

# Toward Best Practices in Environmental Grantmaking

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Strengthening  
Community Engagement  
and Capacity at the  
Local Level

April 2004

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Prepared for the Hamilton Community Foundation  
and Community Foundations of Canada

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*On behalf of the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network*



Hamilton Community Foundation's role in environmental grantmaking has been increasing in recent years, and when we were chosen to participate in The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation's environmental initiative, we commissioned this study to help us become as strategic and effective as possible. We asked the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network to focus on four areas we believe are critical: strengthening capacity, collaboration, citizen engagement (particularly with youth, neighbourhoods, and diverse groups), and grantmaker leadership. They have done a superb job of bringing together expert opinion, case studies, best practices, and thoughtful commentary.

We are very pleased that this new resource will be shared with our fellow community foundations and other grantmakers, thanks to Community Foundations of Canada, as we all work toward improving and protecting our environment.

**Carolyn A. Milne**

*President & CEO*

*Hamilton Community Foundation*

As this study shows, most community foundations are just beginning their work in the complex and challenging area of environmental grantmaking, but initiatives like the partnership between Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) and The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation are helping CFC and our 139 members explore that potential.

This publication represents a major addition to the community foundation toolkit as we build our understanding of how community foundations can support the environmental sector in this country. We hope that *"Toward Best Practices in Environmental Grantmaking: Strengthening Community Engagement and Capacity at the Local Level"* will also be useful for private foundations and other grantmakers supporting environmental action.

**Monica Patten**

*President & CEO*

*Community Foundations of Canada*

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This project was initiated by the Hamilton Community Foundation and Community Foundations of Canada to identify best practices in environmental grantmaking at the local level, with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of community foundations and other grantmakers in building the capacity of the local environment sector and increasing citizen engagement in community environmental issues. The Foundation engaged the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network (CEGN) to develop and coordinate the project.

The analysis and recommendations of this report are based on a review of literature, interviews with knowledgeable foundation staff and environmental leaders across Canada, and examination of nine case studies. These case studies are grouped into four key areas: capacity building in the local environment sector; collaboration and partnership at the local level; constituency building and citizen engagement; and grantmakers taking leadership.

This report is not intended to be a definitive guide, but rather to provide an overview of the current state of knowledge and practice in the field and to serve as a starting point for further discussion and debate on best practices in environmental grantmaking at the local level.

### A. Overview of Community Foundations and the Environment

#### *Community Foundations and Environmental Funding:*

There are 139 community foundations currently active across Canada, but the environment is a relatively new funding area for many of them. Despite the public interest in a healthy environment, this represents a small part of community foundation grantmaking, estimated at between four to five percent of their total grant dollars in 2002. In part, this reflects the overall pattern in foundation and corporate giving, although community foundation environmental grants are smaller than the average for Canadian environmental grantmakers. However, there is considerable variability among community foundations, and growing recognition that more can be done.

The general roles and strengths of community foundations present particular opportunities for

them in the environment sector to partner with other funders, to work with government agencies, to provide leadership to local ENGOs (environmental non-government organizations), and to be a convenor on community environmental issues.

The ability of community foundations to grasp these opportunities is dependent on their available human, information and financial resources and, more importantly, on the willingness of the foundations to take a leadership role on environment issues in their communities.

#### *Character of the Environment Sector:*

Environmental groups at the community level are typically younger, smaller, and more lacking in infrastructure, stable revenue streams and public funding than groups in other sectors. At least half lack charitable status, and their Boards tend to be less strategic and less sophisticated than in other sectors. Many ENGOs are born in response to a threat to the local environment, and advocacy to change government policies is an important focus for some groups, which may bring them into conflict with agencies and the business sector. However, the environment sector is far from homogenous, and some organizations have evolved to a broader focus and greater permanence.

In general, the environment sector has an image problem – ENGOs are often perceived as radical and out of the mainstream, even where that reputation is clearly not deserved. While environment groups perform an essential function in communities and devote countless volunteer hours to the public good, they remain vulnerable and in great need of support.

### B. The “Best Practices” Case Studies

For those community foundations and other funders willing to take up the challenge of environmental grantmaking, the nine case studies summarized below suggest principles for effective local environmental grantmaking in four key areas: capacity building; fostering collaboration and partnership; constituency building and citizen engagement; and grantmakers taking leadership. The case studies were not chosen to be perfect examples of “best practice” but to present the state of current practice and to illustrate the issues, successful strategies and challenges inherent in grantmaking in each

of the topic areas. Recommended best practices drawn from the case studies, literature review, and thoughtleader interviews are included within each of these areas.

### Capacity Building:

In recent years, funders have paid increasing attention to the capacity building needs of nonprofit organizations in all sectors, and many of the lessons learned elsewhere apply well to the environment field. Two case studies were documented relating to capacity building:

- a) *An Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to The Couchiching Conservancy for organizational development within an environmental NGO.* This multi-year grant supports the transition of the organization from a volunteer-based group to one led by a professional Executive Director. Grantmaker requirements including the early development of a strategic plan, tracking of clear deliverables related to the goals of the Foundation, and a declining grant level over several years were used to help build capacity rather than foster dependence.
- b) *A Laidlaw Foundation grant to establish the Sustainability Network, a training organization devoted to local environment sector development.* In this case, the Foundation provided not only seed funding, but also initial office and administrative support which greatly assisted with credibility and stability of the new organization. Environmental organizations were extensively consulted to help design the capacity building programs and delivery systems. The Sustainability Network is now an independent organization with a strong base of programs and support.

### Six best practices are recommended relating to capacity building:

- **Get to know your ENGOs and their strengths and needs**, so that you can match grants with activities appropriate to the organizational stage and needs of local groups;
- **Recognize that capacity building takes time and investment**, especially within the environment sector where many organizations are relatively immature; watch for organizations that are ready to make a transition to a higher level of operations;

- **Make use of existing training resources**, including information-sharing and peer learning among community organizations; formal training appears to work best within the context of the environment sector alone;
- **Offer more than money**, by taking a direct role in hosting events or programs, offering services, or offering endorsement and credibility to selected groups;
- **Evaluate and adjust programs continuously**, using feedback from program participants and advisory councils to review and adjust capacity building programs on a regular basis;
- **Help organizations learn from each other**, through information sharing and peer learning opportunities.

### Collaboration and Partnership:

Collaboration among environmental organizations and with other sectors can produce significant and lasting benefits, but collaboration is not always possible or even desirable, and community foundations should be cautious about forcing it on ENGOs. A growing trend is collaboration among funders around issues of common concern. Two case studies were examined related to collaboration and partnership:

- a) *A collaborative program among six community foundations around the Gulf of Maine to address coastal water quality and fisheries decline issues.* This three-year program, initiated by the foundations themselves, was very successful in attracting new resources and in supporting community-based initiatives. A network of relationships among ENGOs and funders has lasted well beyond the life of the program.
- b) *A Vancouver Foundation start-up grant to the Labour Environmental Alliance Society (LEAS),* which brought together labour unions and environmental organizations to work on issues of common concern. A LEAS project on cleaners, toxins and the ecosystem has reached workers in many industries to educate them about toxic materials in some cleaning products.

**Five best practices are recommended relating to collaboration and partnership:**

- **Make the process interactive**, so that partners in a collaboration are involved in a meaningful way in framing its structure and priorities, have enough flexibility to learn and adjust, and help define an evaluation framework;
- **Ensure clear agreement on the logistics**, with up-front agreement on administrative arrangements, how funding decisions are handled, and dedicated staff for coordination;
- **Recognize the importance of face-to-face networking**, with funding for travel and facilities to regularly bring together partners to build relationships and commitment, foster mentoring, and iron out differences;
- **Look for issues with overlapping interests and readiness for new approaches**, and insist that potential partners in collaboration are having initial discussions before applying for funding support;
- **Make sure the right people and the right organizations are involved**: the skills and credibility of the individuals involved, and the track record and maturity of the organizational partners are vital to success.

**Constituency Building and Citizen Engagement:**

Citizen engagement, both in environmental organizations and in broader causes, is a crucial element in long-term environmental change, but the success of ENGOs in involving citizens is very uneven. Most environmental organizations are supported by a largely white, older adult population, and initiatives to engage diverse cultural communities and young people are mostly at an early stage. Three case studies documented citizen engagement projects with different target groups:

- a) *A North American Fund for Environmental Cooperation (NAFEC) grant to Water Action Chelsea / Action-eau Chelsea to support volunteer citizen monitoring of water quality and quantity within a small Quebec community.* A strong framework to store and analyze data from the program through the municipality and a university, together with the leadership of a well-respected community ENGO, helped attract citizen participants in this project.
  - b) *An EcoAction (Environment Canada) grant to the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to assist in engaging multi-cultural organizations in environmental conservation projects.* This project developed a framework of short, medium, and long-term objectives, respected and involved cultural community leaders, provided opportunities for hands-on involvement in environmental projects, and responded to specific cultural needs.
  - c) *A Youth in Philanthropy granting program by the Community Foundation of Portage and District, supported by the Thomas Sill Foundation, to facilitate youth involvement in researching and selecting grants to local organizations.* While this program has been very successful overall, it has not produced the expected results in the environmental area. This case study illustrates the opportunities and challenges inherent in the Youth Advisory Council model as a vehicle for increased youth engagement in the community.
- Seven best practices are recommended relating to citizen engagement:**
- **Environmental projects with citizen volunteers must be meaningful**: the quality of the activity engaged in must be rewarding to participants, and result in meaningful results; the involvement of a strong credible ENGO and a strong plan are vital;
  - **Engagement programs must respond to community needs and concerns**, because people must care about an environmental issue before they are likely to become engaged;
  - **Work with cultural groups and leaders willing to integrate environmental programs**; current organizations and institutions such as ESL programs provide starting points for involvement;
  - **Encourage ENGOs seeking to increase diversity to first look within**: organizational changes to become more sensitive to other cultural norms, to include diversity in staff and Board composition, and to become more inclusive are important steps in reaching out to diverse communities;
  - **Address barriers to greater environmental involvement in Youth in Philanthropy programs**, including creative ways to make grants to

environmental organizations lacking charitable status, and consideration of capacity building and awareness activities related to youth and the environment;

- **Recognize that youth view environmental concerns in a different context**, often as part of broader social justice or quality of life concerns; engaging youth may require projects with an integrated outlook, an emphasis on activism, and opportunities for youth to be in control;
- **Be willing to experiment with different approaches to engage youth**, with innovative projects relating to community collaboration, leadership training, partnerships with schools, and effective adult-youth partnerships.

