

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Social Justice Spectrum

Seeing our work through a social justice lens:
A Perspective for Community Foundations

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*Community
Foundations
of Canada*

*Fondations
communautaires
du Canada*

301-75 rue Albert Street
Ottawa ON
Canada K1P 5E7
www.community-fdn.ca

"Social justice means that society should provide equal opportunity for all its members. For community foundations, social justice work is directed at social change – seeking solutions to social, economic, and political injustice by addressing root causes of those problems, not just their symptoms – while still supporting the organizations that meet immediate needs"

Introduction

Community foundations in Canada and around the world are working to meet urgent community needs, respond to longer-term local priorities, encourage philanthropy, introduce donors to approaches that make a difference to the community, and improve the community's quality of life. We are working toward communities where all citizens have economic opportunity, equal access to high quality education and health care, vibrant cultural voices, safety, and the respect of their fellow citizens. We are working toward communities that treat their citizens fairly and equitably. We are working toward communities that are just.

But achieving that ideal community is a challenge. Too often, immediate needs in the community are so pressing we have no time or resources left to consider the root causes of those problems or – consequently – their long-term solutions.

But by adopting a social justice lens on some of their ongoing work in grantmaking, asset development, and community leadership, many community foundations are aiming at solving basic problems rather than treating their symptoms over and over again. It is important to remember that adopting a social justice lens does not mean abandoning existing activities or grantees.

Current needs must be met. Adopting a social justice lens means finding ways to advance social justice opportunities and tackle root causes – in addition to the more traditional support we are used to providing.

Social justice philanthropy is not simply good intentions or idiosyncratic self-definition.

In part, social justice philanthropy is as much about how you do something as about what you are doing.

As Rev. John H. Vaughn, executive director of the Peace Development Fund, states:

'It is more than teaching a person to fish, it is supporting their efforts to get a company to stop polluting the lake he or she is fishing in.'

**Brenda Hanzl
and John Hunsaker**

CHANGE BEYOND CHARITY:
UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL
JUSTICE PHILANTHROPY

Community foundations have a long-term perspective and a vested interest in finding long-term solutions. They are uniquely positioned, with their eye on the future, their understanding of community through their grantmaking and community leadership, and their broad web of community connections.

The **Social Justice Spectrum** provides some directions for community foundations to consider as they look at their work through a social justice lens. Developed for Community Foundations of Canada's November 2003 Social Justice Forum, and subsequently revised to reflect the input from that meeting, it presents a wide spectrum of opportunity, ranging from meeting the immediate short-term needs of affected individuals, to funding grass roots community mobilisation initiatives, to conducting research and engaging donors on social justice issues, to collaborating on advocacy efforts for legislative change.

AN EXAMPLE:

For several years, St. Christopher House in Toronto has run an income tax clinic for about 800 seniors, as well as helping them fill out other government forms. Through these programs, staff noticed that many low-income seniors did not know they were eligible for the federal Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) and were therefore living on even less money than they were entitled to. In 2000, St. Christopher House had a visiting social policy "fellow" who discovered that the GIS problem affected more than 380,000 seniors – not just those the agency served. With this information, the agency advocated for the two federal departments involved to reach out to eligible seniors more aggressively. This has increased the income available to many seniors and improved the system's responsiveness.

Most community foundations approach their work in social justice by first identifying an important community issue. Sometimes the issue emerges through the grant making process and is manifested through multiple applications for help in a particular area, for instance affordable housing or shelter. In other cases the issue may emerge through community dialogue about pressing concerns. Sometimes the focus crystallizes as a result of a crisis in the community – for instance in response to a series of racial incidents.

Whatever the issue, the next step for most community foundations is to learn as much as possible about the issue and about those involved. Possible responses are explored and debated and consensus emerges on how best to respond. Each community foundation is unique in its response. Some respond through grantmaking and other support to those

A CHALLENGE:

The root cause of a problem is not usually people. It is often a system. Tackling root causes often uncovers the need for systemic change.

working effectively on social justice issues. Others apply a broader spectrum of community foundation resources to the issue, including their voice through advocacy. Whatever approach – or combination of approaches – you take, social justice work provides a full range of opportunity for community foundations to work with their communities to find long-term solutions to critical social problems.

Social justice philanthropy is, for many, a new way of working. It is often "messy" and ill-defined. It pushes us to move beyond our comfort zone, to take stands, to work with people we may not know or even like, and to look at issues from many perspectives. It forces us to analyse our own way of working, our policies and practices. Working with a social justice lens helps us expand our networks, understand issues more deeply, learn new skills, and further unleash our potential to influence change.

The Legislative and Regulatory Environment

Community foundations must operate within the CCRA rules on advocacy, but there is more room for action than might be imagined. To clarify the rules regulating community foundations and advocacy activities, CFC turned to expert Richard Bridge. His paper, "Innovation and Problem Solving – a Bolder, More Active Role for Community Foundations," (available from CFC or online at community-fdn.ca) provides clarification of CCRA regulations affecting community foundations.

