

# *The David and Lucile Packard Foundation*

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**Phase One Evaluation**

## **Community Foundations Initiative on Management Assistance**

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September 1999

**Teamworks**

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## Acknowledgement

I want to thank the interviewees who generously shared their thoughts with me regarding their experiences with the Community Foundations Initiative on Management Assistance. Interviewees were notably candid and reflective. Of special note, I want to thank the staff of the community foundations who organized productive site visits, ensuring that a complete portrait of their program would be drawn for me.

Renee A. Berger

## Foreword

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation has a long history of support for community foundations in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Area and a deep respect for the role that community foundations play in the life of a community. The Packard Foundation also has a commitment to supporting and promoting the effective governance and good management of nonprofits. This emphasis dates from 1983 when the Packard Foundation began making small grants to local community-based organizations to assess, plan, develop and train boards, and assess the feasibility of new programs and campaigns.

In 1994 the Packard Foundation Board approved an exploratory cluster of grants to eight Northern California community foundations, enabling them to research the management assistance needs in their respective nonprofit communities. Those modest grants began a process of discovery as well as a long and fruitful partnership between the Packard Foundation and the participating community foundations.

This first interim evaluation reports on what has evolved into the Community Foundations Initiative on Management Assistance. It documents the process, the achievements, and the challenges encountered along the way as well as the challenges ahead. The report also makes clear the real potential for community foundations to productively and directly engage in building the organizational strengths of their local nonprofits while developing their own internal strengths and capacities.

The Packard Foundation is proud to be a part of the process and the partnership and also to acknowledge the vision and hard work of the community foundations and their staffs. It may be a truism, but grant funds have little value without the essential commitment of the people who do the work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara D. Kibbe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Barbara D. Kibbe  
Director  
Organizational Effectiveness and Philanthropy  
January 2000

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**“When we first got a grant from Packard, I thought, okay that’s good. Our line of thinking now is that we can’t imagine living without the management assistance center.”**

## Executive Summary

The following report documents the early implementation experiences of eight northern California community foundations participating in The David and Lucile Packard Foundation’s Community Foundations Initiative on Management Assistance (referred to as CFI). The CFI was launched in 1994 with a clear and simple assumption: community foundations are in routine conversation with local nonprofits and are well-positioned to facilitate or deliver services to strengthen the nonprofit sector in their local areas. CFI began with needs assessments that were accomplished by the community foundations between 1994 and 1996. Information from these assessments set the stage for the development and implementation of an array of projects. The CFI provides up to five years of implementation support. Between 1994 and 1998 the Packard Foundation provided nearly \$1.4M to the CFI grantees.

The eight participant foundations are: Community Foundation for Monterey County, Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, East Bay Community Foundation, Fresno Regional Foundation, Humboldt Area Foundation, Sacramento Regional Foundation, Sonoma County Community Foundation, and Sonora Area Foundation.

CFI is best appreciated from the perspective of a journey where some roads would be familiar to the traveler, but others not. Packard’s funding was exploratory. In that vein, the evaluation is focused on discovering how the various programs are evolving and how they are affecting the various participant groups. The evaluation seeks to surface processes that further a goal of exploring the potential roles for community foundations in strengthening the delivery of management assistance. The overarching questions guiding the evaluation are: What activities are underway? How are various parties (i.e., the community foundations, the participating organizations, the trainers) affected? What challenges are encountered? Are there particularly promising practices?

The considerable diversity of the eight foundations, their locations, and different stages of development makes it challenging to draw generalizations. Also CFI itself takes several structural forms. Five of the foundations directly administer the management assistance program, and the remaining three partner with external management assistance providers to operate the program. While the differences present challenges, they have provided an unusually broad range of contexts and strategies to explore.

There is a pattern among the community foundations, especially the ones directly administering programs, of surprise with the unexpected impacts. The community foundations have found that their credibility and visibility have been raised, and that they have discovered a range of nonprofits previously unknown to them.

Moreover, foundation board and staff appreciation of the ongoing governance and management needs of nonprofits and their relationship to effective programs has deepened. Even such a seemingly static strategy as supporting the purchase of library resources has turned dynamic as a result of the foundations locating the libraries at their offices. Simply put, more people visit the foundations. With this heightened interaction, it would seem that the potential for abuse of confidences might escalate. Thus far, foundation staff have been careful to honor the information shared with them and respect the boundaries between and among the foundation, grantees and/or training participants, and consultants.

Nonprofit agency staff stated that they are now availing themselves of training because of the accessibility, relevance, and quality of programs. People noted they were faced with deciding whether or not to trek from Sonora to San Francisco, drive “over the hill” from Santa Cruz to San Jose, or go from Monterey to San Francisco or Los Angeles for training. Many more local opportunities are available to them now. The training programs are well-subscribed.

Important too, in many cases the foundations have set aside pools of funds for management assistance. Several foundations have increased commitments from their own funds to support technical assistance needs. These resources have given local nonprofits the opportunity to hire consultants to assist with strategic planning, financial management, and board development. Localities that thought they might not have sufficient consulting expertise have been surprised to discover such capability exists.

This initial exploration also surfaced a number of challenges. While all of the foundations have embraced the program, only modest attention is being paid to planning how the programs will be sustained after Packard's funding stops. It should be noted that a number of them have charged for courses and are offsetting expenses, but there is a shortfall that needs to be addressed. Also, while capable trainers and technical assistance providers have been identified in the various localities, their ranks are thin. And, several foundations expressed concern that they did not have bilingual trainers or others who could bring needed cultural sensitivity to a segment of the nonprofits they wanted to serve.

