


National Rural Funders Collaborative

A Learning Partnership to Expand
Resources for Communities and
Families Facing Persistent Poverty



The Vision

A Learning Partnership to Expand Resources for Rural Communities and Families facing Persistent Poverty

- *A new philanthropic initiative designed to leverage **\$100 million over ten years** from public and private resources at local, regional and national levels, and*
 - *a commitment to **share and leverage our collective knowledge and influence**, as well as our dollars,*
 - *for the purpose of **expanding the availability and impact of human, technical and financial resources** necessary*
 - *for **rural families and communities facing persistent poverty***
 - *to **effect and sustain positive, measurable change.***
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The Three-fold Strategy

- **Funding** -- To organize philanthropy and other funders for greater collaboration and leverage in funding rural communities through a **national-regional grantmaking partnership**;
- **Learning** -- To share best practices, successes and lessons learned through **peer-to-peer learning network of funders and practitioners**; and
- **Policy** -- To elevate local, regional and national policy issues critical to the ongoing viability of rural areas and well-being of rural families through an **evolutionary, community-based policy forum of funders and practitioners using their collective influence to frame a more adequate rural policy**.



NRFC: A Brief History

- ❖ Spring, 1998—Breakfast roundtable at COF results in Rural Funders Working Group
- ❖ Fall, 1999—Fall RFWG Forum focus on Collaboration among Rural Funders & Expanding Resource Base for Rural Areas
- ❖ Spring, 2000—Five funders engage Neighborhood Funders Group to study feasibility of National Rural Funders Collaborative



Stakeholder Meetings – Fall, 2000

Hoped for Elements

- Flexible funding for broad, sustained community development needs
- Matching funds to leverage public/private & local/ regional participation
- Creation of a broad-based learning network of funders and community leaders
- Support for broader issues: analysis, policy, infrastructure
- Funding process and decisions are regional

Challenges to Address

- Appropriate targeting of funds to provide measurable, sustainable impact
- Well-conceived matching strategies to ensure fully engaged partnerships
- Adequate staffing to support learning activities w/o creating unneeded layers
- Primary focus on direct funding of rural areas
- Efficient structure for pass-through of national funds



Structure & Strategy

- ❖ No new 501(c)(3) – Calvert Social Investment Foundation as NRFC’s value-added partner & fiscal agent
- ❖ One Funder, One Vote – Democratic participation regardless of funding level
- ❖ Shared Governance– Inclusion of non-funders (community leaders, practitioners, at-large members) as NRFC evolves
- ❖ National-Regional Partnership Strategy – Grantmaking, learning and policy work that engages national funders and policymakers with regional collaborative partnerships of funders and practitioners



Organizing the Collaborative

- ❖ **Seven Core Funders** – *W. K. Kellogg, Mary Reynolds Babcock, F. B. Heron, Fannie Mae, Annie E. Casey, Wm. & Flora Hewlett, Wm. Randolph Hearst*
- ❖ **Strength In Diversity** – *Shared perspectives, philosophies, interests and values:*
 - *Programmatic Diversity: Rural Economic Development & Food Systems, Grassroots Leadership Development, Community Asset Building, Affordable Housing, Children & Families, Preservation of Environment and Culture*
- ❖ **Dynamic Tensions** – *Differences of Approach and Strategy as Opportunities for Broader Consensus:*
 - *Grassroots Participation vs. Involvement of Decisionmakers*
 - *Responsive vs. Directive Approach of Selecting Regional Partners*
 - *Community/Organizational Development vs. Quality of Life for Individuals & Families*



The Initial “Request for Qualifications”: Pre-conditions of a National-Regional Partnership

- *Regional Collaboration of Funders, Leaders and Practitioners*
- *Self-described Rural Area Facing Persistent Poverty*
- *Community-based Strategies for Sustained Community Viability and Improvement of Quality of Life*
- *Specific Outcomes and Measurement Models*
- *Commitment to Regional Expansion and Leverage of Resources*
- *Strategic Opportunity for Greater Impact and Participation*



Early Analysis of the Response

- September 30, 2001 – 284 letters of intent requesting funds & participation in the learning network:
 - ❖ **Geographic Diversity:** Appalachia–6%; Mid-South Delta–11%; Midwest/Plains—22%; Northeast-15%; Southeast-14%; Southwest-13%; West/Pacific Northwest-15%; Other-4%.
 - ❖ **Diversity of Issues/Strategies:** children and families; affordable housing; community economic development; healthcare; education; workforce development; access to credit; community asset development; leadership development; technology and telecommunications.
- November 9, 2001 – Twenty finalists chosen for site visits and to submit full proposal



Early Lessons from the Finalists

- Dec–Jan, 2001 – Site visits to all twenty; common issues:
 - ❖ *Diversifying funding beyond a few regional institutions;*
 - ❖ *Thirst and need for being connected to other initiatives and/or regions facing similar issues;*
 - ❖ *Lack of effective technical assistance/Need to develop local technical assistance capacity;*
 - ❖ *Difficulty in achieving adequate capitalization with which to plan, grow and sustain their efforts;*
 - ❖ *Little recognition-regionally or nationally-of the existence or quality of work of these initiatives;*
 - ❖ *Difficulty of developing succession of competent leaders from the community.*



Next Steps for NRFC

- **February 27, 2001** – 3-5 regional collaborations are chosen as initial class of partners w/ NRFC:
 - ❖ 1st year of a 3 year investment of \$100,000 - \$250,000/year
 - ✓ Will consider a few recognition grants of \$ 25,000 – 50,000
 - ❖ Core regional partners/sites for learning network
 - ✓ Will strive for geographic diversity in order to begin to build regional “clusters” of participants/ peer-to-peer networks
 - ✓ Learning network will be convened at national meeting in June
 - ✓ Throughout the year, learning will be multi-dimensional: web, regional convenings, self-defined peer-to peer exchange
 - ✓ Cross-regional exchange of sectoral strategies
 - ❖ Policy discussions w/itl begin next fall.

- **July, 2002** – RFQ for second round of funding announced & selection process begins.



A “New Direction” for Rural Philanthropy

- ❖ Diverse community-based strategies re rural poverty
- ❖ Focus on **regional** strategies specific to place
- ❖ Beyond “matching” or challenge grantmaking; looking for funder-practitioner collaborations
- ❖ Seeks to build over the ten years to accumulate a body of knowledge viz. best practices in rural development/rural philanthropy, and to craft a new, more comprehensive and adequate policy agenda

