

Global Fund for Community Foundations Consultation process summary

Why consult?

The Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF or 'the Fund'), under the guidance of its Management Committee, has been determined to approach as seriously and creatively as possible the proposal to transform the Fund from being a project of WINGS to becoming an institution. This determination began with the creation of an Incubation Committee to oversee the process of exploring if and how to turn the Fund into an institution. It continued into commissioning a 'pre-feasibility' study that considered what would be necessary if the Fund were to become an institution. One of the key recommendations of that study was that it was essential that the future scope, strategy and structure of the Fund should be based on consultation with all core constituencies of the Fund. The Incubation and Management Committees agreed and so commissioned a global consultation process.

Who have we consulted and how?

The consultation process is ongoing, but already we have reached more than 500 professionals working in community foundations and philanthropy in all regions of the world, with roughly 15% being in the 'North', 50% in the Global South, and 35% in Eastern Europe. Most people consulted are senior managers or board members in their organizations, those these range from the World Bank to the smallest emerging foundation in Africa. In addition to the online questionnaire promoted through *Alliance* magazine (141 responses), we've done telephone interviews, group discussions, and informal talks at a range of events. In Brazil, the Philippines and East Africa, we're using grant funds to facilitate regional consultation.

What have people said?

About whether the GFCF should become an institution.....

No one has questioned the assumption that there is a need for funding the development of community foundations and local philanthropy in the Global South and Eastern Europe in particular. Is the GFCF the right vehicle to meet that need? The answer seems to be a resounding 'yes'. The Fund is widely seen as a very welcome new potential funding partner and, in many cases, as the only likely source of early stage support for capacity building etc.

About where the GFCF fits in the philanthropy and community foundation world...

In addition to filling a major funding gap, the Fund is also seen to be filling a gap in the institutional architecture of the philanthropy world. Particularly in the South, there is a sense in which the Fund is seen as 'ours', an institution at global level representing the interests and facilitating debate about the role of emerging and developing community foundations.

About what 'global' should mean for the Fund...

Unless it changes its name, the Global Fund for Community Foundations has a global remit that it has to date interpreted as giving priority in grant making to the Global South and Eastern Europe, drawing inspiration and learning (as well as funds) from the Global North. In

the main, everyone in the consultation process supported this interpretation, but one important issue was raised on several occasions:

If the Fund can in theory make grants anywhere in the world, would it consider supporting emerging or struggling community foundations in disadvantaged or marginalized communities in the North? Examples given by people included specific regions (e.g some parts of the southern states of the United States), and specific groups of people (e.g. Native Americans).

About building constituency...

All organizations have multiple constituencies and the Fund is no different: funding partners, community foundation practitioners in the North, potential, current and past grantees, the wider community of people involved in philanthropy at local level. In one way or another, the Fund will need to communicate effectively with these different constituencies. However, some constituencies are of course more important than others, and in this case most people felt that the core constituency is the body of potential grantees, wherever they may be, though especially in areas in which philanthropy is weak or undeveloped.

So what are the issues or challenges for the Fund in terms of building constituency? Some of the points put forward in the consultation process to date include:

- A big stress on communication, but recognition that different constituencies need different information;
- The importance of access – if the core constituency feels that it is simply the applicant rather than part of something bigger (a mission to place community philanthropy at the heart of local development for instance) then it will cease to look at the Fund as anything other than A.N.Other source of funds;
- Following on from access, the Fund needs to find ways of enabling all constituencies to have powerful roles within the Fund's structure and processes (see below)

About how flexible the Fund should be in its focus...The debate is summed up in these two comments:

It is essential that the Global Fund's role is not limited to community foundations as defined in the United States. There is a critical need for the Fund to harness the energy and ideas at the broader community philanthropy level and help to convert it to more strategic forms of community giving and engagement. (Global South)

While I hope that the Fund will, over time, be very flexible, I also hope that it will truly demonstrate its commitment to serving community foundations and philanthropy support orgs, and not spend too much of its energy and time at this stage pushing the boundaries of what a cf is and why it doesn't work (according to some views) in some places. (North)

No one suggests that the Fund should not focus on community foundations, but with a very few exceptions, most people recognize the need for flexibility. In the questionnaire, almost half of respondents gave priority to 'stimulating the development of new and varied types of community philanthropy (including community foundations)' with less than a quarter of respondents wanting to 'spread the community foundation model as widely as possible'.

About how the GFCF should make grants... Everybody acknowledges the Fund's primary role as a *grant maker*. However, the issue of grant making strategy provoked much more varied responses. Again, most people feel that some form of proactive strategy will be

necessary, but there is less clarity on what this means in practice. The option that received most support was for an open programme combined with using grants to stimulate applications from particular regions, though there was a lot of support for targeting particular regions for a period. These two comments sum up the debate:

I believe that the Fund can have the greatest impact by maintaining an open granting cycle across the globe. You are one of the few organizations doing this. To pick certain geographic areas could stifle the beginnings of a movement in another region.