Where to begin

For many community foundations, the first steps will be analysis of their current practice and discussion at the Board table about placing a new emphasis on getting at the root causes of community problems. With that commitment established, many community foundations will then reach out to groups in the community who are working on social justice issues to learn more about local needs and opportunities. Based on the input of those groups, the community foundation can make adjustments to its grantmaking guidelines and/or priorities, and to its planned community leadership activities. It is likely that many community foundations will decide to give more attention to social policy, and support to groups that are advocating for change.

Social justice and the principles for community foundations

A social justice lens is implicit in most of the ten Principles for Community Foundations outlined in the 2nd Edition of *Explorations*. Building capacity, creating dialogue, developing partnerships, and reflecting diversity all contribute to the full participation of citizens in our communities – a basic foundation for more equitable communities. Internally, understanding our communities, creating an effective grants program, building community assets, evaluating, being accountable, and balance are essential to a social justice focus as they are to all our work. Adopting a social justice lens builds on the foundation of our ten principles.

About language

There is no doubt that the term "social justice" is a powerful one and, for some people, controversial or negative. Community foundations may go through an evolution of comfort with social justice language, moving to use the words only after achieving some experience and success in the work.

What we do is more important than the words we use. But while some people may be uncomfortable with it, the term shouldn't be a bad word in Canada, where social justice is a fundamental pillar on which our society is built. Community foundations can show leadership by reclaiming the term.

How the Spectrum is organized

The **Social Justice Spectrum** is designed to stimulate discussion on how community foundations can advance social justice through their work. It is organised according to the three roles of community foundations – grantmaking, donor service and endowment building, and community leadership – and the way we work: our governance.

*"If you have come here to help me,
you are wasting your time..
But if you have come because your
liberation is bound up with mine,
then let us work together."*

Lilla Watson, Aboriginal artist and organizer

The community foundation's three roles – through a social justice lens

1. GRANTMAKING

Community foundations have an impact on social justice issues through their grantmaking. They help meet the immediate and urgent needs of those individuals and groups most affected by issues and, by doing so, help build their capacity to participate in the social change process. They help groups and communities connect and mobilize around issues, support innovative projects addressing root causes, and fund advocacy and awareness initiatives that engage policy makers and the broader public. They advance learning by making grants for research and evaluation, and by supporting dissemination of information and knowledge on social justice issues.

Grantmaking can:

Strengthen the capacity of those most affected

- help meet the basic and immediate needs of marginalized people
- support basic training and development
- fund operating costs of groups supporting the disenfranchised, and simplify their reporting burden
- fund community economic development initiatives
- take a calculated risk on funding an innovative group

A CHALLENGE:

The grantor/grantee relationship is a power dynamic. How do we move to a more collegial, equal relationship with grantees? As one community foundation volunteer discovered, "I've been thinking I had to keep my distance from grantees, to stay neutral. Now I realize it's ok to get close."

Build the capacity for mobilization around social justice issues

- fund leadership development programs for underrepresented individuals
- make grants that promote the inclusion of underrepresented or affected groups
- support technical assistance to strengthen groups' capacity for social justice work
- fund community mobilizing initiatives among existing and emerging grass roots social movements
- support initiatives that build cross-sector connections, collaborations and networks

Advance learning about social justice work and issues

- listen to grantees/applicants and identify social justice priorities
- fund social innovation that addresses root causes
- fund research into root causes
- fund evaluation and dissemination of social justice work
- put a deliberate social justice screen on grant applications: ask grantees how their project advances social justice

Support advocacy and awareness initiatives

- fund groups that are learning about influencing legislative agendas and policy makers
- fund groups that raise public awareness about social justice issues
- support organizations that are engaging and influencing elected officials

A CHALLENGE:

Social justice results are not immediate. Funders need to adjust their expectations and evaluation criteria accordingly.

2. DONOR SERVICE AND ENDOWMENT BUILDING

Community foundations are committed to providing comprehensive services to donors. That service often includes helping donors understand the priority needs of the community. With a social justice lens on donor service and endowment building, community foundations can:

Engage donors in social issues and innovative solutions

- share research reports and community demographic information with donors
- invite donors to community meetings on social issues
- engage donors in discussion about the difference between root causes and symptoms of social problems
- use donor newsletters and annual reports to provide information on social issues and highlight innovative solutions
- tell success stories

A CHALLENGE:

Funders need to be available as solutions are being developed – not when problems have already grown. The early enabling work as communities develop their own solutions is crucial – but seldom funded because outcomes are uncertain.

Introduce donors to innovative grantees

- take donors on site visits to grantees who are doing innovative work in the donor's area of interest
- highlight innovative grantees at annual meetings and other celebrations
- introduce donors to community leaders engaged in social justice work and facilitate one-on-one meetings

Stress the value of undesignated funds

- help donors understand the essential flexibility that undesignated funds give the community foundation to be proactive about community issues, rather than simply reacting to needs
- help donors understand the need for a multi-year, multi-approach commitment to a specific social issue

AN EXAMPLE:

One community foundation is considering establishing an open social justice fund in memory of a well-known community activist.

