahanoff Foundation of Calgary and Toronto, moderator of a session on story-telling in the foundation world, introduced the topic by quoting Alberto Manguel: “Stories are storehouses of diversity and difference but they are also repositories of solidarity and understanding and further, stories promote a sense of the interpenetration of cultures and the interdependence of persons”. But, as Shira pointed out, stories are just one layer in the larger construct of communications. The broader questions, she said, are: should foundations communicate? If so, why? If so, what? If so, how?

According to panelist Bruce Trachtenberg, executive director of the U.S.-based Communications Network, an affinity group for foundations, “communication is an elemental part of foundation work... grantmaking is just one piece of it. Foundations that see themselves as change agents *must* communicate. They must marshal all their resources to make people aware, try to mobilize support, try to develop partnerships and engage others in their efforts.”

“If you are a traditional grantmaker, it is not clear why as a foundation you would want to communicate strategically. But if you do see yourself as a social change agent, then communication is key,” said panelist Philip Haid, President of the Board of the Laidlaw Foundation, “I don’t think you can be in the social change realm and be quiet about it. Social change is messy and non-linear—no one person or organization does it alone. But context is important and communication will be more or less appropriate in different circumstances. Courage is necessary to get your message out in the world but if it’s done right, it will actually help you internally.”

Though communication strategies may not be suitable in all situations, foundations should never withdraw from the limelight out of fear. “It may be a strategic decision to keep your mouth shut,” says Trachtenberg. “But if a foundation takes on an issue they think is really important, and are afraid of being acknowledged as leading the charge, they are missing a very important opportunity. You don’t make things happen by being invisible—you take the lead. If you are articulate and clear and you know the audience you are trying to reach, that’s part of what you are trying to achieve as a foundation.”

Shira Herzog pointed out that foundations are not well understood by the public or the government either in Canada or in the United States. When foundations tell their stories, they help promote the success and hope of the communities they serve, while helping people understand the importance of their causes. “We have to try to put a face on the work we do so that people see it’s valuable, relevant and something they can connect with. That means telling stories about our grantees and what they have accomplished and our own role in helping them achieve it” said Trachtenberg.



SHIRA HERZOG, PHILIP HAID,
BRUCE TRACHTENBERG

“Communications does not equal advertising—it’s not about you, it’s about the issue,” Haid cautions. Depending on their objectives, foundations must design their communications for the relevant audiences, whether they are grantees, policy-makers, other foundations or, less likely, the general public. Yet without proper planning, communications can be an expensive, time-consuming enterprise with no clear outcome. So how do foundations effectively choose communication strategies?

“It’s difficult to answer this because it is difficult to measure the impact of communications,” said Trachtenberg, acknowledging the lack of benchmarking or agreement on successful communications strategies in the field. “But it is important to try to understand what people want to know and then give it to them.”

Some foundations may opt for new media vehicles like blogs, podcasts, email newsletters and websites, whereas others will rely on tried-and-true methods like annual reports, grantee outreach and letters. Recruiting journalists, marketing experts and public relations specialists can also help foundations determine whether they’re effectively relaying their message to their target audiences. But Haid urges foundations to remember that “markets don’t have vision. Focus groups and polling may kill a great idea. It’s your job to establish the vision.” He suggested that foundations turn their traditional thinking inside out and instead of telling stories about their grantees and their projects think about “What do we want to learn? And how can we share it along the way?”.

CENTRE 123 GO!

123 Go! is a community building initiative which mobilizes parents, citizens, community workers and decision-makers in Montreal neighbourhoods to create a stimulating, nurturing and safe environment for children aged 0-3 years. The objective is to give very young children the best possible start in life.

Looking back on the last 10 years, 123 Go!’s director Mario Régis credits the centre’s dynamic collaborations with various early funders for its many achievements. “In particular, several private foundations gave us key support at the very beginning including Bombardier, McConnell, Coutu and later the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon”. Centraide of Greater Montreal also played a key role in the centre’s development.

This partnership allowed the funders and the fledging organization to pool together not only financial resources, but knowledge, learnings and strategies to ensure a concerted effort between stakeholders. This early collaboration increased mutual understanding of how communities work and which community building approaches are the most effective. It also clearly demonstrated the benefits of the ongoing exchange of ideas. Equally important, says Régis, was the acceptance of risk. “Centre 123 Go! was allowed the freedom to not only experiment, but to innovate.” This enabled the centre to learn from its mistakes.

For Régis, the constant collaborative effort involved in Centre 123Go!’s development now ensures a voice for parents of young children in all phases of community decision-making and community development projects. This means, for example, that parents with young children in strollers now have access to local bus transportation to get to a doctor’s appointment or that neighbourhood parks are safer for young children or finally, that immigrant families with young children are mentored by community workers to ensure access to community services.