Distance and isolation remain structural problems within the service areas, leaving some areas less served than others. Program directors are juggling with trying to provide everything to everyone, but are concerned about the extent to which they can offer opportunities for deeper organizational change.

Overall, the early indications are that the nonprofit sector in the participating communities is richer as a result of CFI. Nonprofit staff are being introduced to community foundations, they are gaining access to quality training and technical assistance, and their own day-to-day struggles to foster sound organizational practice are seemingly better understood by themselves and by foundation staff. The community foundations have elevated their visibility, discovered local organizations they previously had not known, and have heightened their appreciation of the demands placed upon nonprofit organizations.

Given that this effort is roughly mid-course for many of the participating community foundations, these are impressive gains.

**“A big challenge we have as a community foundation is to really walk the walk ... to know the nonprofits in the area, what they experience, and through them to understand the needs of the community. The connector for me has been the management assistance program because it is at the front lines and is the place where we really hear the opportunities, the challenges.”<sup>1</sup>**

## I | Introduction

The following report provides observations of the early implementation of The David and Lucile Packard Foundation’s Community Foundations Initiative on Management Assistance (referred to as CFI). This report is part of a multiyear evaluation that will emphasize sharing learning between and among CFI participants.

The CFI was launched in 1994, with a clear and simple assumption: community foundations are in routine conversation with local nonprofits and are well-positioned to facilitate or deliver services to strengthen local nonprofit organizations. The CFI is an outgrowth of more than a decade of Packard Foundation interest in building organizationally sound nonprofits. Packard’s earlier work identified uneven capacities in different localities to respond to growing leadership and management needs within the nonprofit sector. The CFI is housed in Packard’s Organizational Effectiveness Program and specifically relates to the goal of building the field of nonprofit management.

Though the CFI is called an “initiative,” it should not be confused with recent efforts in the broader foundation community that typically consist of an elaborately designed template for testing specific hypotheses about certain communities, institutions, and so forth. The CFI is best appreciated as a cluster of grants that share a common theme and offer grantees considerable flexibility so they can tailor what works best for their respective communities. There were two steps to the CFI design: (1) invite community foundations to conduct a needs assessment that included community input and (2) mount an implementation based on the assessment’s findings.

Ten community foundations in Northern California were invited to submit responses to a request for proposals. Eight foundations elected to respond and are now participating in the CFI. They are: Community Foundation for Monterey County, Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, East Bay Community Foundation, Fresno Regional Foundation, Humboldt Area Foundation, Sacramento Regional Foundation, Sonoma County Community Foundation; and Sonora Area Foundation.<sup>2</sup>



Three of the foundations launched their needs assessments in 1994, with the remaining ones completed in 1995 and 1996. Thus, some participants are as much as two years further along than others into implementation. The CFI provides up to five years of implementation support. Between 1994 and 1998 the Packard Foundation provided nearly \$1.4M to the CFI grantees.

## 1.1 The Evaluation Approach

CFI is best appreciated from the perspective of a journey where some roads would be familiar, but others not. Packard's funding was exploratory. In that vein, the evaluation is focused on discovering how the various programs are evolving and how they are affecting the various participant groups. It explores the potential roles for community foundations for offering and/or strengthening the delivery of management assistance. The overarching questions guiding the evaluation are: What activities are underway? How are various parties (i.e., the community foundations, the participating organizations, the trainers) affected? What challenges are encountered? Are there particularly promising practices?

Between January 1999 and July 1999, the evaluator visited the eight community foundations, interviewing nearly 70 people. Interviewees included board members of the community foundations, the chief executive of each foundation, the program's lead staff person, technical assistance providers, and participating nonprofit organizations. The purpose of these site visits and interviews was to obtain a thorough understanding of how each community foundation is implementing the program. In turn, the intent is to apply this information toward developing a learning-focused evaluation workplan.

Each interviewee was asked to view this inquiry as the evaluation's planning phase, designed to "get the evaluator smart and sensitized" to their work and to their needs. In all cases, a summary of impressions was provided at the end of the site visit. This took place with the chief executive and the program director. In several cases, because of scheduling conflicts, the debriefing was solely with the program director.

The considerable diversity of the participant foundations and the communities they serve, and the substantial differences in how programs are structured, present certain challenges for generalizing results. The foundations range from highly rural locations to urban ones. All cover service areas that are a mix of urban and rural features. Also, the foundations vary greatly in their own stages of development.

The structure of the program varies from those that are housed within and directly administered by the community foundation to those that are facilitated by the community foundation but managed by other entities such as volunteer centers. Programs housed within the community foundations share some commonalities, and those administered by nonprofit management assistance providers have their shared experiences, too. For example, the impact on the community foundations' visibility is far greater for those who directly administer the CFI. And, the programs operated by management assistance agencies provide laboratories for experimenting with deeper training experiences than they traditionally offer.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Overview of CFI Programs

As previously noted, there are eight community foundations participating in the CFI. On average, the CFI-funded programs have been operating for about two years. Most might be considered as mid-course in their development. Below a brief profile of each of the community foundation programs is presented.