### Grantmakers Taking Leadership:

Many foundations are becoming more strategic in their grantmaking, seeking to direct grants in a more focused way to achieve greater public benefit. Some are becoming more directly engaged in identifying environmental issues, priorities and potential solutions in their communities.

At the same time, many foundations have maintained their traditional discomfort with funding advocacy activities by ENGOs. This reluctance is largely self-imposed, rather than dictated by the limits defined in charitable law. Public consultation is a legally-mandated and important element of many aspects of community and natural resource planning, and it is often difficult for the community to engage effectively on complex issues. Since many environmental issues are intimately linked with public policy, the extent to which community foundations support engagement in advocating policy change is especially important for this sector.

Two case studies are included to address issues relating to foundation leadership:

- a) *An Alberta Ecotrust Foundation initiative to lead a Calgary Dialogue on Urban Ecosystem Health* using a facilitated process in a workshop with community group representatives to identify and discuss urban environmental issues and potential solutions. This process has been successful in stimulating environmental project proposals, developing a network and listserv among city organizations, and generating public appreciation for the

Foundation. Several other community dialogues are planned, based on this model.

- b) *A George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation grant to the Sierra Club of Canada for community engagement in Newfoundland forestry*, which is oriented to providing information and mapping on ecological areas with imminent threat, networking and training with conservation groups and concerned citizens, and community-based visions and action plans to respond to upcoming consultations on forest licenses. This project provides the building blocks to allow effective engagement to influence future resource management policies in the province.

### *Five best practices are recommended relating to foundations taking leadership:*

- **Use the convenor role to identify community needs and opportunities**, such as hosting community discussions about environmental issues and concerns, and encouraging networking and future projects to address those concerns;
- **Define your comfort level with advocacy projects**, and make that boundary known to applicants; be aware of changing government regulations in this area, and recognize that a foundation's comfort level may also change with experience;
- **Show leadership in supporting civic engagement**, particularly by becoming more courageous in grantmaking in the environmental sector;
- **Support projects that encourage constructive dialogue on issues by bringing people together**, providing relevant and accurate technical information, and focusing on workable solutions; but funders should be careful not to try to pre-define outcomes for a process of dialogue;
- **Look for an understanding of issues and process by applicant organizations**; proposals should demonstrate a solid understanding and realistic assessment of opportunities for influencing public policy, and of the steps along the way.

## Acknowledgements

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Funding for this project has been provided by the Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF), which is part of a nation-wide project to strengthen community foundation grantmaking for the environment

sponsored by The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, in association with Community Foundations of Canada.

Invaluable information and perspectives for this study have been derived from telephone interviews with the following thoughtleaders:

<b>Sandy Houston</b>	George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation
<b>Mauro Vescera</b>	Vancouver Foundation
<b>May Wong</b>	Toronto Atmospheric Fund (now with Toronto Community Foundation)
<b>Paul Bubelis</b>	Sustainability Network
<b>Victoria Gagnon</b>	Ontario Trillium Foundation
<b>Tracey Robertson</b>	Ontario Trillium Foundation - Waterloo
<b>Bruce Lourie</b>	Richard Ivey Foundation
<b>Lois DeBacker</b>	C.S. Mott Foundation
<b>Pat Letizia</b>	Alberta Ecotrust Foundation
<b>Shelley Uytterhagen</b>	Carthy Foundation
<b>Hugh Arklie</b>	Thomas Sill Foundation
<b>Janice Harvey</b>	Conservation Council of New Brunswick
<b>Harvey Locke</b>	Tides Canada Foundation
<b>Stephen Huddart</b>	J. W. McConnell Family Foundation
<b>Sheila Leahy</b>	Consultant to C.S. Mott Foundation
<b>Gisèle Rucker</b>	Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation

In addition, valuable input was received from Kathryn Townshend of the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network, Betsy Martin and Barbara Oates of Community Foundations of Canada and from an advisory committee of Ruth Richardson,

May Wong, and Mauro Vescera. The foundation staff and representatives from grantee organizations interviewed for specific case studies also added greatly to the study with their information and perspectives.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

This report presents the findings of a project, initiated by the Hamilton Community Foundation and Community Foundations of Canada, to identify best practices in environmental grantmaking at the local level. It is intended to help community foundations and other grantmakers to increase their effectiveness in building the capacity of their local environment sector and increasing citizen engagement in community environmental issues.

The Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF) is one of several Canadian community foundations taking part in an initiative, led by Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) and funded by The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, to significantly expand their focus on the environment within their respective communities – with the goal of facilitating and strengthening environmental change at the local level.

The HCF recognized that, in order to meet this goal, it needed to build its own understanding of environmental grantmaking. As part of this process, the HCF identified a need for practical information on “best practices” in local environmental grantmaking based on the experiences of other grantmakers engaged in supporting environmental initiatives. Specifically, the Foundation was interested in learning more about grantmaking practices that: help to strengthen the capacity of the local environment sector; encourage collaboration and relationship building within the environment sector; and encourage citizen engagement broadly, and especially in neighbourhoods, with youth and with diverse populations. The Foundation engaged the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers’ Network (CEGN) to develop a project to meet this need.

While the project will assist the Hamilton Community Foundation in the development of its own environmental program, it was recognized that the findings would also be useful for other community foundations in the early stages of their environmental work – and indeed for any grantmaker wishing to better understand the particular characteristics, needs and challenges that funders face in supporting environmental initiatives at the local level.

This study is not intended to be a definitive guide, but rather to provide an overview of the current state of knowledge and practice in the field and to serve as a starting point for further discussion on best practices in environmental grantmaking at the local level.

### 1.2 Methodology

The project was based on a case study approach. Case studies provide an effective way to convey general principles through real-life examples – facilitating a process of learning by experience as readers move from the specific facts, issues and solutions provided in the case example to the inference of general principles and learnings that can be applied in practice across a variety of situations. Because they are drawn from real life, case studies provide a rich mix of actual experience illustrating not just the successes, but also the issues and challenges faced along the way.

For this project, the case study approach also had the advantage of accommodating the range of specific issues relevant to the broader topic of local environmental grantmaking. These issues addressed by the nine case studies in this report can be grouped into four key areas and include:

#### A. Capacity Building in the Local Environment Sector

- Organizational development of individual local environment groups (i.e. single organization-level)
- Local environment sector development (i.e. sector-level)

#### B. Collaboration and Partnership at the Local Level

- Fostering collaboration among local environment organizations
- Fostering cross-sectoral partnerships between environmental organizations and other sectors within the community

#### C. Constituency Building and Citizen Engagement

- Effective citizen engagement at the local/neighbourhood level

- Increasing the diversity of participation in local environmental issues
- Engaging with youth

#### D. Grantmakers Taking Leadership

- Foundation-led initiatives
- Supporting engagement in environmental public policy issues

The project was undertaken by the consultants with input from an Advisory Committee made up of CEGN staff and members. The first steps included a scan of relevant literature and telephone interviews with sixteen thoughtleaders in the environmental grantmaking field who were identified by the Advisory Committee. The literature scan and thoughtleader interviews together helped to identify principles of effective grantmaking practices in each of the topic areas. The case studies were selected based on suggestions from the thoughtleaders and in consultation with the Advisory Committee. The case studies were not chosen to be perfect examples of “best practice” but to present the state of current practice and to illustrate the issues, successful strategies and challenges inherent in grantmaking in each of the topic areas. Taken together, the case studies also comprise a range of projects, regions, types of grantmakers, grant sizes and recipients. Information on each of the selected environmental granting case studies was gathered through telephone interviews with representatives from both the grantmaker and recipient plus, where available, review of written material (such as evaluation reports) on the grant/project.

### 1.3 Organization of Report

Following this introduction, the report begins with a brief section providing an overview of the current context of community foundations and the environment in Canada. The main body of the report comprises four sections corresponding to the key areas listed above: capacity building in the local environment sector; fostering collaboration and partnership; constituency building and citizen engagement; and grantmakers taking leadership. Each of these four sections provides background observations on the general topic area, an introduction to the case studies selected to illustrate this

topic, the case studies themselves, a summary of recommended best practices relating to the topic, and selected resources.

### 1.4 A Word About the Journey

It is a truism that, while it is good to have a destination, it is the journey that really matters. All of those involved in this project would agree that the process of exploring the concept of “best practice” in local environmental grantmaking was very much a learning experience. Over the course of the review of the literature, the interviews with the thoughtleaders and the discussions of the Advisory Committee it became clear that this field is in its early stages in terms of articulating a solid body of theory and research to guide best practice. We are clearly at the beginning in terms of a critical examination of the field.

This report is offered as a starting point for this journey. By providing an overview of the current state of the field, including drawing together some examples of good work being done, we hope to stimulate further discussion and debate on the many unanswered questions and uncertainties that remain. What is certain is the value inherent in learning from each other as we work toward an understanding of best practices in environmental grantmaking at the local level.

## 2.0 Overview of Community Foundations and the Environment

This section provides an overview of the current context of community foundations and the environment in Canada based on findings from the scan of relevant literature and research, and from general observations of the thoughtleaders.

### 2.1 Community Foundations and the Environment

There are 139 community foundations currently active across Canada, ranging in size from small organizations completely dependent on volunteer resources, to large organizations like the Vancouver Foundation, which has total assets of over \$600 million. Together, these Canadian community foundations had \$1.8 billion in assets in 2003.

Regardless of size, all community foundations combine three main roles: grantmaking; community convening and leadership; and endowment building/donor service. Community Foundations of Canada has created a series of ten principles for community foundations that reflect these roles. These principles relate to:

- building community capacity;
- understanding the changing nature of our communities;
- creating opportunities for dialogue;
- developing partnerships;
- reflecting diversity and fostering renewal;
- establishing an effective and imaginative grants program;
- building community assets and facilitating philanthropy;
- evaluating and sharing results;
- implementing responsive and accountable processes;
- balancing our resources.

Community foundations across Canada are very familiar with these roles and principles, and they form an important backdrop for this study, since virtually all of them apply to grantmaking within the environment sector as well.

For Canadian community foundations overall, the environment currently represents only a small fraction of their granting activity and as such represents an important need and opportunity for support. According to CEGN's Canadian Environmental Grants Database and figures from Community Foundations of Canada, grants to the environment represent between four and five percent of the total grant dollars made by Canadian community foundations in 2002 – representing almost \$5 million in grants to the environment. This percentage is typical of overall patterns of foundation and corporate giving but very low compared with 25 percent of total grants by all types of Canadian environmental grantmakers included in CEGN's database. In addition, environment grants made by community foundations were generally smaller than the average for grantmakers in the database – with a median environment grant of \$5,000 for community foundations compared to the overall median of \$11,700.

