

## Is more really better?

Caroline Hartnell

**Community philanthropy organizations (CPOs), and community foundations in particular, are undoubtedly on the increase. In 1994, there were 34 CPOs in Europe, mainly in the UK. In 2002, when the Community Philanthropy Initiative (CPI) carried out its first mapping exercise, there were 260; this year there are 532. Of these, 209 are ‘fully fledged community foundations’, following ‘the classic endowment model’. There are now over 1,100 community foundations worldwide, in 42 different countries.**

This year’s CPI meeting had 48 participants from Europe, 17 from North America, eight from Africa, one from the Middle East and one from Asia – 75 in all.

But, as suggested by the title of the second plenary of this 7th CPI meeting, ‘Is more really better?’, numbers, asset size and grantmaking figures are not everything. Speakers raised a wide range of genuinely difficult issues:

- *How do we know we’re meeting the needs of the community?* Are we engaging communities in setting grant priorities? There will always be different views on priorities, and community foundations have the challenge of mediating between these and seeking consensus. In Croatia, the first step has been to carry out research involving all sections of the community. In Latvia, community forums have helped set priorities. User groups – pensioners, women, etc – have also proved successful within community foundations. How do we measure impact?
- *Are we involving all sections of the community?* A good board was generally agreed to be the key to sustainability, but who should be on it? Should board members be wealthy people, able to contribute financially to the community foundation, or should they reflect the local community? Are we succeeding in creating diverse donor bases, including young people, women, and people of colour?
- *Is the emphasis on delivering donor services diluting the work of community foundations?* Community foundations are there to address community needs. They have an important role to play in social change, and must be willing to address unpopular issues, which may upset the people who might support us.
- *Are we failing to build on existing local traditions?* In Croatia, for example, there have been self-help, local philanthropy and solidarity groups for 200 years, but no one now takes account of these local mechanisms.

Although community foundations always need more money, funding may bring its own set of risks. Are we running the risk of stunting growth by putting too much money up front, asked Shannon Lawder (Mott Foundation). After all, community philanthropy is about unlocking local resources. What are the risks, in terms of loss of independence, of accepting government funding?

## Foundations for Peace

Foundations for Peace provided an interesting example of a new global network of local funders in divided societies that is based on shared values rather than more

formal characteristics. Initiated by the Community Foundation of Northern Ireland (CFNI) last October, the network espouses three core values: social justice, peace-building and inclusion. 'Other conferences like the EFC address issues like how we raise money but not why we are doing this and how we should be doing it,' explained CFNI Director Avila Kilmurray. 'So we realized something else was needed.' Members can now discuss with people working in similar circumstances questions like: How can funders work with people not at the table and what risks do they take in doing so? How do we ensure the safety of our staff in risky situations? How does what we're doing relate to political activity?

As a small network of nine members that greatly values face-to-face meetings, how should Foundations for Peace relate to other organizations and networks? One suggestion was that it might profitably interact with community foundations and other local funders dealing with social justice issues for indigenous peoples or working in societies that have been through political violence. The 'larger justice issue' could be the connection. It is their shared values and common experiences that makes this network valuable to its members.

**EVENT** Community Philanthropy Initiative 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Networking Meeting

**Dates** 29-30 May

**Title** The Rocky Road to Sustainability

**Venue** Athens

**Organizers** European Foundation Centre

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In June Avila Kilmurray received the first Raymond Georis Prize for Innovative Philanthropy in Europe. See interview with her in the August *Alliance Bulletin*.