- The *Community Foundation for Monterey County* Management Assistance Program (MAP) offers a wide range of well attended courses from fundraising to personnel law and insurance for nonprofits. Over 140 area agencies, large and small, have participated in MAP's training programs. Underscoring its own commitment and confidence in the MAP, the foundation doubled its commitment of unrestricted monies for technical assistance grants. In January 1994, MAP launched the Certificate Program in Nonprofit Leadership and Management, a distance learning program offered through the University of Wisconsin. This endeavor is planting a seed at California State University – Monterey Bay, where early explorations are underway with MAP to develop a local certificate program and potentially a bachelors degree with a concentration in nonprofit management.
- The *Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County* Management Assistance Program (MAP) offers a broad spectrum of workshops, information and referral services, operates a library at its office, and has funded the acquisition of the Foundation Center's core database at the Santa Cruz and Watsonville public libraries. In response to demand, both libraries have purchased the Foundation Center's "FC Search" which provides advanced search capacities. The MAP administrator conducts monthly workshops on fund research skills at these public libraries. MAP's training programs are diverse, including board excellence, recruiting board members, "rookie"

grantwriting, and budgeting for small nonprofits. MAP is also in the midst of conducting the first in-depth study of nonprofits in Santa Cruz County. In addition to MAP's services, but directly tied to its goals, the foundation's board earmarked \$30,000 (a 50% increase) from its own unrestricted monies to provide support for small management assistance grants. Santa Cruz MAP and Monterey County MAP collaborate on several fronts, including organizing a grantmakers event for area nonprofits in both counties to learn about how funders make decisions.

- The *East Bay Community Foundation* is partnering with the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC) to build an infrastructure for management assistance in the East Bay. The effort is known as the East Bay Management Assistance Partnership Project (East Bay MAPP). It is focused on structural change and improving the links between local nonprofits and local management assistance resources. East Bay MAPP has recruited "Strategic Local Partners" in Alameda and Contra Costa counties whose charge is to house demographic information about their sub-region and to eventually offer a menu of services including needs assessment tools, publications, opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, and referrals. NEDLC works closely with the Strategic Local Partners to build a network among them, broker connections to various management assistance resources, and strengthen the partners' capacities.
- The *Fresno Regional Foundation* Nonprofit Advancement Center's (NAC) mission is to provide the "best training opportunities, management concepts, and reference materials to nonprofits in the Central Valley." The NAC, which was launched with Packard's support, is offering a diverse training program including courses in governance, strategic planning, collaboration, fundraising, and financial management. Over 500 people have participated in center programs in the past couple of years. Staff have reached out to the California State University at Fresno, exploring the possibility of developing a certificate course, and have brought training programs to poorly served rural areas. The NAC's resource library serves as a magnet for many who previously never had contact with the foundation.
- The *Humboldt Area Foundation* is using Packard's support to greatly expand the services of its Rooney Resource Center, a program of the Humboldt Area Foundation and the North Coast's information clearinghouse and support center for nonprofit organizations. Center services include a resource library, workshops (an average of 60 per year), a newsletter, and information and referral. Over 1000 people have attended Rooney

Resource Center programs. An advisory committee provides input into programming and is being used as a vehicle to further develop the local consulting community. The center also sets aside a pool of funds for nonprofits that want to address specific governance and management assistance needs, such as increasing board member involvement. Center staff engages in extensive networking to strengthen the local nonprofit community. For example, staff provides facilitation and administrative assistance to the Northern California Association of Nonprofits, a local trade association.

- The *Sacramento Regional Foundation* partners with a local Nonprofit Resource Center to provide a unique 10-month customized training program for chief executives of area nonprofit organizations. The program, entitled “Nonprofit Leadership: Raising the Standard,” offers over 60 hours of hands-on training designed to produce specific products (e.g., a marketing plan), mentoring, and on-site management assistance. Despite often heard protestations from nonprofit chief executives about how their busy schedules prevent participation in such time-consuming programs, enrollment in the first year exceeded expectations (47 applicants for 15 positions) and attendance was excellent. In addition to reports of sharpened skills, participants found themselves developing new support systems and even fostering new collaborations.
- The *Sonoma County Community Foundation* works in partnership with the Volunteer Center of Sonoma County to provide an in-depth training program for board members. Board members, similar to chief executives, have limited availability and are often reluctant to commit the time needed for training. Despite this hurdle, the Volunteer Center mounted a program that has several stiff requirements: (1) 80% of a board must be present or the session will be cancelled; and (2) board members must be present for the full workshop, which lasts seven hours. The training is part of a comprehensive package of services that includes a needs assessment, follow-up “check-ups” with the trainers, and management assistance. The Volunteer Center convenes the trainers who have created a “learning community” among themselves to share tools and other resources to advance this program. The foundation and its partner, the Volunteer Center, want to provide the board excellence program to an estimated 70 organizations, roughly 10% of the nonprofits in Sonoma County.

- The *Sonora Area Foundation* Nonprofit Support Center (NSC) offers workshops, information and referral, a Foundation Center library, and a newsletter. Workshops are offered on board development, marketing, fundraising, and grantwriting, among other subjects. In its young life, the NSC is already emerging as a focal point for training services in this somewhat isolated area, attracting people from the outer reaches of Sonora and Tuolumne counties. The NSC reports that roughly 40 people per month visit its library, which is located at the foundation. Importantly, the work of the NSC is helping to surface local consultants. Outreach is an important part of the center's work. It is hosting an advisory council with participants from nearly 20 nonprofits that meets bi-monthly. Notably, a board member from the Sonora Area Foundation is attending these meetings.