Philanthropy and Aboriginal Communities

The conference featured a session on the specific challenges of philanthropy in Canada's First Nations communities, moderated by Stephen Huddart of The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. In his opening comments, Stephen said "we have an issue to discuss of some importance to Canadians... but it's unfortunate that the landscape we are surveying this morning is not one of which Canadians can be particularly proud..."

"If we look at the 1998 United Nations Human Development Index—which placed Canada as the most livable country in the world—those same data if applied to First Nations communities would situate them at about #78, on par with Peru or Brazil... a situation of intolerable injustice that we cannot countenance... as citizens, as philanthropists, as leaders, it is for us to address these issues, to focus on the most vulnerable among us."

Next to no charitable infrastructure is available to Aboriginals living in remote areas and on reserves. Panelist Wayne Helgason, Director of the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, pointed to a history and culture of redistribution of goods among members of aboriginal communities before first contact. But the framework of the Indian Act which now governs aboriginal reserves prohibited this redistribution until 1951. Voluntary sector organizations are rare on reserve because so much is organized, regulated or provided for by the federal government and the notion of registered charity is not applicable. There are virtually no food banks, domestic violence shelters or literacy agencies on reserve for example.

"You may have wondered what it would be like if no philanthropy existed in your sector," says Cindy Blackstock of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. "That situation actually exists in this country—among First Nations. It exists because everyone assumes that philanthropic efforts and services are not wanted or not needed."

In the area of child welfare for example, services on reserve are seriously underfunded by the federal government, leading many children to be put into foster care rather than staying with their families. The median age of a Canadian Aboriginal is 25 years old (even younger in the North). About 60% of all aboriginal children in Manitoba live in poor families, according to Helgason. Blackstock stated that the needs of Aboriginal children are not met because of underfunding and jurisdictional disputes between provincial and federal governments.



WAYNE HELGASON
STEPHEN HUDDART
JAMES STAUCH
CINDY BLACKSTOCK

For Blackstock, stereotypes about Aboriginal life and social services promote a distorted view of the reality on reserves. “We have cut one population out of the wealth of this country,” she says. “Aboriginal populations need the same resources that everyone else in Canada gets.” How to make a difference in this situation? One way as described by Blackstock is to participate in a program called Caring Across the Boundaries, funded in part by the McConnell Foundation, which connects aboriginal and local philanthropic communities.

The third panelist, James Stauch, of the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, described the Gordon Foundation’s efforts to support aboriginal peoples in the far north, structured through its Northern Program and guided by an aboriginal advisors’ circle. About a third of the value of the grants made by the Program go to aboriginal governments; another third goes to NGOs and a third goes to other forms of aboriginal organizations.

Regarding barriers to philanthropy in aboriginal communities, Stauch commented that “the issues seem huge for foundations and it is hard to find out where to begin... But if we focus only on issues, it can be immobilizing.” says Stauch. “I’m more interested in talking about opportunities and where foundations can usefully intervene,” he said. The Gordon Foundation, for instance, is working towards involving northern citizens in the development of public policy and building more awareness in the mainstream.

Projects include building public and media awareness about the North, developing Aboriginal history curricula in schools, convening workshops on issues of importance to northern communities, linking academics to policy makers, connecting youth with elders and supporting cultural heritage, among other initiatives. Stauch suggests visiting the communities as much as possible to get a direct picture of the situation.

“The philanthropic sector is in a unique position to provide assistance to First Nations that is currently already available to other Canadians,” says Blackstock. “You have an opportunity to fund democracy.”

PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION: KIDS CARE

Film producer Laura Sky, based in Toronto, presented an excerpt from her documentary *Kids Care*. *Kids Care* was supported by Sky Works Charitable Foundation, and by the Lawson Foundation. *Kids Care* asked children who have lost loved-ones to cancer to share their experiences with grief to help youth in similar situations. A children’s advisory group supported the development of the film and has traveled to 57 communities across the country to present the film and discuss its messages.

“We learned that kids are great teachers” said Sky. “Adults can learn from kids in a way that they don’t necessarily learn from each other”. As Sky noted, “It’s not a film about cancer but about connection, about solidarity,” a fact demonstrated by a touching excerpt from the film featuring a group of teenagers Sky dubbed the “Mississauga Boys,” who recount with grace and honesty their final days with a dying young friend.