Over the past few years, there have been several opportunities for community foundations to increase their activity in the environment. Several Canadian community foundations joined with U.S. colleagues in the Great Lakes Community Foundations Environmental Collaborative to address local watershed issues that affect the overall health of the Great Lakes. The Collaborative gave them the access to training, environmental consultants and some matching funding to increase their endowment funds and environmental granting.

Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) has also begun to focus on the environment by identifying opportunities like the Collaborative for community foundations, and working with The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation to develop and manage a program to help community foundations significantly expand their focus on the environment. By facilitating partnerships, documenting and sharing the experiences of community foundations, disseminating lessons learned and best practices and providing opportunities for peer exchange, CFC can help community foundations become important supporters of environmental action in Canada.

The thoughtleaders interviewed for this project identified several of the general roles and strengths of community foundations that they viewed as having particular relevance for the environment sector:

- Community foundations can partner with other funders, including private foundations and other sources, to create collaboratives around issues of common concern. This collaboration can help to validate projects by the community organizations being funded, to introduce organizations to other funders, and to lever additional funding for projects;
- They can work with various government agencies and programs to get to know key staff and to encourage funding of worthy community groups and projects;
- They can provide leadership in partnering with community environmental groups by knowing their staff, board members, and programs well enough to know who to bring to the table on issues of interest;
- They can play a very valuable role in convening meetings or forums to bring together representatives of various sectors within the community (environment, social, business, etc.) to discuss issues, identify priority needs and strategies, and develop consensus. Community foundations have great potential to play this convening role because they are seen as neutral, they often know key players in various sectors, and they should have facilitating skills to guide productive discussions.

The ability of community foundations to grasp these opportunities in the environment sector is dependent in part on the resources it has available in the form of staff and board members, and in part on the willingness of the foundations to take a leadership role on environmental issues in their communities.

## 2.2 Distinctive Characteristics of the Environment Sector

Granting to environmental organizations and projects is relatively new to most community foundations. While there are some similarities to the other sectors of interest to community foundations such as the arts, culture, recreation, and health, it is important to recognize that typical community-level environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) are different in several ways. An important first step for foundations interested in entering the

field of environmental grantmaking is to understand these distinctive characteristics of the environment sector.

There are exceptions, but typical ENGOs have distinctive challenges related to: financial and organizational capacity, leadership skills and governance, funding, and public perception that results from the reactive, sometimes contentious, nature of their activities, and a public image that sometimes portrays them as eccentric or marginal.

- ENGO volunteers and staff often have exceptional expertise in their chosen area, whether it be nature, wildlife, air quality, toxics or environmental education. While they have great volunteer energy and talented, passionate leadership, there are typically many small groups with very limited resources, and only a few groups with staff. Relative to other sectors, ENGOs are significantly lacking in infrastructure, stable revenue streams, and public funding. (As one observer noted, there is no Arts Council for the environment sector, nor are they typically included in the United Way.) Many have no staff, but where staff exists, salary levels are low, resulting in high staff turnover. Organizations are often project-driven, with a lack of stable core or discretionary funding. Small community ENGOs are often isolated and vulnerable; half of them lack charitable status, a characteristic which hampers their foundation and corporate fundraising.
- Community ENGO boards are often comprised of people who become involved because of their passion for the environment, rather than their organizational skills or connections. As a result, boards tend to be less strategic and less sophisticated than those in other sectors. Community ENGOs may be weak on organizational management and governance skills. In some cases, they have difficulty working collaboratively with each other, in part because of strong competition for a limited funding base, but there have been a growing number of examples of successful collaboration between ENGOs and with other organizations such as municipalities and universities. In general, they have little experience at working cooperatively with other sectors.

- Many community ENGOs are born in a defensive posture, in reaction to a perceived threat to the local environment. Some remain as single-issue groups, some fade away, and a few evolve into organizations with a broader focus and greater permanence. For many of the smaller groups and some larger ones, advocacy remains an important focus, but the environment sector is far from homogenous. Most environment groups participate at some level in civic engagement, often in formal planning processes or in response to development proposals. Their interests and the important questions they raise sometimes bring them into conflict with developers, other commercial interests, and government agencies with development schemes, a situation that rarely happens with arts or sports and recreation groups.
- In general, the environment sector has a public perception problem - ENGOs are often perceived as radical, marginalized, and out of the mainstream, even where that reputation is clearly not deserved. This image can hamper their ability to attract board candidates with essential skills.
- Like other sectors, the environment sector has its own language and networks. As part of a fairly new relationship, it should be expected that it will take some time for community foundations to become comfortable with the organizations in this sector and their priorities.
- In general, the environment sector receives a small share of overall foundation and corporate giving. Information sources from Canada and the United States (including the Conference Board of Canada, the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, and the U.S. Foundation Center) identify environmental grants as comprising approximately 4% to 6% of total grant dollars by corporate and/or foundation funders.
- Finally, it is important to note that many groups engaged in environmental work at the local level are not strictly speaking “environmental organizations”. For example, according to CEGN’s Canadian Environmental Grants Database, just under one-third of environment grant dollars in 2002 went to organizations whose primary focus was not the environment. These other types of organizations engaged in environment work

included schools, sports/recreation/tourism groups, municipal government, First Nations, community/citizens groups, agriculture, social services, and others.

Environmental non-governmental groups perform an essential function in the community by working to improve such fundamental needs as clean air and water, and a healthy environment. While they contribute energy, expertise and countless volunteer hours to protect the civic necessities, the community level ENGO’s have great difficulty accessing funds from private foundations or corporations. They are vulnerable and among the most in need of support from community foundations. Engaging in the environment also represents an important opportunity for community foundations to fulfill their mission to strengthen their local communities and provide leadership on issues affecting community and individual well-being.

### 2.3 Introduction to the “Best Practices” Case Studies

For those community foundations, and other funders, willing to take up the challenge of environmental grantmaking the nine case studies that follow suggest principles for effective local environmental grantmaking in four key areas: capacity building in the local environment sector; fostering collaboration and partnership; constituency building and citizen engagement; and grantmakers taking leadership.

As noted, the case studies were not chosen to be perfect examples of “best practice” but to present the state of current practice and to illustrate the issues, successful strategies and challenges inherent in grantmaking in each of the topic areas. Together, the case studies present a broad range of projects, regions, types of grantmakers, grant sizes and recipients. They also collectively illustrate examples of grantmakers engaged in a range of broad strategies:

- reactive or responsive approaches in which the grantmaker responds to community needs as expressed by applicants;
- proactive approaches involving foundation-led instigation of projects, initiatives or outreach on funder-identified priorities of interest;

- interactive approaches involving a process combining elements of the first two strategies and generally including two-way (and often multiple) discussions between the grantmaker and community groups to jointly identify priority needs and consensus to guide future grantmaking.

It is difficult to identify one of these strategies as the “best” approach in any given area. They are most usefully thought of as a continuum of strategies available to grantmakers depending on the situation and needs. Choosing among these strategies involves a host of factors to be considered at the local level, and the relative weighting of the three strategies is likely to change over time as community foundations grow and mature. The important thing is for foundations to be aware of the different approaches and consciously choose a strategy appropriate for their own goals and for the current needs in their community.

As noted, each of the four sections that follow provides background observations on the general topic area, an introduction to the case studies selected to illustrate this topic, the case studies themselves; a summary of recommended best practices relating to the topic; and selected resources. For each case study, the following information is provided: grant details, the underlying grantmaking strategy, a description of the initiative/project, outcomes, key learning points, summary comments and case contacts.

## 3.0 Capacity Building

### 3.1 Background Observations

In recent years, funders have paid increasing attention to the capacity building needs of nonprofit organizations in all sectors. Capacity building has been defined as strengthening the ability of nonprofit organizations to fulfill their missions in an effective manner. It can occur in many aspects of an organization, including programs, management, fund raising, financial management, and communications. Capacity building activities can include staff training, peer exchanges, one-on-one consulting, new equipment and staff, or even facility purchase or renovation. It is also closely related to the issue of core operating funding, which for many organizations is the most critical need in establishing effective capacity.

The recent literature is rich in useful approaches to capacity building for organizations of all kinds, and many of those approaches are appropriate in the environmental context as well. Capacity building is a particular priority for most community ENGOS, because as described earlier, they are generally smaller and less mature than similar organizations in other sectors. They have pressing needs to develop a more stable financial base, greater organizational skills, and improved community relations and marketing techniques.

The thoughtleader interviews provided observations in several areas that should receive particular emphasis by community foundations involved in the environment sector at the local level:

- As a prerequisite to effective capacity building, it is essential that community foundations and their staff understand the nature and needs of the environment sector in their community. This means investing in staff expertise and advisory resources, and playing an active outreach role to establish links with the environmental organizations at all levels to learn about their activities and priorities. External or peer review of project proposals is a useful technique to augment internal expertise and find ways to improve a grant proposal.
- The kinds of capacity development sponsored or provided must match the needs of the ENGOS involved. For example, small volunteer-based groups might benefit most from sessions on volunteer management, or how to structure effective projects and funding proposals. Larger groups might benefit from strategic planning, board development training, travel and training bursaries, or management of trust funds.
- Many of the concepts relating to capacity building generally within the nonprofit sector can be usefully applied to environmental organizations as well. For example, Tim Brodhead, President of The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, noted in a 1999 paper (see Resources section) that their approach to building capacity is rooted in three concepts: 1) focusing on people's assets, strengths and capacities rather than their needs, problems and deficiencies; 2) allowing people who are engaged in improving themselves to decide what external resources would be useful to them; and 3) seeking solutions which are sustainable.
- Because of the relatively young nature of many of the community organizations in the environment sector, "readiness" is a key factor in the success of capacity building assistance. Readiness may in part be indicated by the organization's strategic planning, but may be determined through knowing the group's leaders, the support shown by its board, and the thought and effort put into funding requests. Community foundations can play a pivotal role in taking an organization to a higher level of operations, but should recognize that this takes time to be successful, and typically means significant, multi-year funding commitments. Capacity building funding should allow room for the organization to follow its own priorities.
- Building capacity to manage leadership transition is a major issue for community ENGOS, especially since very few environmental organizations have middle-management staff levels to serve as a training ground for future leaders. Encouraging peer networks, establishing mentoring relationships and creating internship programs may be more appropriate to ENGOS than formal training programs. Identifying promising young people, preferably from diverse backgrounds, and providing opportunities for on-the-ground experience over several years could be an effective strategy for developing future leaders.

- In some instances, supporting infrastructure at the community level such as office or meeting space for ENGO's can be very helpful. Funding to purchase computers and equipment or secure office space can improve the capacity to find other funding, do research and connect with potential allies and resources. Shared space and facilities in some cases can encourage sector and cross-sectoral interaction and support.