<sup>1</sup> All quotes are derived from the interviews. The interviews were conducted with an understanding that no names would be associated with quotes.

<sup>2</sup> To enhance readability, the foundations are referred to in the text by their location or by their formal names.

<sup>3</sup> Foundations that directly administer CFI are the Community Foundation for Monterey County, Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, Fresno Regional Foundation, Humboldt Area Foundation and Sonora Area Foundation. The East Bay Community Foundation, Sacramento Regional Foundation, and Sonoma County Community Foundation have engaged third parties to administer the program. In Sonoma and Sacramento the third party is a management resource center that provides training; in the East Bay it is an intermediary organization that is facilitating access to training.

**“ I was told ‘you ought to charge more for that class’ . . . it was exciting for them to be with other board members and learn they have similar problems.”**

## 2 | Findings

This section discusses the impact of the CFI program on the community foundations, describes the scope of the management assistance activities, and explores the effects upon nonprofit participants.

### 2.1 Impacts on the Community Foundations

#### 2.1.1 Foundation board members and staff report that participation in CFI has increased foundation visibility and credibility.

Board and staff, principally of those programs housed within foundations, tended to first cite heightened visibility and credibility as key outcomes, before listing other ones. Though acknowledging that credibility is difficult to measure, people pointed out that the relationship with the Packard Foundation provided an important boost to foundation credibility. They underscored that their local cachet was raised by having a prominent outsider to their community recognize them. In regard to enhanced visibility, it was clear that the aggressive marketing of training programs and outreach into the more isolated parts of service areas (e.g., Humboldt’s outpost of assistance in Garberville and Crescent City, and the East Bay’s Strategic Learning Partners) is succeeding in raising awareness of the community foundations themselves.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2.1.2 CFI has increased the community foundations’ breadth and depth of knowledge of local nonprofit agencies.

Among those programs that were housed within the community foundations, a number of board members commented they: (1) feel more knowledgeable about the area nonprofits and their needs and (2) are growing more familiar with these organizations’ management challenges. Specifically, for several of the foundations, the marketing of CFI-sponsored training programs resulted in surfacing many nonprofit organizations that had previously been unknown to them. (It is also occasionally bringing the foundations into contact with government agencies.) Several board members volunteered that they are better able to decipher the jargon of nonprofits. In many cases board members’ principal professional experiences have been in the private sector and the

terminology of the nonprofits was initially quite foreign to them. As a result of CFI, discussion has increased about such topics as management, leadership, and team building, concepts that readily translate to their own professional worlds.

**2.1.3 The CFI is raising awareness of the need to address organizational effectiveness as an ongoing need for building a stronger nonprofit institutional fabric.**

Several foundation executives commented that involvement in this program has given them needed imprimatur to advance recognition of the organizational needs and management challenges of nonprofits. With this heightened recognition has come an opportunity to think more strategically about the long-term needs of institutions. Both board and staff noted that they are thinking more strategically about how to foster stronger organizations, rather than solely focus on sustaining or expanding program support. Specifically, CFI has, in several cases, contributed to refinements in grant guidelines. It is also credited with enhancing grantmaking practices.

- Several foundations reported that they had refined or otherwise changed their guidelines (e.g., Humboldt, East Bay) to encourage applicants to consider applying for support for organizational needs, such as strategic planning and board development. The Sonora Area Foundation's largest grant (\$34,000) last year was to meet one organization's needs for operating support to stabilize staff and better position it for growth. And the Sonoma County Community Foundation has a small grants program dedicated to capacity building. Applications for support from participants in its board leadership training program are given greater consideration for funding.
- Monterey and Santa Cruz previously had pools of funds set aside for technical assistance grants and have increased the size of these pools—reported as a direct outgrowth of the participation in the program, an increase in applications, and in the quality of the applications.
- The five foundations that directly administer programs have increased the hours of the program directors. In three cases, staff initially hired to work roughly 25 hours a week have become full-time. Funds for their positions seem to be mainly from soft money, combining Packard with other grants. As their presence has increased, so too has their involvement in other aspects of foundation activity, e.g., working with program officers to integrate management assistance into grantmaking.

**2.1.4 Outreach to more isolated and previously uninvolved parts of service areas has presented challenges to several program operators.**

Each of the foundations experiences special geographic and also what are referred to as local “cultural” challenges. The chief problems are the length and difficulty of travel—and, occasionally, psychological separation caused by local

topography or poor road access. This separation contributes to perceptions, among some participants, that they are outside the mainstream culture. Foundations that reach into mountainous areas, and/or cover a large territory with poor country roads, face special problems. The nonprofits in these more removed areas are often small and less connected to other nonprofits, and they are especially concerned about committing the time of their one or two staff to training. In several of the cases (Santa Cruz, Monterey, Fresno), the groups in the more remote areas often primarily consist of volunteers and are Latino. These factors compound the structural problem of poor roads or daunting distance. Each of the foundations that experiences this set of challenges appears to be experimenting with ways to mitigate the isolation.

- The Humboldt Area Foundation made a decision to hire part-time staff who would be physically located in two outlying cities. A key hiring criterion was the requirement that the prospective staffer have familiarity with the locality's nonprofits. East Bay's effort to identify existing agencies to serve as Strategic Learning Partners is another example of outreach expressly designed to address local needs and sensitivities. Both Sonoma and Sacramento are challenged geographically because they serve areas that are mountainous (Sacramento reaches into El Dorado County), making driving during snowy weather especially difficult.