Target regions/countries where there is already some promising activity, good chance of success of CPOs and ensure that the support given includes documentation of the model/best practices. One successful example/case in a country or region can often easily spur others.

A number of important issues were raised in the consultation process with regard to developing a proactive strategy:

- Will the Fund be able to find suitable intermediaries in all regions it might wish to target?
- Will intermediaries offered a grant to help develop good applications etc also be able to apply to the Fund?
- Has the Fund got or will it develop the capacity to work closely with intermediaries who might themselves be in need of support with regard to philanthropy and community foundation development?
- How will the Fund avoid conflicts of interest and local sector politics?

About what the GFCF should fund... There is widespread recognition that building a strong community foundation takes time, skills, knowledge - so the Fund will need to continue with its mix of grants for training, learning visits, seed funding and challenge grants. However, within this mix, there is room for creativity: supporting the development of media and communication skills and strategies; feasibility studies for new initiatives; writers' scholarships, and so on. With regard to concerns about the quality or availability of intermediaries in many regions, suggestions emerged to ways of developing and investing in intermediary and consultant capacity, including establishing a GFCF 'Fellowship' for aspiring resource people, and funding the development of training curricula.

About what the Fund should do in addition to grant making

A clear conclusion of the consultation process is that the Fund should do much more than make grants; indeed, that it probably must do more. In all the consultation processes there has been consensus that the Fund should take seriously its potential role(s) in building knowledge/fostering learning etc about community philanthropy and community foundations. There was not a lot of enthusiasm, except amongst those very new to the field, for the Fund to become a 'resource centre'; there was much more support for gradually building its own knowledge base and making this available for others.

By far the most popular potential role was to '*facilitate an active learning community focused on local philanthropy*' – and discussions around this role generated some exciting roles for the Fund to explore:

- Building and building on the network of advisors
- Convening e.g. the Africa Philanthropy symposium held in Kenya
- Stimulating debate locally via creative grant making

- Working with ‘thought leaders’ over time, eg sponsoring research or publications
- Maintaining and encouraging a creative Blog role online and creating an online forum
- Ensuring not only that the Fund has a regular spot at the key philanthropy and community foundation conferences but that its sessions steadily become known for their quality/interest etc

Amongst respondents from the Global South, there was considerable enthusiasm for the Fund playing roles in encouraging more support for community foundation development, for an ‘enabling environment’ and for including community foundations in local development policy and implementation approaches (e.g. community driven development). However, it’s fair to say that other than some general comments on policy frameworks, tax and increased funding, few people had concrete suggestions for how the Fund with its limited capacity could take on advocacy roles. The few people who did discuss this at length placed the emphasis on behind the scenes work, using sympathetic networks (formal and informal) to ensure that the community foundation and local philanthropy messages continue to be heard in funding and development circles. Another strong point was that the Fund will be more able to make a policy or funding case when it has a strong body of evidence on which to base its case.

About how the GFCF should be governed and structured... There is a strong desire amongst the core constituency for representation, but recognition that this is difficult at Board level. Overall, there was strong support for a small board combined with a larger advisory group that would more adequately represent different regions as well as all key constituencies including community foundation practitioners in the North. In general, the role of advisors provoked much discussion. There was a general consensus that the Fund will need two levels of advisors, one being a representative body of people who can provide contextual and strategic advice on a voluntary basis, and a second level of individuals working in the sector who will need to be paid and whose own capacity as resource people may need investment.

About where the GFCF should be based... For most people, location of the Fund’s head office doesn’t matter though if pushed, the South was the preferred option. Whatever base is selected, there was strong support for keeping the main body of staff members together in one place, and for thinking creatively how to work with partner foundations in the North to provide an office base, meeting facilities etc.

What can we conclude?

The consultation process is illustrating the need and opportunity for the Fund, not only as a grant maker offering critical early stage funding, but as a creative force in the community foundation and philanthropy world. There has been a universal welcome for suggestions that the Fund can develop important roles in facilitating debate and creative thinking about how philanthropy at community level fits with other development processes. If the Fund really develops this approach, then what emerges is an identity based on a creative strategic approach to placing community philanthropy and community foundations at the heart of local development processes. If it’s clear that for this to happen, thorny issues such as how to link organized philanthropy to traditions of giving must be dealt with, then the Fund will be the convenor of debates around those issues. If it’s clear that the capacity to support community foundation development on the ground is simply not there, then the Fund will be flexible and proactive in using grants and other strategies to build that capacity.