### 3.2. Capacity Building Case Studies:

This section includes two case studies as examples of effective grantmaking in support of capacity building within the environment sector. Because capacity building includes a wide range of activities, these case studies can only illustrate particular aspects of this subject area. The cases relate to the following themes:

- a) **Environmental NGO organizational development: The Couchiching Conservancy**  
*(How can community foundation grantmaking support or increase the capacity of individual NGO organizations to improve the environment in the community?)*

This case was selected as particularly good example of a key element of capacity-building in individual organizations: assisting an environmental organization in the transition from volunteer-based to staff-based operations.

- b) **Local environment sector development: The Sustainability Network**  
*(How can community foundation grantmaking strengthen the capacity of the environmental NGO sector, as a whole, in the community?)*

While there are many examples of support for various types of capacity building within individual organizations, examples of sector-wide involvement are much more limited. This case was selected as a good example of sector development through providing a range of training opportunities to community-based ENGOs.

### 3.2.1 Case Study:

## Environmental NGO organizational development

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<b>The Couchiching Conservancy Capacity Grant</b>
<b>Grantmaker:</b>	Ontario Trillium Foundation
<b>Grant Recipient:</b>	The Couchiching Conservancy
<b>Location:</b>	Simcoe County (near Orillia), Ontario
<b>Time Frame:</b>	2002-2006
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	\$21,000/yr average over 4.5 years (total grant \$95,000)

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### Grantmaking Strategy:

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (Trillium) operates both province-wide and in 16 regional catchment areas. Like most community foundations, Trillium supports a broad range of community-centred groups and activities including the arts, culture, recreation, sports, social services and the environment. Trillium recognizes that volunteer and community effort is of great importance to healthy communities and to the preservation of the natural environment that supports those communities.

As part of its strategy for the environment sector, Trillium recognizes that building the capacity of environmental groups is essential to the vitality and effectiveness of the sector as a whole.

One key element in capacity building that Trillium has identified is the need for professional staff for some of these groups. This issue is especially relevant to the environment sector. While some environmental groups emerge in response to a local issue or threat, and disappear when the issue is resolved, others carry on at a modest level supported by a core of dedicated volunteers. Sooner or later, those groups are faced with the need for a professional staff person if they are to continue and grow.

Many community environmental issues require expertise, participation in daytime meetings or hear-

ings, continuity in financial or land management, or more daily coordination than volunteers can sustain. For example, a local land trust can draw on community volunteers for much of its activity, but potential donors of land or money want continuity in the relationship in order to be confident that major gifts will be cared for appropriately. Other types of ENGOs face similar challenges in maintaining their energy and effectiveness.

While a professional staff can generate donations, grants and added volunteer effectiveness that far exceed the cost of salary, it takes time and staff effort to achieve that increased income to pay for professional staff – leaving environmental groups in a “Catch 22” situation. A financial “bridge” to take groups from purely volunteer to secure initial staffing is a critical challenge for both the organizations and the community foundations that support their goals and objectives.

An important challenge for Trillium is knowing which groups to support when they apply, since not all are suitable or ready to make the transition from volunteer to staffed. In making these decisions Trillium emphasizes its strategic goals:

- building capacity, not dependency – therefore a credible plan that will be sustainable by the ENGO after the grant is vital;

- fostering community engagement— therefore a pattern of successful partnerships and community support is an important part of the application;
- expanding volunteerism in the community, not simply replacing volunteers with paid staff – continued volunteer engagement in the board and executive is therefore another consideration.

Trillium responds to individual applications after detailed review and discussion by program staff with applicants, using a comprehensive strategic framework to evaluate proposals. This framework includes:

- environment scans completed for each of Trillium’s funding sectors that are used to raise awareness among staff, committees and board members about community needs, issues, trends and approaches, and to serve as a general context for assessing how an application fits with community priorities;
- a carefully thought out application process that ensures that an applicant includes a sound strategic plan, deliverables, an evaluation framework, and a transition to sustainable (post grant) operation;
- regional staff who can advise groups on how to make the most effective application, can check the contents of those applications, and provide advice after approval as the grant progresses;
- regional volunteer advisory committees who are familiar with community needs, connections and provide expertise to the review process;
- regional and provincial staff expertise and information systems to see how similar grants or initiatives have worked out in other regions; and
- review by the Trillium Board of Directors.

This comprehensive approach is needed because Trillium often makes relatively large and multi-year grants, and is sensitive to ensuring that public dollars are invested wisely and carefully. Trillium procedures deliberately “front-end-load” the project planning work needed by applicants, with relatively modest reporting requirements afterwards (typically once-annually reports required). Trillium is prepared to make multi-year grants because certain capacity building objectives cannot be achieved in a single year or with the uncertainty and effort that is neces-

sary with re-applying annually. It does also make smaller grants with shorter duration for other aspects of capacity building, recognizing that the type of assistance provided must fit with the current needs of the applicant organization.

### Description of the Project:

In 2002 The Couchiching Conservancy, a community land trust, requested funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation - York/Simcoe Region, to expand its land protection and fund raising capacity in the northern portion of Simcoe Country and western portion of the Kawartha Lakes (Carden Plain).

Founded in 1993, the Conservancy operated as a charitable organization with strong volunteer and community support. In 2002, the Conservancy Board decided that the organization could greatly expand its effectiveness if it could make the transition to a volunteer driven organization with a professional executive director. While the Conservancy had an active fund raising program and growing revenues, a full time professional was needed to deliver the programming and attract the extra funding that would support that person – a circular problem. By applying for a 4.5 year declining grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Conservancy Board sought assistance to make the transition, and take the organization to the next level.

The multi-year grant provided the Conservancy with sufficient assurance to hire a quality professional, to have enough stability to attract the right applicants, to undertake multi-year projects and to ramp up income from projects and fund raising volunteers based on the growing benefits to the community. The grant was to provide a declining portion of the executive director salary. The approved grant was as follows:

<b>Year 1</b>	<b>\$ 30,000</b>
<b>Year 2</b>	<b>25,000</b>
<b>Year 3</b>	<b>20,000</b>
<b>Year 4 and 5</b>	<b>20,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>95,000</b>

The project proposal set out how the position would be funded at the end of the grant period. As a condition of this grant, Trillium required a five year strategic plan to be submitted within the first year, a condition that ensured that the Conservancy had thought through and achieved board agreement for its plan.

The project proposal included financial commitments from other sources and described specific community benefits to be achieved within the five-year period:

- securement through donation or purchase of at least 1400 hectares of natural lands, involving at least 5 land or conservation easements;
- at least 100 private landowners personally contacted to encourage good land stewardship;
- at least 10 private land stewardship agreements completed with landowners;
- at least 800 hectares of land evaluated for ecological significance;
- at least 200 new members signed up for the Conservancy;
- at least 50 new volunteers actively engaged in property management, ecological monitoring or project activities.

These concrete deliverables related not only to the objectives of the Conservancy, but also aligned closely with the strategic goals of Trillium. For example, they targeted an increase in volunteer activity and community partnerships, rather than replacing existing volunteer effort with staff.

#### Outcomes:

The Conservancy has hired its executive director and volunteer activity and community contributions have increased since the grant was approved in 2002. In addition:

- 1219 hectares or nearly 3000 acres of land have been secured, providing tangible long-term environmental benefits to the community;
- member and volunteer activity and fund raising have increased significantly, including a major capital campaign for a strategic land purchase;
- community donations have restored a house on one Conservancy property to provide a conservation centre for future operations;
- landowner contacts and biological studies on the Oro Moraine and Carden Plain have complemented and supported positive municipal initiatives in these priority landscapes;
- community profile of Conservancy programs and positive environmental solutions have increased markedly;

- The Couchiching Conservancy provides its experience and advice to assist other local land trusts in Ontario, helping to build capacity elsewhere.

### Key Learning Points:

The Trillium capacity grant to The Couchiching Conservancy illustrates a number of important elements:

- Capacity building grants that are well-matched to the needs of the applicant organization and the community can make a critical difference in the ability of ENGOS to produce community benefits. In this case, a multi-year grant to support the delicate transition from volunteer-based to staff-based operations appears likely to provide long-term positive impacts.
- Knowledge of the environmental community as well as the community at large provide important information about needs, priorities and who is doing what. Trillium achieves this through its voluntary advisory committees, environmental scans, and its staff in the regions.
- Trillium watches trends and patterns including the success of environmental grants through internal consultation across its 16 regions, using contacts and an electronic information system. Community foundations might provide similar mutual support by setting up links or informal consultation with foundations in other regions.
- Multi-year capacity grants are sometimes necessary to achieve community objectives, but they should have an evaluation framework, deliverables, declining support or other measures to foster post grant sustainability.
- Capacity grants should be carefully evaluated against foundation objectives. For example, if increased volunteerism and community engagement is a foundation objective, grants that simply replace volunteers with paid staff will not prove beneficial in the long term.

**Summary Comments:**

This Couchiching Conservancy case study illustrates a grant that raised an organization to a higher level of activity and long term community benefit. Instead of giving a short-term project grant (analogous to giving “a fish” to feed a man for a day), it is helping the environmental group fashion a better “fishing net” so that it can feed the community’s environmental needs for the long term. Because of the relatively large number of volunteer-based ENGOS and few staffed groups, this transition is particularly important for the environment sector.

In addition to long term capacity building, there are other circumstances where expertise is needed for a defined term, such as a coordinator to bring a variety of participants to a public planning or community enhancement project, to manage a mini-grant program for many small volunteer groups, or where certain expertise is needed for a community project. A community foundation grant does not have to cover the whole amount, but can validate the group and help attract additional money from other funders.

### 3.2.2. Case Study:

## Local environment sector development

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<b>Sustainability Network</b>
<b>Grantmaker:</b>	Laidlaw Foundation, with a supporting planning and consultation grant from the Toronto Community Foundation, and contracts from Environment Canada – Ontario Region, and the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy
<b>Grant Recipient:</b>	Sustainability Network
<b>Location:</b>	Ontario
<b>Time Frame:</b>	1997
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	\$20,000 initial grant from Laidlaw Foundation, followed by annual grants for 3 years

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### Grantmaking Strategy:

Compared with most other sectors, the environment sector in Canada is relatively young. As environmental groups matured and encountered larger and more complex issues such as climate change or urban sprawl in the 1990's, it became apparent to ENGO leaders that additional organizational skills were needed to meet these new challenges. At the time, grants to build management, governance and other essentials were uncommon and many foundations and agencies active in the environment in Canada preferred to fund projects and field work. The few capacity grants made by foundations usually went directly to larger groups, and served to build up one specific organization rather than the sector as a whole.