**2.1.5 Thus far, from this early exploration, the potentials for “ethical” violations and for inhibiting participants from being candid do not appear to have been realized.**

While the close relationship between community foundations and nonprofits was key to the rationale for launching CFI, it was also a cause of concern. As a result of CFI, community foundation staff are in the position of potentially being exposed to sensitive information about local nonprofits. This can occur during foundation staff contact with nonprofit organization board and staff in workshops, in their review of agency applications for management assistance grants, and in the course of conversations about information and referral needs. Information gleaned during these contacts could lead to breaches of confidence or be used to meddle in the private affairs of an organization. On the one hand, foundations interested in supporting organizational effectiveness benefit from knowing an agency's needs; on the other hand, nonprofits are inclined to be reticent about their needs, preferring instead to focus on their strengths. This conundrum was known at the outset of CFI; what was unknown was how the community foundations would handle the situation.

In those foundations where the program is in-house, the potential for nonprofits to be less candid for fear of the consequences of talking about governance and management needs, and for foundations to inappropriately use information they have learned from program participants, does not seem to be arising. Clearly trust has been built with particular foundation individuals.



There is, however, an emergent need to codify practices to ensure confidentiality and to clarify who owns information derived from program participation.

A few nonprofit interviewees expressed that they initially experienced anxieties about being forthright, but that the concerns were quelled as they grew to trust the intent of the foundation and the person who is running the CFI-funded program. Several stated that the community in which they work is small and that there are no secrets; others pointed out that they felt increasingly safe talking about board and management needs. This latter group said that rather than being punished for revealing difficulties, they are potentially rewarded for focusing on strengthening their organizations.

To some degree, the foundations are constructing firewalls between the CFI-funded program directors and their distributions committees to ensure that “inside” information is carefully handled. In most cases, it appears there is an understanding that distributions committees will make decisions based upon information presented in applications (and possibly supplemented in site visits). CFI program directors are not expected to provide additional detail about a group’s operations. The heart of this issue is who owns and is empowered to provide information.

At Humboldt, for example, it is made clear that its role is to empower grantees and applicants. Its management assistance program is designed to ensure that the primary relationship is between the grantee and the management assistance consultant. This is also the case with the Monterey and Santa Cruz technical assistance grants. Notably, in these three cases, the CFI program director has the authority to review applications and make grant award decisions. If asked, they suggest consultants. Any information about the status of the grant’s implementation is drawn from communication with the grantee, not the consultant. These boundaries appear to have developed from the program directors’ own sense of ethics and appreciation of power. These decisions are among the most important manifestations of values. As noted above, such processes are at risk of being tied solely to the character of the individual program director and need to be codified to ensure they are institutionalized.

**2.1.6 There is presently little strategic planning regarding how to sustain the CFI program, despite the often stated commitment to its continuation.**

Packard Foundation funding for the CFI is slated to decline and eventually to stop. While great enthusiasm was expressed for this program, little time has been devoted to strategically planning to ensure sustainability. For those programs that are housed within the foundations, each emphasized the crucial importance it has played in furthering the foundation’s goals. The programs

are credited, as referenced earlier, with reaching out to previously unserved constituencies and communities, changing how the local culture converses about organizational needs, and even altering the internal culture of the foundation. Some of the foundations are relatively early in their implementation and have focused much of their energies to launching and fulfilling CFI plans before they seek added support. Others are now participants in California Endowment's California Management Assistance Program, which is helping to supplement their budgets. In general, however, the community foundations have not devoted time to strategically planning how to address future revenue needs.

## 2.2 The Management Assistance Programs

### 2.2.1 **The CFI program directors report the programs have benefited from the added credibility of having an affiliation with the community foundation. This is especially true for those who administer CFI programs housed within the community foundations.**

The administrators of programs operated by the community foundation noted that the affiliation with the foundation aids them in their marketing. At the beginning of CFI, some of the community foundations did not have especially high profiles, yet they are proving to be effective and credible intermediaries for organizing and marketing training and management assistance. The community foundations hired people to serve as program directors who brought backgrounds and knowledge in human resource development and nonprofit management. These people have proven to be entrepreneurial. They have done a good job building trust with participants and with the chief executive to whom they report. An added benefit is that there has been high stability in these key positions (this is also true for those who administer the programs at the management assistance agencies).

From an institutional perspective, the foundations do not carry the occasional liabilities associated with university-based training such as high cost and lack of customization. While the community foundations are potentially a funding resource, many workshop attendees said they are not motivated to participate because they may have an interest in submitting a proposal to the foundation. Many said they are more likely to seek larger grants from government and look to the foundation's library and grants training for acquiring grantwriting skills.<sup>5</sup> Participants recognize that community foundation discretionary monies are often modest—and, in some cases, foundation policies might limit eligibility (e.g., Sonora's funds are almost exclusively restricted to Sonora County, but workshop participants come from Tuolumne and other counties).