The documentary’s impact reveals how important it can be for foundations to take a risk on the unknown. Lawson gave Skyworks its largest cancer grant ever. Acknowledging this remarkable gamble, Sky said “We need you to take wise risks, we need you to invest in the learning of the kids, in our own learning as organizations and we hope that it will contribute to your own learning as foundations.”



LAURA SKY

“What this project has shown us is that kids are wise and capable teachers... they give us the route to our hearts.”

Investing in Leadership

Some foundations in Canada are experimenting with the funding of nonprofit leadership development on the premise that the effectiveness of charitable organizations is driven by the effectiveness of their leadership. Yet, in the absence of any clear definition of leadership development, many of these foundations are unsure about the impact of their initiatives.

During a panel session on the topic of investing in leadership, Sandy Houston of the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation noted that his foundation is increasingly opting to invest in talented individuals rather than in organizational capacity building. He stressed the importance of directing support to the leaders who have the ideas, skills and commitment to bring about social change.

The Maytree Foundation's Ratna Omidvar concurred, saying that Maytree has consistently supported a leading idea and the leader to implement it. "Leaders have the capacity to create the change that we're looking for," she said.



RATNA OMIDVAR

Omidvar explained Maytree's diversified approaches to building community leadership—a menu of offerings ranging from short sessions to selective long term training, from workshops to one-to-one coaching to networking.

"Diversifying the leadership landscape is also one of our most significant philosophies," she said. "It's not just leadership training; it's leadership training for and *about* diversity."

Houston echoed this, stating that foundations should think about how to promote the emergence of community leaders. "Often, the leadership of the organization doesn't look like the communities it's trying to serve," he said. "Where are the people who are interested in helping their communities? What tools are necessary to give them a voice, to have influence on the circumstances affecting their lives?"

Youth leadership can be especially neglected. Though generally perceived as disinterested and unenthusiastic about social change, when put to the test, many young people step up. Houston cited the Metcalf Foundation's Emerging Leaders program as an example of leadership development that nurtures potential in middle managers, individuals who haven't yet had the opportunities to prove themselves. Metcalf also explicitly supports network-building among the leaders so that they can continue to learn from each other. "They're becoming their own engine of change," Houston said. Leaders from different sectors such as environment, the arts and social services are strongly interested in networking and learning from each other across sub-sectors.

It was suggested that foundations put the horse before the cart in investing in individuals while the organizations are starved of resources. "The reason we have to invest in capacity building is because collectively, as funders, we are so unwilling to give organizations what they require in order to do their project work." Houston noted that to address this problem, Metcalf is investing in trying to build a network and leadership for the voluntary sector in Ontario as a whole to help give it a voice and give it more resilience in the face of chronic underfunding.

Omidvar stressed the importance of holding a conversation about how to help good organizations survive and flourish. She pointed out that leadership training is in fact an aspect of capacity building and it is done by a variety of actors in the field, including many industry associations. Foundations can work with many partners such as universities, other agencies such as United Ways and individual coaches and mentors.

It is very difficult to attribute leadership change to any single intervention by a foundation. Evaluating leadership development is notoriously difficult. In the end, it's about having faith. "We're not quite sure what our leadership development is going to do, but at least we're being courageous about it," said Omidvar. "You get a miracle every now and then to keep your faith."

Investing in Talent

Dr. Indira Samarasekera, President of the University of Alberta, closed the conference with an eloquent address about the role and collaboration of Canadian foundations and universities. “Without philanthropy leading the way” she said, “many economic and technological inequities evident in today’s communities and nations will continue to go unaddressed—or under-addressed—eroding our capacity to come together, to solve our common problems, and to improve quality of life for the so very many who are in need.”

She argued that foundations and universities share a common concern: improving the human condition and the global commons... “a vastly complicated intricate challenge that requires input and resources from many points of talent, knowledge, research and investment.” Universities are committed to developing the talent that is required. “Philanthropy that supports students as they prepare to enter the global workforce plays a huge role in helping universities meet their commitment to elevating the human potential”.

“I can understand why philanthropists might feel that universities have a far less pressing need than many of the highly visible, global problems that grip both our hearts and minds,” said Samarasekera. “But your support to universities enables us to develop the talent that will sustain the initiatives you want to advance.”

Samarasekera cited the great philanthropic gestures of the past that have stimulated and developed extraordinary minds, such as the Rhodes Scholarships, the Killam Trusts, the Gairdner Foundation prizes and more recently, the Grand Challenges Exploration Initiatives launched by the Gates Foundation. “The investment in talent—and the ongoing development of talent—is vital to our future. Without it, the great philanthropic acts of today will eventually become unsustainable, starved by insufficient knowledge, discoveries and innovations.” As she ringingly concluded, “the global commons—which embrace us all—can never have enough human talent prepared to advance the caring... the knowledge... or the commitment to solve big problems when what we seek is nothing short of a transformation towards equity in the global human condition. Only when that is achieved, will our success at creating a true global community finally be won.”