In the early 90's, the Laidlaw Foundation funded a review of the environment. This review identified the need for training and capacity building among environment groups in Ontario. This finding was reinforced in two subsequent initiatives. In 1996, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and others sponsored a conference that included conservation and environmental groups from United States and a few from Canada. Great Lakes region foundations sponsored the "Great Lakes, Great Stakes" exercise

and related reports. These discussions confirmed the sector-wide capacity gap among environmental groups in Ontario. Many local groups lacked the organizational skills and fundraising capacity to participate effectively in civic planning processes, and some sort of skill-building service was needed.

In the United States, the Environmental Support Center and the Institute for Conservation Leadership were filling this role. There was no similar organization in Canada dedicated to delivery of programs to increase the capacity of the environment sector.

Bruce Lourie, who managed the Laidlaw Foundation's environmental program at the time, and like-minded environmentalists brought this idea back to the Laidlaw Foundation at a time when its environmental program was under review. The result was an initial grant and project support for the Ontario "Sustainability Network".

### Description of the Project:

The initial seed funding for the Sustainability Network in 1997 supported the hiring of a part time staff person. The Foundation also took a hands-on role by providing office space, administration, charitable status and the credibility and advantages of being a project of the Laidlaw Foundation. Three

other funders, the Toronto Community Foundation, Environment Canada, and the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy (MOEE) provided \$42,000 to fund a six month consultation and planning phase to ascertain, from the ENGOs themselves, just what kind of capacity building was needed and which delivery systems would work best. This “bottom up” approach was a key characteristic of the concept.

Environmental groups wanted a program that was “simple, small, affordable and accessible”. The proposed network was intended to identify, organize, deliver and communicate training and development opportunities. The groups themselves identified the need for greater skills including:

- management of non-governmental organizations;
- leadership;
- fund raising and grant writing;
- marketing and communications;
- governance and board relations; and
- planning and budgeting.

The same groups identified the need for networking opportunities to meet other environmental groups working on similar or related topics, and to meet potential funders to learn about their priorities. From these needs emerged the extremely popular “quarterly breakfast meeting” series.

At the end of the initial grant period, an inaugural workshop and seminar on fund raising was offered at the offices of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust. The workshop was packed, and the funders in attendance left with a very clear concept of the capacity building program the environmental groups needed and wanted. With this mandate and the high credibility established by the involvement of the Laidlaw Foundation, funding was secured from several other sources and the program rolled out on an ongoing basis.

The Sustainability Network offered an Internet network, breakfast meetings, seminars, training courses and occasional forums. Later, bursaries and travel allowances were added to assist in leadership development in other venues.

The Sustainability Network places considerable emphasis on evaluation of its programs on an ongoing basis. Bruce Lourie, the Laidlaw program manager until 2002, and Paul Bubelis, the Sustainability

Network’s Executive Director have been careful to frame evaluation broadly. To keep in touch with their clients, they set up a “Council of Networks” in Ontario. The Council included representatives from such groups as the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, the Toronto Environmental Alliance, Ontario Environment Network, Green Communities Association, and Federation of Ontario Naturalists. This Council provided broad feedback on the effectiveness of Sustainability Network programs from 1998 to 2002, and has now been essentially replaced by a board structure.

Sustainability Network uses other evaluation mechanisms that are more quantitative including:

- evaluation forms from participants in workshops and training;
- tracking numbers and trends in attendance at training or forum events;
- direct feedback from the website and attendance at sector events.

In terms of increasing the capacity of environmental organizations to serve the community interest, there are plenty of testimonials as to the value of the Sustainability Network’s programs. The sustained and expanding participation is proof of the value perceived by environmental organizations. A precise and objective measurement of sector capacity is difficult, but the Network is testing a 56-point measurement tool to establish benchmarks and to measure progress.

#### **Outcomes:**

From the initial funding and support provided by the Laidlaw Foundation, the Sustainability Network developed a model and services that have remained essentially the same and have been embraced by the environmental community, particularly in the Greater Toronto Area. Participation has included:

- 4,000 subscribers to the newsletter;
- 30,000 visits per month to the Web page;
- 2,000 attendees at 25 breakfast forums to date;
- 700 workshop attendees.

After a period of administrative and organizational support from the Laidlaw Foundation, the Sustainability Network went on to establish other

funding sources, incorporate separately, establish its own board, and secure charitable status.

Accessibility is one of the four “watchwords” from the initial concept. The Sustainability Network provided capacity building programs with easy accessibility in the Toronto area, and has delivered programs in other parts of Canada. While the seminars and training modules are widely admired, easy local accessibility remains an important issue. Currently the Network is working through partners to arrange program delivery in other provinces and parts of Ontario, and some of the courses have been offered by Internet.

### Summary Comments:

While targeted support to individual organizations can address specific needs, support that increases environment sector capacity as a whole will benefit the community across a wide range of interests. Community foundations have a broad view and a particular stake in having capable and mature environmental organizations that can participate in community planning and civic activity. Groups in the local environment sector are smaller and often need more help than the larger and more established arts, social and health groups. Consequently there are great community benefits from capacity building in the environment sector, and ENGOs respond positively to opportunities to learn and help each other.

## Key Learning Points:

The Laidlaw Foundation’s support of The Sustainability Network illustrates a number of important points:

- Groups in the environment sector recognize the need to build skills and capacity, and they enthusiastically support a sector-wide approach.
- Engaging grass roots environmental groups in defining their capacity building needs from the very beginning resulted in a program that was “on the mark” – one that has enjoyed strong, sustained support and participation.
- Foundations can offer more than monetary support. Laidlaw made critical initial contributions by:
  - lending its name and letterhead, a step that gave instant credibility to the venture and opened many doors;
  - lending space and services, which focused all startup resources on the program, and brought early benefits to the community;
  - lending administration, governance and charitable status to the project, providing an “incubator” function until the Network could divert energy to establish its own governance.
- Outside the Greater Toronto Area in particular, there is a need for more capacity building in the environment sector. There may be opportunities to pick up on relevant elements of established programs and recreate them in these smaller communities.
- The popularity of the Sustainability Network program underlines the value and importance of convening and networking groups working in the environment sector.

### 3.3 Recommended Best Practices Relating to Building Capacity

The following recommended best practices have been distilled from the two case studies, the observations of Foundation staff and other thoughtleaders, and some of the recent extensive literature on capacity building:

- **Get to know your ENGOs and their strengths and needs:**

A capacity building program works best when funders know well the organizations and the people involved in the sector, and can match grants with appropriate activities to build on their strengths and address their areas of weakness. Within the environment sector, this may mean a combination of multiple small grants to volunteer organizations, a few larger grants to assist staffed organizations with such issues as training and staff transition, and some strategic grants to help a few organizations make a significant leap in capacity – for example, from volunteer-driven to staffed-led. Engaging local ENGOs in discussions about their capacity building needs and priorities is a positive step to increase a community foundation’s knowledge of local organizations, and to build commitment to participation in future programs.

- **Recognize that capacity building takes time and investment:**

The benefits of capacity building are substantial, but they are not immediate. This is particularly so within the environment sector, where many organizations are at a relatively early stage of organizational maturity. Community foundations should recognize that progress may appear slow at first, as a series of small incremental steps may be necessary to effect noticeable changes in organizational capacity. Watch for organizations that are on the verge of change to a higher level of operations; they may be good candidates for multi-year funding to assist them in the transition to higher capacity.

- **Make use of existing training resources:**

There is no need to re-invent the wheel to develop effective capacity building programs, since existing organizations provide proven techniques and programs. However, training in capacity building for the environment sector appears to generally work best within the context of that sector alone; while the principles are the same as in other sectors, the nature of the organizations is sufficiently different that at least some of the training should be environment-specific.

- **Offer more than money:**

Community foundations can help environmental organizations build capacity by directly sponsoring training programs, or offering community foundation endorsement and credibility. A forum or event hosted by the community foundation, for example, is likely to attract more participants than a similar learning opportunity sponsored only by an external, and perhaps unknown, training organization. Community foundations may also be able to assist in building capacity by offering services such as office space or shared equipment.

- **Evaluate and adjust programs continuously:**

While the organizational changes resulting from capacity building programs take time to develop, it is possible to regularly evaluate such factors as the number of people attending programs and their satisfaction ratings. Advisory councils of key people within the environmental community can provide feedback and informal evaluation. On the basis of these factors, programs should be reviewed and adjusted as necessary to ensure they continue to serve the organizations within the community effectively.

- **Help organizations learn from each other:**

Information sharing and peer learning among organizations already active in the community are valuable learning tools. Community foundations can encourage and facilitate opportunities for interaction, often at a very modest cost.

### 3.4 Selected Resource Information on Capacity Building

(Note: Most of these publications relate to general capacity building)

- *Echoes from the Field: Proven Capacity-Building Principles for Non-Profits*, The Environmental Support Center and Innovation Network Inc. ([www.envsc.org](http://www.envsc.org))
- *Effective Capacity Building in Nonprofit Organizations*, McKinsey & Company, 2001, [www.venturephilanthropypartners.org](http://www.venturephilanthropypartners.org).
- *Growing Community Foundations as Environmental Stewards: Phase One and Phase Two*, Council of Michigan Foundations ([www.cmif.org](http://www.cmif.org)) for six success factors
- *The Community Organizing Toolbox*, ...pioneering a national strategy for grassroots funding, The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation Case Study, ([www.nfg.org](http://www.nfg.org))..."building organized communities"
- *Building Capacity in Nonprofit Organizations*, edited by Carol J. De Vita and Cory Fleming, The Urban Institute ([www.urban.com](http://www.urban.com)); good overview of eight core components, five challenges, foundation initiatives
- *Governance Do's and Don'ts: Lessons from Case Studies on Twenty Canadian Non-profits*, Mel Gill, Institute on Governance; examines factors for success
- *Evaluation of Capacity Building: Lessons from the Field*, Deborah Linnell, Alliance for Nonprofit Management
- *Pathways to Nonprofit Excellence*, Paul C. Light, Brookings Institution Press; fourth in a series on changing nature of public service
- *Reflections on Sustainability*, Tom David, The California Wellness Foundation ([www.tcdf.org](http://www.tcdf.org)); identifies four dimensions of sustainability - spirit, values, niche, and capacity
- *The Developing of Capacity; Capacity Building - Shifting the Paradigms of Practice*; and *Leadership and Management*, Allan Kaplan, Community Development Resource Association of South Africa ([www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za)); an interesting alternate view of capacity and its development
- *Building to Last: A Grantmaker's Guide to Strengthening Nonprofit Organizations*, Paul Connolly, The Conservation Company ([www.consco.com](http://www.consco.com)); includes suggested step-by-step process, review of tools
- *Stressed by Steadfast: Executive Directors of Western Environmental Organizations, 2002*. Training Resources for the Environmental Community, 2002. ([www.trecnw.org/research/trec-report-environmental-executive-directors.pdf](http://www.trecnw.org/research/trec-report-environmental-executive-directors.pdf))
- *Capacity Building for Impact: The Future of Effectiveness for Nonprofits and Foundations* (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2002)
- *Funding Effectiveness: Lessons in Building Nonprofit Capacity*, by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. Published by Jossey-Bass, 2004, 150 pages, \$30.00
- *New Directions in Foundation Giving*, excerpts from a presentation given by Tim Brodhead, President, J.W. McConnell Foundation, at the Ketchum Breakfast Forum, Montreal, February 16, 1999

## 4.1 Background Observations

Because of the complex and inter-connected nature of many environmental issues, it can be advantageous for organizations in this sector to work together on either a short-term or ongoing basis. Collaborations have been instigated by ENGOs with common goals, for example the development of the Green Budget Coalition. In other instances, funders have actively encouraged collaboration among applicant groups in the name of efficiency and more robust initiatives. Community foundations are often in a unique position to perceive that greater benefits could be produced if ENGOs developed partnerships both within the environment sector as well as with organizations in other sectors, such as health or social services.