**2.2.2 The programs that are internal to the community foundations typically provide access to library resources (on fundraising as well as various governance and management needs), offer diverse training opportunities, and increasingly are offering access to management assistance. A critical role played by the program directors that is often not recognized is information and referral.**

- *The libraries.* Program directors maintain records of library usage, and they report that use has been surprisingly high, and importantly, growing. An interesting by-product of having libraries physically located at the community foundations is that they result in increasing contact between local nonprofit organization board and staff with community foundation staff. Foundation staff have grown more familiar with the faces of the people running area organizations and vice versa. The Humboldt library is in the main entry area of its offices where several staff have their desks. For Humboldt's current board and staff, this "open door" arrangement is quite symbolic. Just a handful of years ago under prior leadership, Humboldt preferred to minimize interaction between the foundation and the community.
- *The training programs.* The training programs cover a broad spectrum of topics and are occasionally designed for differing levels of readiness. The training fulfills goals of increasing knowledge and basic skill development. The directors keep records of trainee participation. They also utilize simple evaluation forms designed to elicit feedback on the quality and utility of the programs. The training programs provide a vital vehicle for introducing nonprofits that had been unknown to community foundation staff, and for facilitating contact between nonprofits, trainers, and management assistance consultants. Training programs at the participant foundations have grown in their range of offerings and in their depth.

For example, Monterey has progressed from sponsoring "one-off" sessions to offering a series of programs, intended to build on each other, for board and staff development. Santa Cruz added a session targeted for board presidents. Its board president is a speaker. Several of the sites are exploring, or have mounted, formal certificate programs. (Fresno is examining the development of a program with the state university, and Monterey enrolled its first class in a University of Wisconsin long-distance learning program in nonprofit management.)

- *Management assistance.* There appears to be an emergent progression from offering training to complementing the training with management assistance opportunities. As programs mature, the administrators are finding themselves seeking ways to balance continuing to serve basic training needs

with furthering and deepening the impacts of their work. They have turned to allocating a portion of their funding (or asking trainers to offer follow-up assistance) to provide for meeting management assistance needs. Notably, two of the foundations, Monterey and Santa Cruz, previous to CFI had pools of funds allocated for management assistance grants, but have significantly increased the size of those pools. For example, Santa Cruz increased its technical assistance pool, from its own funds, from \$20,000 to \$30,000.

- *Information and referral.* The program directors, especially those who are housed at the community foundation, spend a considerable amount of time providing information and referral services.<sup>6</sup> They are looked to by workshop participants, management assistance applicants, and people from other organizations for assistance identifying their own agency needs and for guidance regarding training and management assistance. In fact, several of the program directors estimated that the single greatest proportion of their time is spent doing mini-assessments and referring people to various consultants. One consultant described this as a business screening service, noting that it greatly enhances her own efficiencies.

**2.2.3 In those locations where nonprofit centers are administering the program, the CFI monies are being used to provide programs that target specific stakeholders and have ambitious objectives associated with organizational change.**

In some areas nonprofit management assistance agencies already offer the introductory-type courses similar to the CFI's programs that are administered in-house. The CFI programs administered by the nonprofit management assistance agencies take their work a step further than their traditional offerings, focusing on deeper and more customized experiences.

- In Sonoma and Sacramento, the community foundations each partner with a local management assistance agency that is experimenting with training programs requiring a longer and deeper commitment than these agencies' core offerings. Sonoma's board excellence program represents a major departure from how it had previously provided such training. This is also the case with Sacramento's program, whose target audience is nonprofit chief executives. CFI participants in these programs reported that they were initially concerned about the major commitment of time. Enrollment, however, has been good and participants report improving their skills. Important unanticipated outcomes from Sacramento's program including fostering new collegial relationships and several participants were exploring formal collaborations with other organizations.

**2.2.4 CFI is building a stronger market of management assistance providers.**

The programs are playing important roles surfacing local management assistance talent and occasionally cultivating networking among management assistance providers so that knowledge and skills are further advanced. The Sonora Area Foundation was concerned that it would not find a local pool of management assistance providers. It assumed that it would need to recruit trainers from Sacramento and other locations. To its surprise, Sonora learned that there is a local talent pool, consisting of trainers who live there but whose markets have been elsewhere. Sonoma, which has a substantial pool of trainers, has fostered the creation of a “learning community” among the people involved with its board training program. These trainers meet regularly to share information and to trade and upgrade tools that they are using. Several sites made use of the National Center for Nonprofit Boards governance training program targeted to consultants who do board training.

**2.2.5 The program staff have formed advisory committees for their own guidance and to expand and better coordinate the network of people interested in building sound nonprofit organizations.**

All programs have established advisory committees to perform a variety of functions including providing input to refine programs and networking to strengthen connections between participants. These advisory committees, however, vary greatly as to their degree of activity. The Humboldt Area Foundation and Sonora Area Foundation advisory committees are especially active, meeting on a regular schedule and enjoying good attendance. Humboldt’s committee chiefly focuses on program refinements. Sonora’s is designed to gather input from nonprofits and it aggressively uses this forum for networking purposes. Notably, a board member attends Sonora’s CFI meetings. Monterey’s advisory committee was established soon after the program was launched and is focusing on sustainability among other issues. A Monterey board member is on this committee.

## 2.3 Impacts on the Nonprofit Participants

### 2.3.1 Nonprofits are experiencing increased access to a range of training opportunities.

The nonprofit agency interviewees expressed a great deal of enthusiasm about their local CFI program, underscoring the benefits from expanded access to library-based resources and to training and management assistance. In those locations where there is no freestanding management assistance center, the CFI's resources have been critical to establishing a specific hub, providing much needed efficiencies for the nonprofits to access training and management assistance. As noted, for those sites where there is a freestanding management assistance provider, participants are experiencing training customized to result in deeper learnings than they more typically encounter in the offerings of these agencies.