INDIRA SAMARASEKERA

Conference Program at a Glance

Opening Plenary:

Speaking From the Heart: The Engaged Donor

Presenters: Richard Ivey, Toronto, The Honourable Margaret McCain, New Brunswick and Guy Laliberté, Montreal

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22

Donor Engagement: The Passion of the Founder

Moderator: Nan-b de Gaspé Beaubien, de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation

Presenters: Philippe de Gaspé Beaubien, de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation; Carol Newell, Endswell Foundation; Stephen R. Bronfman, Stephen R. Bronfman Foundation

The Challenge of Change: Funders and Sustainable Social Innovation

Moderator: Katharine Pearson, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

Presenters: Professor Frances Westley, University of Waterloo; Tim Draimin, Tides Canada; Sidney Ribaux, Equiterre

Investing in Leadership

Moderator: Lynne Toupin, HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

Presenters: Ratna Omidvar, Maytree Foundation; Sandy Houston, George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation

Investment Policy and Social Responsibility

Moderator: Robert Alain, EJLB Foundation

Presenters: Michael Jantzi, Jantzi Research Associates; Megan Campbell, Community Foundations of Canada; John Prendergast, The Community Trust of Southland (NZ); Bill Young, Social Capital Partners

Afternoon Plenary:

European Foundation Models

Presenters: Patrick Johnston, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, Gerry Salole, European Foundation Centre (Belgium), Luc Tayart de Borms, King Baudouin Foundation (Belgium), and Bharat Mehta, City Parochial Foundation (UK)

TUESDAY OCTOBER 23 MORNING

The Foundation Accountability Debate

Moderator: Tim Brodhead, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

Presenters: Professor Joel Fleishman, Duke University (U.S.); Luc Tayart de Borms, King Baudouin Foundation; David Elton Max Bell Foundation

Philanthropy and Aboriginal Communities

Moderator: Stephen Huddart, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

Presenters: James Stauch, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, Cindy Blackstock, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada; Wayne Helgason, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg

Engaging The Next Generation

Moderator: Nancy Rosenfeld, Stephen R. Bronfman Foundation

Presenters: Jonathan Wood, The Lawson Foundation, Denise Paré Julien, de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation; James Good, The Good Foundation Inc.

Influencing Public Policy: Is there an 'Advocacy Chill'?

Moderator: Bruce Lourie, Ivey Foundation

Presenters: Sean Moore, public advocacy expert; Rick Smith, Environmental Defence

The Art of Failure

Moderator: Shelley Uytterhagen, Carthy Foundation

Presenters: Charles Pascal, Atkinson Charitable Foundation; Bob Wyatt, Muttart Foundation; Professor Joel Fleishman, Duke University

Tackling Poverty in Communities:

Lessons from Experience

Moderator: Tim Brodhead, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

Presenters: Carolyn Milne, Hamilton Community Foundation; Lyse Brunet, Centraide of Greater Montreal; Bharat Mehta, City Parochial Foundation

Telling our Story Strategically: Why it Matters for Foundations

Moderator: Shira Herzog, The Kahanoff Foundation

Presenters: Philip Haid, Laidlaw Foundation; Bruce Trachtenberg, The Communications Network (U.S.)

Funders, Researchers and Communities:

Finding Common Ground

Moderator: Peter Warrian, Lupina Foundation

Presenters: Pierre Gerlier Forest, Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation; Jody Heymann, McGill Institute for Health and Social Policy

TUESDAY OCTOBER 23 AFTERNOON

Global Philanthropy: Shared Motives, Different Forms

Moderator: Patrick Johnston, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation

Presenters: Gerry Salole, European Foundation Centre; Khalil Shariff, Aga Khan Foundation; Monica Patten, Community Foundations of Canada

Charities Regulation in Canada and the UK: Two Different Worlds?

Moderator: Mike Kray, Mike Weir Foundation

Presenters: Terry de March, Canada Revenue Agency; Lindsay Driscoll, Charities Commission For England and Wales

The Evolving Role of the Board

Moderator: Nathan Gilbert, Laidlaw Foundation

Presenters: L. Robin Cardozo, Ontario Trillium Foundation; Joy Calkin, Muttart Foundation; Norman Webster, R. Howard Webster Foundation

Closing Plenary:

Investing in Talent: Sustaining Transformation

Presenters: Indira Samarasekera, University of Alberta

Thank you to our partner and sponsors:



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