While collaborative approaches have yielded very favourable outcomes in some cases, several of the staff of foundations and ENGOs consulted for this project noted that this is an area that needs to be approached with care:

- Funders should be cautious about assuming that increased collaboration or coordination is always possible or even desirable. ENGOs spring up for different reasons, and the people involved may not feel they fit comfortably with the organizational culture of another group. “Shotgun marriages” created to please funders may cause problems in the future if the partners are not willing and able to effectively collaborate. Collaboration among organizations requires a huge amount of effort and energy, and the resulting benefits are not always worth the effort.
- On the other hand, community foundations can act in their convenor role to create forums around environmental issues within the community where various stakeholders can meet each other, listen to other viewpoints, and discuss areas of common ground. The controversial nature of some local environmental issues makes this an especially valuable role. Community foundations are uniquely positioned to play this role, because they are usually perceived as objective, and they can draw participation from multiple sectors and players on all sides of an issue. In some cases, the synergy from these forums will lead to collaborative efforts developed by the participants themselves.
- Community foundations can consider clusters of grants around specific issues that bring different groups together and result in synergy e.g. shoreline health issues might include grants to environmental, recreational and health groups. The effectiveness of this clustering can be increased by bringing participating groups together periodically to share findings and exchange views. This peer learning is a positive strategy that can help to build capacity in participating groups and bring environmental groups into a collaborative relationship with other sectors.
- Many environmental organizations tend to be receptive to collaboration with other ENGOs, in part because they understand intuitively the inter-connected nature of ecosystems and environmental issues. This receptivity may vary regionally, and in some cases a history of competition and mistrust among groups may make collaboration more difficult. Community foundations need to know their local ENGOs well enough to know what to expect in their area. However, community environmental organizations often lack the maturity and experience to forge collaborations with other sectors, and are likely to be very cautious in this area.
- Collaboration often goes beyond local environmental organizations working together. Partnerships between community ENGOs and national or provincial organizations are common. Cooperative projects with universities, municipalities and other agencies can also be productive. Since many other types of groups also undertake environmental projects – service clubs, schools, sports and recreation groups, ratepayer organizations, First Nations, etc. – the potential for collaborative approaches extends well beyond strictly “environmental” organizations.
- Community foundations are often well-placed to encourage informal collaboration, for example, by suggesting that an appropriate ENGO be invited to take part in projects or forums in other sectors.
- More formal collaborative efforts usually follow four distinct stages, as outlined by Winer and Ray in *The Collaboration Handbook*: 1) brainstorming of ideas, vision, direction; 2) prioritizing and focus of ideas; 3) developing an implementation

plan, including techniques such as memorandum of understandings to clarify roles; and 4) a sunset – clarity about closure or at least frequent benchmarks for evaluation along the way.

- A growing trend is collaboration among funders around specific issues as a means of coordinating project activities and providing more effective grantmaking. This could include locally-based forums among a mix of community and private foundations to develop information networks and deliver training to foundation members and staff, or more formal collaborations to jointly assess and deliver grants.
- Collaborative funding of projects can also provide opportunities for a range of funders and ENGOs to get to know each other, which can result in lasting relationships.

#### 4.2 Collaboration Case Studies

This section includes two case studies to add to the observations gathered from experienced Foundation staff:

- a) **Collaboration within the environment sector:**  
**Gulf of Maine Collaboration** (*How can community foundation grantmaking achieve greater community benefit by fostering collaboration between organizations in the sector?*)

While there are many examples of collaboration within the environment sector, the Gulf of Maine collaboration is an example that not only involves networking and joint actions among grant recipients, but also a formal and innovative collaborative approach by a group of community foundations. It acknowledges that the issues involved, water quality and fisheries decline, do not respect political boundaries, and provides an appropriate scale to address these issues.

- b) **Cross-sectoral partnerships: Cleaners, Toxins and the Ecosystem** (*How can community foundation grantmaking increase community benefit by fostering partnerships between environmental NGOs and other sector organizations?*)

The number of existing cross-sectoral partnerships is very small. The Cleaners, Toxins and the Ecosystem case study documents an innovative alliance between labour and environmental groups, who had been traditional adversaries. This case illustrates ways in which grantmakers can help overcome long-standing perceptions such as the conflicts between jobs and the environment.

## 4.2.1. Case Study:

**Fostering collaboration among environmental organizations**

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<b>Gulf of Maine Collaboration</b>
<b>Grantmakers:</b>	Collaboration of Community Foundations for Gulf of Maine
<b>Grant Recipients:</b>	Small grants distributed to 83 local organizations through 6 community foundations, including the Fundy Community Foundation in New Brunswick.
<b>Location:</b>	New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts
<b>Time Frame:</b>	1993-97
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	Over US\$199,000 in total grants over the 3-year life of the program, with US\$30,000 through the Fundy Community Foundation. Individual grants averaged \$500 to \$1500 in the Water Quality Monitoring Network Project, and up to \$5000 in the Community Fisheries Project.

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**Grantmaking Strategy:**

A group of community foundations in New England began to discuss their potential role in addressing environmental issues within the Gulf of Maine after the governors and premiers of the states and provinces bordering the Gulf signed an international agreement to foster joint action and policies in 1989. A growing interest in funding environmental projects generally, and increasing public awareness of the East Coast fisheries crisis, were also important factors in establishing their interest. Through discussions with other community foundations, led by the Maine and New Hampshire foundations, the concept of a collaborative program gradually emerged.

The thinking behind the Gulf of Maine initiative has been spelled out by Lissa Widoff, the former Project Director, in *A Case Study in Ecosystem Philanthropy: The Collaboration of Community Foundations for the Gulf of Maine*, which was prepared for the Council on Foundations Community Foundation Conference, October 1998:

“The Collaboration of Community Foundations for the Gulf of Maine (CCF) came together as a means to strengthen working relationships among

neighboring community foundations and to build their capacity to address a common environmental concern – the future sustainability of the Gulf of Maine coastal ecosystem.

They chose to address how citizens could have greater impact on two inter-related issues in the Gulf of Maine: the monitoring and management of coastal water quality, and the community-level social and economic effects of the decline in the fisheries industry. The Collaboration began its work in 1993 as a partnership between six community foundations: the Maine Community Foundation, Greater Piscataqua Community Foundation (New Hampshire), the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation; the Community Foundation of Cape Cod, the Fundy Community Foundation (Canada), and the Boston Foundation.

These foundations joined forces because they believed that by working together, they could bridge geographic distances and provide a regional context at the local community level for the issues affecting the Gulf of Maine. They believed that community foundations, with their ear close to the ground, could help bring the perspective of the average citizen to the policymaking table. The foundations saw

themselves as a vehicle that could give voice to the community-level social and economic ramifications of environmental policy, particularly with respect to issues surrounding the fisheries industry and coastal communities. This group of foundations was also interested in building their individual capacity to raise funds for environmental purposes, and in expanding their leadership potential.”

### **Description of the Project:**

This project involved collaboration at two levels: first, among a group of six community foundations working jointly on environmental issues of regional concern; and second, among a larger grouping of ENGOs who coordinated their efforts as grant recipients.

Under the initial guidance of the Maine and New Hampshire Community Foundations, the project placed early emphasis on securing representation from community foundations across the entire Gulf of Maine region, which included several New England states and the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. To strengthen Canadian representation, the U.S. collaborators worked with several environmentalists associated with the Conservation Council of New Brunswick to develop the Fundy Community Foundation.

The CCF developed a statement of purpose as a unifying vision to guide subsequent activities and solicited an initial grant from the C.S. Mott Foundation to carry out a series of stakeholder workshops that defined a set of priority issues. With the assistance of a Switzer Leadership Grant, the Collaboration hired a staff coordinator to guide their activities on the project and to assist in securing further support from regional and national foundations.

A program strategy developed by the CCF included five elements: 1) identification of two key issues – community responses to the fisheries decline, and community environmental monitoring of coastal water quality; 2) providing small grants to community groups working on those key issues; 3) providing networking and peer learning opportunities for grantees; 4) capacity-building for the community foundations; and 5) sunset and evaluation for the collaboration.

Funding for small grants in the citizen water quality monitoring program was re-granted directly to the community foundation partners involved in the collaboration. Their local grants committees

granted awards to community ENGOs, and reported grantee information to the CCF staff. For the community fisheries project, funds were distributed to the community foundations after proposals had been reviewed and selected collectively. Many of the CCF grants were too small to fully support projects, and CCF developed connections to other funders such as economic development agencies, state agencies, and regional funders who could provide secondary funding to the ENGOs involved.

CCF provided annual grantee meetings to offer new kinds of thinking about community issues and to promote peer learning. It also convened one major conference and supported grantee travel for other learning experiences. As a result, many of the ENGOs met with their counterparts in other communities for the first time, and established ongoing relationships based on their common concerns. The ability to meet and learn from organizations in other jurisdictions, who were dealing with similar issues but within a different legal and social context, was especially valuable.

A formal evaluation was conducted by an external consultant at the end of the project, drawing on interviews with 27 CCF participants to assess the outcomes of the small grants program, the experience of the CCF as a collaborative strategy between foundations, and the changes in capacity of individual community foundations as a result of the project. The evaluation was very positive, concluding that the Collaboration made “considerable difference” to the Gulf of Maine communities over its three-year life.