Interviewees routinely reported that prior to CFI's offerings, they would think twice about whether or not to attend a training session. For example, in Monterey and Santa Cruz people reported that they would not pursue training opportunities because it meant going to San Francisco, San Jose, or even Los Angeles—all costly timewise and financially. Very small organizations are especially reluctant to send people away for a day or two. Locally available sessions have made training accessible.

### 2.3.2 The CFI programs are contributing to creating a climate where it is safe to discuss organizational matters.

Staff and board members of nonprofits are generally reluctant to talk about their organizational needs. They are more inclined to sell their strengths and otherwise pose as healthy organizations. This is true in peer-to-peer discussion and especially the case in their interactions with funders. Participants in these conversations are aware that it is expected in the course of development that difficulties and challenges will necessarily arise, but do not want to raise them for fear of exposing their vulnerability. Issues that range from dealing with the complex dynamics of chair and chief executive relationships, the adequacy of financial systems, and the management of sensitive personnel matters are common to all organizations but are left undiscussed. CFI seems to be changing this situation.

In several cases, program participants reported that they were experiencing more opportunities to engage in conversation about organizational capacity needs and to receive affirmation that their problems and concerns were not unusual. Several observed that they felt that the local culture was changing, allowing them to talk about tender subjects without fear of being viewed as incapable of doing their jobs. These conversations are taking place among the peers they meet in training sessions and with the CFI-funded program directors.

**2.3.3 CFI is fostering increased access to management assistance providers.**

The participants were enjoying the significant increase in their awareness of who's who in their management assistance community. Several of the non-profits, after exposure to providers in CFI-sponsored training, have separately retained trainers for management assistance. They feel that the sessions give them a good opportunity to preview prospective consultants. A major constraint, however, is that these organizations have minimal resources to retain people. This has been mitigated somewhat in the case of the programs run by Humboldt, East Bay, Sonoma, Monterey, and Santa Cruz, each of which has a component to fund management assistance.

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to assess whether this has aided efforts to raise additional monies for supporting management assistance needs. Some believe that there is a connection between their participation in CFI and the opportunity to participate in the California Endowment's California Management Assistance Program.

<sup>5</sup> Fresno Regional Foundation works closely with development staff of the local university who have been highly successful with their government grantmanship. This staff has provided training and follow-up services to assist people with researching and writing applications. One of the interviewees directly attributed her ability to submit a winning proposal to this grantmanship program.

<sup>6</sup> Occasionally a program director will conduct a training program. These occasions have been generally limited to teaching people how to use the library (Santa Cruz) and when there is a lack of a particular training capacity (bilingual trainers in Monterey). Such involvement appears to be done with careful consideration as to whether it is appropriate or not and if it stifles developing a broader marketplace of trainers.

“The big barrier, endemic in the field is that I am too busy . . . I have to help people first is the attitude. There is the barrier, too, that people see themselves as terminally unique. So training is low priority for many.”

### 3 | Some Challenges

The interviewees were quite reflective about their work and cited a number of challenges. The commonly cited critical ones included:

- *Increasing the pool of management assistance providers.* Diverse interviewees, including program administrators and consultants noted a concern about the limited number of trainers and management assistance providers who were people of color and/or bilingual.
- *Increasing the pool of able trainers in certain “technical” subjects.* Several program directors noted that they were able to find capable consultants for areas such as accounting, personnel law, and nonprofit insurance needs, but had more difficulty finding able trainers in these types of subjects.
- *Overcoming isolation and ensuring exposure to cutting edge work and thinking.* Foundation executives and program directors expressed their own desires for learning. Most particularly, the program directors who spend most of their time focusing on the learning needs of others feel they get little time to meet their own needs.
- *Increasing efficiencies and decreasing duplication across programs.* Many of the programs are collecting similar kinds of information, such as assessment tools, evaluation materials, best practices, and bibliographies. Program administrators recognize that efficiencies could be heightened by using the benefits of the Web for sharing information, but, with busy schedules, have been unable to focus on this task.
- *Determining the most effective ways to meet the needs of the distinctive organizations located in outlying and less accessible areas.* The chief executives and program directors want to reach out to their more remote areas, but are struggling with finding the most effective means of accomplishing this goal.



- *Determining how to successfully balance addressing wide-ranging basic management training needs with the desire to pay greater attention to the deeper, more challenging organizational needs of participants.* Program directors find themselves balancing between wanting to be a mini-university, offering a potpourri of courses for all needs and taste, versus working with organizations in a more profound and lasting manner.
- *Learning what techniques, in courses such as fundraising, are more likely to truly advance skill levels.* Program directors have been experimenting with various designs to deepen the impacts of training. Directors are offering courses where people meet on multiple occasions (rather than solely offering workshops), customizing programs for participants with different levels of experience, coupling training with access to consultants for follow-up. They expressed an interest learning more from others about how they are tackling the need to advance skill levels.
- *Identifying how to better document program outcomes.* All of the participant foundations have developed techniques for documenting the impacts of the training programs on participants. They are interested in knowing the adequacy of these systems and in learning if there are ways to elicit harder, more quantitative types data (and show “causality”).
- *Having adequate funds to pay for consultants.* All of the programs involve consultants who perform as trainers or as management assistance providers. Program directors find themselves relying upon the good will of local consultants, hoping that they will charge less than their standard rates. While many consultants have been willing to provide their services at concessionary rates, they would really prefer having their time more fairly valued.
- *Occasionally dealing with board members’ perceptions that there are too many nonprofits.* Several of the foundations executives and staff said they were battling perceptions among board members (and occasionally others, such as business people in their community) that there was a proliferation of nonprofits and, by implication, that they were not especially efficient or effective.
- *Identifying techniques for fostering cooperation/collaborations between and among participant organizations.* Program staff and nonprofit organizations talked about the need to promote more collaboration among nonprofits as well as with government and business.

