

In Pursuit of Full Potential: Contemporary Narratives in the Community Foundation Movement and their Implications for Emerging Institutions

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Abstract

Myra Virgil explores developments in the community philanthropy movement and their consequences for nascent community foundations, particularly for jurisdictions like Bermuda where no similar entity exists. An inquiry into the contemporary debates on the core functions of community foundations and the consequences for their roles, sustainability, and assessing impact is also undertaken. A list of recommended readings is drawn, which can be used as a primer for Board and staff members of emerging community foundations and social capital markets.

The vast literature on community foundations makes learning about the field's most contemporary developments a daunting task, especially for busy professionals and volunteers. Ms. Virgil surveys the seminal work and new knowledge about community foundations, and draws important conclusions for embryonic foundations in new markets. She finds that, as local and global communities have changed, so have the contours of the field and the possibilities for the community foundation vehicle. Although there are underlying tensions regarding the mission and values of community foundations, it is clear that emerging community foundations must pay critical attention to the strengths and challenges within each context. A fundamental role for community foundations of all types is to provide information and connect people with resources and needs across sectors, making sense of the wealth of existing and emerging resources. New community foundations need not sacrifice their core missions to become active leaders in their communities. While local conditions and ecologies certainly differ and will manifest in varied responsibilities for community foundations, unexplored and unanticipated opportunities will emerge by remaining nimble, creative, and community-driven.

Ms. Virgil concludes that community foundations must remain committed to well-established ideals of place-based philanthropy, i.e. honoring local identity, utilizing resources from the broader philanthropic community, and tailoring culturally-specific giving practices. However, remaining open to new ideas, adapting them into institutional practices, and aligning people and processes with emerging program models and paradigms, are key for the new community foundation at a time of transition in the movement.

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