### **Outcomes:**

The CCF project was very successful in increasing funding and support for ENGOs working on community-based initiatives in the Gulf of Maine over a three-year period. A key element in this collaboration was the leadership provided by the community foundations themselves, who jointly developed a strategic framework for the project, and took the initiative to approach major national and regional funders to attract their investment. One result was increased capacity among the community foundations, not just during the life of the project, but through increased endowments and programs that provided a continuing role in environmental grant-making.

The impact of the project on community-based ENGOs was substantial. Many of the 83 groups that

received funding were fledgling, entirely voluntary organizations. CCF project funding and technical assistance helped to build their capacity to function more effectively, gave them credibility and legitimacy that helped them secure other funding support, and often helped provide the momentum to get groups past the initial start-up crisis into a more stable structure. In several cases, CCF investment helped nurture small projects into statewide and regionally significant efforts.

One outcome was the creation of a Coastal Network that is fostering community-based resource stewardship throughout the Gulf of Maine on an ongoing basis. In part, this development is based on a much broader understanding of the interconnected nature of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem that flowed from the CCF project. It also reflects the ongoing nature of relationships amongst ENGOs that developed over the course of the project.

Both the project evaluation and comments from participants emphasized the significance of the networking that characterized the CCF project. Janice Harvey from the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, who was deeply involved in the Canadian component of the project, noted that many of the relationships with other ENGOs developed during this project continue to play an important role in the region. She also commented that the project provided community ENGOs the opportunity to establish positive relationships with other funders, with long-term benefits for the region.

Lissa Widoff noted that collaborations can be messy – it takes time to build trust, they often stall, it is important to have clear agreement about money and administrative matters but remain flexible enough to benefit from unexpected opportunities.

#### Summary Comments:

The field of collaboration is still young, with few good models in practice and evaluation. Because of the complex nature of many collaborations, it can sometimes be difficult for funders to track the effectiveness of individual grants, or to determine their contribution within a multi-dimensional collaboration that may involve many partners.

This collaboration successfully addressed this challenge, for it has had the benefit of a thorough evaluation report (*An Evaluation of the Collaboration of Community Foundations for the Gulf of Maine: Environmental Issues and Community-Building*; New Paradigms Consulting, West Haven, CT, March

1997), as well as a subsequent paper with thoughtful reflections prepared by Lissa Widoff, the Program Officer for the Gulf of Maine project. This summary has drawn heavily from these sources, as well as from interviews with Lissa Widoff and Janice Harvey.

#### Key Learning Points:

- This project illustrates the four distinct stages of collaboration – brainstorming, focusing, implementation, and closure. One aspect of this case study that is notable is the focal point of leadership, which clearly rested with the six community foundations involved. From that leadership position, this collaborative reached out to other funders to build an effective pool of resources, and to community groups to foster collaborative actions in their projects.
- The CCF approach goes beyond being proactive to becoming a good example of an interactive strategy – the community foundations were clearly reflecting the priorities expressed by their communities in choosing program areas, and placed emphasis on frequent communication and feedback during the life of the collaboration.
- This case study highlights the benefits of collaboration in leveraging new outside funds, collectively influencing regional priorities, and providing greater visibility and rich learning experiences for the participating community foundations and the participating ENGOs.
- The community foundations involved played an important role on the front line with communities as funders, information resources, and facilitators, as well as intermediaries and neutral convenors to bring diverse interests together.
- While there are many ways to structure administrative support for collaborative efforts, in this case the centralized staff role and pooled funds clearly worked well. A shared commitment to mutual goals, clear decision-making processes, and provisions for mentoring between large and small community foundations all appear to have been important factors in its success.

## 4.2.2 Case Study:

### Fostering partnerships between ENGOs and other sector organizations

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<b>Cleaners, Toxins and the Ecosystem</b>
<b>Grantmakers:</b>	Vancouver Foundation; also Bullitt Foundation, Endswell Foundation, EcoAction, and several unions and individuals
<b>Grant Recipient:</b>	Labour Environmental Alliance Society
<b>Location:</b>	Vancouver, B.C.
<b>Time Frame:</b>	2000-2001
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	\$17,000 from Vancouver Foundation

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#### Grantmaking Strategy:

The Vancouver Foundation is a community foundation established in 1943, which now administers some 800 funds and provides grants to projects across British Columbia. While much larger than most other community foundations, it shares a similar mandate and many characteristics with them.

Nine Advisory Committees, made up of volunteers with expertise in the field, make recommendations on funding applications to the Foundation Board. The stated purpose of the Environment Advisory Committee is "to encourage and assist in the resolution of broad environmental issues arising in British Columbia." Five specific goals relate to broad community participation, scientific understanding, resource management planning, training programs for First Nations and other communities, and projects addressing watershed, marine, and urban environmental issues.

The Foundation uses a letter of inquiry process to screen potential applications for their basic eligibility and relationship to Advisory Committee goals. If a project qualifies for a grant application, program staff assess its merits before it is considered by the Advisory Committee and the board.

The Foundation guiding principles support innovation where there is demonstrated commitment, the likelihood of effectiveness, and strong potential to serve as a model to others. Projects that involve collaboration among different sectors are often viewed as innovative, especially those involving the environment sector where such collaboration is rare.

Like most jurisdictions, British Columbia has a long history of antagonism between environmentalists and union workers, particularly in resource industries such as forestry and mining. However, in early 1998, activists from the labour and environmental movements came together in a series of monthly forums sponsored by the Environment Committee of the Vancouver and District Labour Council. These forums led to the founding of a new organization called Labour Environmental Alliance Society (LEAS) dedicated to finding solutions to environmental problems based on social justice. LEAS projects mobilize workers around environmental issues, often by demonstrating the link between human health and the environment.

LEAS approached the Vancouver Foundation and several private foundations for support during its planning stages. The Vancouver Foundation was

quick to respond with positive interest, and actively encouraged the development of this collaborative approach.

### Description of the Project:

The Vancouver Foundation has provided several grants to assist this innovative organization in its development and its projects, including a start-up grant to help build a strong program base and create communications systems. These grants allowed LEAS to hire Mae Burrows as Executive Director.

Because Burrows has extensive background and personal credibility in both the labour and environmental movements, she became a key component in the success of the organization.

This grant also allowed LEAS to develop an introductory brochure and several articles for publication in labour and environmental papers, to create a newsletter and website, to develop overhead and PowerPoint presentations, and to set up two interactive email discussion lists.

### Key Learning Points:

Collaborations among organizations in different sectors are significantly more difficult to establish than within the environment sector alone, and most ENGOs lack experience in reaching out to groups beyond their traditional allies. Without the involvement and support of a funder such as a community foundation, ENGOs may also feel that the effort and time involved to create cross-sectoral partnerships are not sustainable. However, as the LEAS initiative demonstrates, the pay-off in community and environmental benefits arising from cross-sector collaboration can be substantial.

Several key factors which helped to make the LEAS collaboration a success should be considered by community foundations in weighing the merits of potential collaborations:

- The context within which collaboration can thrive is very important. Many community issues or concerns are not amenable to collaborative approaches, because antagonism may be too ingrained or the issues too adversarial. Look for issues where there is an overlap of values and interests among different sectors (such as the common interests in the effects of toxic chemicals on human health and the aquatic environment in the LEAS case). Timing is often an important element. External events or mounting frustration with adversarial approaches may provide triggers for groups to begin talking to each other, and establish a readiness for collaborative efforts. In most cases, the best strategy is to start with collaboration on relatively safe issues, build a track record of success in cooperative actions, and then expand into more difficult areas.

- The maturity and track record of the organizations involved is another key factor. Look for evidence of a diversity of views within an ENGO's board or membership, a track record of willingness to listen and respond to other views, and an awareness of the role they are playing and the constituency they represent on environmental issues. Successful collaboration requires compromise; some single-issue ENGOs may lack the ability or inclination to do that.
- When an organization seeks funding support for collaborative projects, it should be able to present clear evidence that it has already had initial discussions with the other organizations involved. Foundation members or staff may certainly be involved in contact prior to that, and may play a useful role in bringing potential partners together to see whether any type of collaboration develops. But collaborative efforts are generally too uncertain to warrant funding support until partners are formally committed.
- Having the right people involved is vital. In the LEAS case, Mae Burrows was already well-respected in both the labour and environment sectors, so was an ideal candidate to lead a collaborative program. In general, people involved in cross-sectoral collaborative projects must have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their organizations, be open to genuinely listening to the concerns of others, and be receptive to new ideas and new approaches. To a large extent, collaborations are about building strong relationships which can provide the benefits of a broader perspective on issues.

In addition, the grant contributed to the successful development of the Cleaners, Toxins and the Ecosystem project. This project recognizes that many commercial cleaners routinely used by union workers contain toxic substances that pose a risk both to human health and to the natural environment when these are discharged into local waters. LEAS staff examine the Material Safety Data Sheets that come with cleaning products, identify ingredients that cause health problems such as carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, and liver or kidney sensitizers, and seek healthier, safer alternatives. They also work with union members and others to enlist their cooperation and engage them in reducing the use of toxic materials.

This direct involvement of union members in addressing environmental and health issues related to toxins makes this alliance an innovative model for others to follow. Through specific projects geared to areas where their interests overlap, labour and environmental groups have been effectively brought together in an ongoing collaboration.

**Outcomes:**

The project developed a plain-language Cleaners and Toxins guide and distributed over 4000 copies. Over 500 people were engaged directly through workshops, presentations, and onsite programs. This included participants from schools, long-term care homes, bakeries, fish and meat processing plants, grocery stores, airports, and recycling depots, as well as employers, cleaning suppliers, building managers, and scientists and managers from several agencies. At least 20 organizations have become involved as partners, including 10 unions and 5 environmental organizations. These organizations meet periodically to share information, provide candidates for board and committee positions, and discuss other potential areas of collaboration.

The project also led to a special forum in January 2002 that brought together 60 unionists, environmentalists, cleaning product manufacturers and suppliers.

LEAS continues to expand its areas of activity, including projects relating to “right-to-know” labelling on cleaning products, a Prevent Cancer Campaign, and a project to expand the number of jobs from environmentally-friendly resource use by recovering logs that would otherwise be wasted.

### 4.3 Recommended Best Practices Relating to Fostering Collaboration

The following recommended best practices for fostering collaboration are drawn from discussions with experienced foundation staff, from the two case studies presented above, and from the published literature:

- **Make the process interactive:**

Collaborations work best when participants are involved in a meaningful way in all four stages - brainstorming, focusing, implementing, and closure. A community foundation can define broad outcomes and provide a framework for discussions, but it should leave considerable flexibility to allow participants to learn from the unexpected and make adjustments as they go. This can even extend to a formative evaluation process, in which participants and funders jointly define an evaluation framework and outcomes as part of the process of focusing the project.