- *Raising the funds to sustain the program.* During these initial years of operation the chief executives and program directors have channeled their energies into program design. In a sense, this has been a period to product test and determine the scope and needs of the market. Little time, however, has been devoted to planning for program continuation after Packard's funding stops.

Finally, the success of the programs has brought with it the challenge of coping with growing workloads. Those who remain part-time report that the program demands exceed the hours they are committed to work. Also, the nature of the program requires extensive clerical types of tasks—developing mailing lists, managing course registrations, handling a large volume of telephone inquiries, and so forth. A number of the programs have built in support for clerical assistance, and the foundations have provided their own staff to help with various tasks. Fresno reports using volunteers.

**“ You need to establish understandings, a culture within a board so that they know that problems a nonprofit experiences is one of the reasons we are here. Developing a center of [governance and management] expertise will only make us even more valuable to the community.”**

## 4 | Areas for Potential Exploration

This section posits next steps for the evaluation. As noted earlier in this document, the goal of this first stage of analysis was for the evaluator to learn about the various programs and explore their activities and early impacts. Based on this information, ideas would be advanced for the next stage of study. Whereas traditional evaluation would call for making recommendations, leaving the task of follow-up to the grantees, here we will be exploring a somewhat more facilitative role for the evaluator to advance learning.

Some of the possible areas for further exploration include identifying specific practices that advance learning (e.g., coupling training with coaching), examining what lessons are learned from those programs that require longer time commitments and seek deeper change, analyzing how foundations that have programs that are in-house manage the ethics of their relationship to grantees, exploring funding practices that support organizational effectiveness (i.e., new grant guidelines, operations of distributions committees, etc.), and examining the role of various mechanisms that promote networking and collaboration (e.g., the advisory committees, roundtables for executive directors, learning communities of technical assistance providers, etc.).

The following is a list of some of the possible practices that address these topics:

- Community Foundation for Monterey County, Fresno Regional Foundation: Monterey has launched a formal certificate program associated with the University of Wisconsin’s long-distance learning school. The program was fully enrolled in its first year and is currently underway. Notably Fresno has been exploring the development of a certificate program with California State University at Fresno. It would be worthwhile to explore how these relationships are evolving.

- Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County, Community Foundation for Monterey County, Humboldt Area Foundation: Areas to explore include documenting the processes used for reviewing and awarding management assistance grants, examining how confidentiality is protected, and identifying how to maximize learnings from these experiences (given the constraints of confidentiality). In addition to documenting these practices, it would be useful to examine grantmaking guidelines and the extent to which they are now supporting interests in capacity building.
- East Bay Community Foundation, Humboldt Area Foundation (and others): Interesting questions include, How are foundations reaching out to outlying areas? What progress are they making overcoming the obstacles of geographic isolation and people perceiving that they have highly localized needs?
- Humboldt Area Foundation: Interesting features of the foundation's work include facets of its relationship with participants that focus on trust building and information exchange, including the provision of management assistance grants and board site visits for grant review. Other notable practices include the recent survey of nonprofits as well as the workings of the outposts in Garberville and Crescent City. (And possibly looking at this in relation to analogous efforts of the East Bay Community Foundation through its partners.)
- Sacramento Regional Foundation: The foundation has commissioned a local independent evaluation that might produce some interesting learnings. This foundation has encountered challenges with attracting business community members to serve as mentors for training participants. It could be worthwhile to learn what they are doing to address the obstacles.
- Sonoma County Community Foundation: It might be fruitful to examine the particulars of how the board excellence program is carried out (possibly pairing this with the Sacramento executive training program). Also of interest is the Volunteer Center's effort to build a learning community among its consultants to the board excellence program. Another area of exploration might be the foundation's capacity building grants program.
- Sonora Area Foundation, Humboldt Area Foundation, East Bay Community Foundation (and others): Each uses advisory committees and other forums to foster communication among the various stakeholders. It might be productive to explore the structure, purpose, and progress of each of these committees.

In addition to exploring some of the above practices, the evaluation workplan could seek to tackle some of the challenges outlined in section three of this report. For example, those foundations that share a common interest in deepening culturally sensitive and bilingual management assistance providers might be encouraged to form a “learning circle” to share experiences and ideas for addressing this need. And, to diminish duplication and potentially enhance communication, a Web site and a listserv could be created.

In closing, this first stage of inquiry yielded a rich array of learnings. The foundations were themselves quite surprised with the range of impacts of the program. As mentioned, the effects upon the community foundations are more immediate, profound, and eye opening for those who directly administer programs. They are expanding their knowledge of nonprofits in their locality and heightening appreciation for the ongoing demands associated with building sound organizations. Among those institutions that had existing management service delivery mechanisms, it has permitted important experimentation toward deepening the impacts of their training programs.

Overall, the early indications are that the nonprofit sector in the participating communities is richer as a result of CFI. Nonprofit staff are being introduced to community foundations, they are gaining access to quality training and technical assistance, and their own day-to-day struggles to foster sound organizational practice are seemingly better understood. Given that this effort is roughly mid-course for many of the community foundation participants, these are impressive gains.

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