Establish endowment funds directed at social justice issues

- work with donors to establish donor-advised/field of interest funds for issues like poverty, literacy, social research, policy development
- establish a micro-loan fund for emerging minority businesses

AN EXAMPLE:

In 2002, the Moffat Family made the largest gift ever to a Canadian community foundation, starting the Moffat Family Fund at The Winnipeg Foundation with a gift of \$100 million. The family's vision is "a Canadian society where all individuals have equal opportunities to develop their potential." The fund is supporting innovative projects in Winnipeg and 12 other Canadian communities where Moffat Communications did business.

3. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Community foundations have a unique potential to bridge and build connections between people and convene groups from diverse sectors of the community. They can draw knowledge and information from their local, provincial, national, and international networks. They have status and influence in the community along with access to financial and other resources. They can use their convening role to promote social justice in their community. They can use their "clout" to bring social justice issues to the attention of policy-makers and influencers in their area.

By applying a social justice lens to their leadership role, community foundations can help move ownership of important community issues beyond the affected groups and into the broader community, ensuring that elected officials, policy makers, media, and others know that the whole community is concerned about justice issues. Often, the convening process makes it clear that policy and legislative change is essential to a long-term solution to the social issue under scrutiny. Community foundations then have an opportunity to be

advocates for social change. Community foundations can use their community leadership role to:

Contribute to the social justice and advocacy work of others

- participate in community forums, think tanks, and public consultations around social justice issues
- facilitate connections between groups working toward a similar goal locally, regionally, and nationally
- engage donors and other funders in discussions about social justice funding
- facilitate exchange of views between grassroots groups and policy makers
- "campaign" for change with others

Promote awareness of social justice issues

- share information and learning broadly with community groups, policy makers, elected officials, donors, media, and others
- convene donors to discuss social justice
- "champion" other groups who are working toward policy change in support of specific justice issues
- tell stories to celebrate social justice successes
- inspire the broader community with "what is possible" on social issues

A CHALLENGE:

For most organizations and social justice issues, a community foundation grant is just a small part of their funding. However, community foundations can influence other sources and leverage additional funding. They can also provide stability with a multi-year grant.

Build understanding of policy making and its impact

- promote understanding of key policy areas that affect social justice issues and their root causes
- share knowledge and information about how policy change occurs (build awareness of the legislative and electoral cycles, knowledge of key government players and their roles and relationships to policy development and legislative reform etc.)
- monitor government developments relating to social justice issues

AN EXAMPLE:

One local organization was concerned that low-income people were not running for school board positions. They found that the districts were so large, people of modest means could not travel through their constituency to truly represent residents. The organization is working to have the district boundaries redrawn to more manageable size.

Assume a lead or collaborative role in advancing social justice work

- convene dialogues, think tanks, study sessions with grass roots/ social justice groups
- lead or collaborate with others on social justice research and evaluation
- hold information sessions on influencing policy makers and legislative reform
- develop mediation skills in the community

Spearhead advocacy initiatives on broad-based community issues

- identify a social justice issue that requires leadership
- identify and bring together those who are concerned about the issue
- determine what policy change is required and build alliances for change
- build a "case " for policy change
- approach key opinion shapers who can get the issue on the legislative agenda
- provide input into bureaucratic level consultations
- meet with legislative representatives to influence their views in favour of change

Promote the need for advocacy with the broader public

- develop key messages in support of policy change
- "campaign" for change by informing the public of the need for policy change and ways that they can participate
- celebrate successes and acknowledge the contributions of others

How community foundations work – governance through a social justice lens

The way we operate is as important as the work we do in each of our three roles – and no less so if we adopt a social justice lens. Building on the Principles for Community Foundations outlined in *Explorations*, 2nd Edition, there are a number of ways community foundations can advance social justice in their own operations and demonstrate their institutional commitment to social justice.

Internal practices that advance social justice

- reflect community diversity – and ensure that that diversity is integral to decision making. (As one Aboriginal spokesperson has said, "I've been consulted to death. I want to be on your Board and make decisions.")
- establish board and committee recruitment policies and practices that ensure inclusion of underrepresented groups (minorities, low-income people, youth, etc.)
- ensure that staff hiring policies and practices are truly inclusive
- use board and staff meetings to learn about social justice issues
- ensure that investment policies include ethical investing strategies
- seek out minority suppliers
- simplify the grant application process and reporting burden for grantees
- devise grant and program evaluation criteria that capture the long-term nature of social change.

A CHALLENGE:

Fear of the rules and fear of public or donor reaction is far more inhibiting than the reality; self-censorship is one of the biggest obstacles to social justice work. Address risk-aversion internally.

The Social Justice Spectrum is one of a series of tools developed for Community Foundations of Canada and its members, as part of the Building Foundation Commitment and Capacity for Social Justice project. Community Foundations of Canada is grateful to the Ford Foundation and the Atkinson Charitable Foundation for their generous support of the social justice project.



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