- **Ensure clear agreement on the logistics:**

Collaborations do need clear up-front agreements on administrative arrangements, how funding decisions will be handled, and staffing. For any major collaborative project, there should be a dedicated coordinator of some kind, responsible to the collaboration as a whole rather than any single member group.

- **Recognize the importance of face-to-face networking:**

There is no substitute for face-to-face discussions to create and maintain common commitment to a collaborative project, and to iron out inevitable differences. These periodic gatherings can broaden the perspectives of participants, foster mentoring between groups, and build lasting relationships that have benefits well beyond the immediate project. Funding support for travel and facilities to bring collaboration partners together regularly, including both funders and grantees, is costly but vital. This networking supports peer learning, and builds strong relationships to overcome antagonism and resolve problems.

- **Look for issues with overlapping interests and readiness for new approaches:**

Collaborations between environment and other sectors have the best prospects for success when there is a clear overlap in interests and values, and when the context around an issue provides a reason for groups to talk to each other. Community foundations can usefully bring organizations together to discuss common issues, in the hope that some form of collaboration may emerge. Collaboration does not need to simply involve non-government organizations; universities, municipalities, and other agencies could also be involved. But organizations seeking support for a collaborative approach should already be having initial discussions between themselves before a funding application is considered.

- **Make sure the right people and the right organizations are involved:**

Since collaborations are so dependent on relationships, it is essential to consider the skills and credibility of the individuals involved, and the track record and maturity of the participating organizations. Community foundations likely already know the organizations and people involved in most sectors, which can be helpful in judging the potential for success in collaborative projects. But they may need to spend some time getting to know the ENGOs in their area, since this is a relatively new program area, before they are ready to consider collaboration in the environment sector.

#### 4.4 Selected Resource Information on Collaboration and Partnership

- *Leading the Field: Profiles of Community Foundation Leadership in Smart Growth and Livable Communities* (www.fundersnetwork.org), for some examples of how community foundations are addressing social/economic/environment issues through granting
- *Philanthropy Supports Equity and Smart Growth*, Kalima Rose, NFG Reports Summer 2001 (www.nfg.org)
- See also Resources, Community Foundations Canada, The Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities (www.fundersnetwork.org)
- *Community-based Collaboratives: A Study of Interorganizational Cooperation at the Neighbourhood Level*, Jessica Pitt, The Aspen Institute (www.nonprofitresearch.org)
- *The Collaboration Handbook: Creating, Sustaining, and Enjoying the Journey*, by M. Winer and K. Ray.
- *A Case Study in Ecosystem Philanthropy: The Collaboration of Community Foundations for the Gulf of Maine*, by Lissa Widoff for the Council on Foundations Community Foundation Conference, October 1998.
- *The Collaboration Challenge: How Nonprofits and Business Can Succeed Through Strategic Alliances*, James E. Austin, 2003.
- *In Search of Strategic Solutions: A Funders Briefing on Nonprofit Strategic Restructuring*, by D. La Piana & A. Kohm for Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, January 2003. ([http://www.geofunders.org/\\_uploads/documents/live/InSearchofStrategicSolutions.pdf](http://www.geofunders.org/_uploads/documents/live/InSearchofStrategicSolutions.pdf))
- *Best Practices for Funders: Providing Practical Support to Nonprofits Pursuing Strategic Restructuring*, La Piana Associates, June 2003. ([http://www.lapiana.org/resources/tips/funding/06b\\_2003.html](http://www.lapiana.org/resources/tips/funding/06b_2003.html))
- *Reflections from a Funder*, La Piana Associates, September 2003 ([http://www.lapiana.org/resources/tips/funding/09\\_2003.html](http://www.lapiana.org/resources/tips/funding/09_2003.html))
- *The Funder's Role in Strategic Restructuring*, La Piana Associates, June 2003 ([http://www.lapiana.org/resources/tips/deciding/06\\_2003.html](http://www.lapiana.org/resources/tips/deciding/06_2003.html))

## 5.1 Background Observations

For foundations interested in supporting a healthy environment in their communities, the concept of citizen engagement is crucial. Most successful nonprofit organizations rely heavily on their members, volunteers, and donors or other supporters. Besides wanting those people to be actively involved in supporting the organization, they often also encourage their participation in a broader set of activities designed to support healthy communities. For example, environmental organizations might ask their supporters to conserve energy or recycle, to gather ecological data, or to promote environmental protection in government decisions. All of these activities fall within the broad category of citizen engagement.

In many communities, the success of ENGOs in engaging citizens and maintaining their ongoing involvement is very uneven. Short-term participation tends to be high in hands-on projects such as tree planting or stream cleanup, and some ENGOs have built a considerable constituency for citizen science programs such as amphibian monitoring or bird population studies. But participation in proactive strategies such as municipal land use or economic development planning is generally limited and sporadic. Many people don't become engaged unless their immediate environment is threatened.

There is also a challenge in securing engagement beyond the traditional population base of largely white, older adult participants. In general, environmental organizations have not changed with the culture of their communities and have not achieved a broad spectrum of ethno-cultural participation. Many observers see opportunity for growth in this area, and in collaboration with First Nations groups. Young people tend to be involved in environmental issues through youth organizations, and their youthful enthusiasm is seldom successfully transferred to environmental groups in the community.

The thoughtleader interviews and literature review provided several insights and suggestions for community foundations to consider for effective citizen engagement in the environment:

- Community foundations generally know the communities they serve; one of their strengths is their understanding of the people of their community as well as the environmental challenges.

They should consider whether the breadth of their own volunteers, staff, and environmental grantmaking programs reflect the full range of age and cultural values within their community.

- Several factors have been identified which help to make citizen engagement more effective and that could be encouraged by funders: involvement of a range of stakeholders; partnerships; enlisting prominent local champions; providing a diversity of opportunities for involvement; face-to-face interactions; reasoned arguments; and maintaining a sustained presence and continuity of organizational involvement.
- In her report on *Theoretical Understandings of Citizen Engagement* prepared for the Hamilton Community Foundation, Lynda Lukasik points out that effective citizen engagement necessarily consists of a learning component coupled with an action component. While the techniques used to promote behavioural change may differ, she concludes that both mainstream and grassroots efforts can be effective, and that greater coordination of efforts and communication would be helpful.
- Defining “the environment” more broadly (e.g. to incorporate urban environment features such as streetscapes and community gardens, and concepts such as healthy neighbourhoods) can help to engage more organizations, particularly ethnic and economic groups, who may not consider traditional environmental issues as a leading concern but who do have related interests.
- Part of the need in encouraging community engagement in the environment relates closely to capacity building - looking at ways to equip ENGOs and their members to participate meaningfully in local decisions. This could mean training in how to effectively participate in planning processes, for example, or greater access to information and research resources to bring forward constructive options. It could also mean a greater emphasis on providing core funding to allow for organizational continuity, or structural changes such as gaining charitable status for key organizations.
- To increase the cultural diversity of participation in environmental issues, it is necessary to make

explicit efforts to reach out to groups outside of the mainstream, to create connections with local leaders, to understand cultural differences, and to involve them in the design of effective programs.

- Several foundation programs have effectively involved youth in targeted grantmaking programs, or in youth advisory councils. Youth internship programs with ENGOs could provide essential job experience while training future leaders.

## 5.2 Citizen Engagement Case Studies

This section includes three case studies relating to various aspects of grantmaking to support or encourage effective citizen engagement in the environmental field:

- a) **Effective citizen engagement at the local/neighbourhood level: Water Action Chelsea / Action-eau Chelsea** (*How can community foundation environmental grantmaking encourage the quantity and quality of grassroots involvement in community improvement?*)

While citizen engagement is often a secondary component in environmental projects, the nature and extent of that engagement is often unclear and difficult to measure. The Water Action Chelsea project was selected because it addresses an issue of clear community concern, and the role of the volunteers engaged is set within a clear framework.

- b) **Increasing the diversity of participation: Engaging Multicultural Communities** (*How can community foundation environmental grantmaking increase its effectiveness through participation of a range of social, economic and ethnic groups that is representative of the community?*)

Increasing the cultural diversity of participation in environmental issues is at an early stage in Canada, with a limited selection of cases. However, the Toronto case study presented here includes many helpful lessons, and good projects are also underway in Vancouver and other centres.

- c) **Engaging with youth: Youth in Philanthropy** (*How can community foundation grantmaking increase the involvement of youth in the development and delivery of environmental programs and projects?*)

The case study selected for engaging with youth is a Manitoba example of a program commonly used by community foundations, Youth Advisory Councils or Committees (YACs). While this project has been very successful in most ways, it has not produced the desired results in the environmental area. The case study examines why this is so, and how it and similar projects elsewhere might be improved.

## Effective citizen engagement at the local/neighbourhood level

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<b>Water Action Chelsea / Action-eau Chelsea</b>
<b>Grantmaker:</b>	North American Fund for Environmental Cooperation (NAFEC)
<b>Grant Recipient:</b>	Action Chelsea for Respect of the Environment (ACRE)
<b>Location:</b>	Quebec
<b>Time Frame:</b>	2003
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	\$40,000

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### Grantmaking Strategy:

The North American Fund for Environmental Cooperation (NAFEC) was established in 1995 as a means to fund community-based projects in Canada, Mexico and the United States. This Fund was created under the mandate of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), which addresses environmental issues from a continental perspective, particularly those issues related to free trade.

#### NAFEC supports projects that:

- are community-based (involve a clearly defined community of stakeholders who actively participate in the design and implementation of the project);
- respond to a specific issue or problem and lead to concrete results;
- reflect cooperative and equitable partnerships between or among organizations from different sectors and/or countries;
- meet the objectives of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation by complementing the current program;
- build the capacities of local people, organizations and institutions;

- emphasize sustainability; link environmental, social and economic issues; and
- leverage additional support, but that are unlikely to obtain full funding from other sources.

NAFEC seeks projects with outcomes that can be shared among communities across North America, as well as projects that explore the relationship between government policy and community-based efforts. NAFEC actively facilitates interaction among grantees, as well as with government agencies to disseminate learning from funded projects.

Each year, NAFEC establishes a thematic category for its granting program. In 2003, this category was environmental monitoring and assessment related to human health. Projects funded had to strengthen the capacity of citizens and communities to monitor aspects of their environments that affect their own health.

Competition for NAFEC grants has been intense. Approximately 400 proposals are received annually. An initial staff review screens out proposals that do not meet the funding guidelines, that clearly do not have a strong community base, or that are otherwise weak. Many of the remaining proposals are circulated to CEC staff for expert review. About 100 proposals are forwarded to a Selection Committee for serious consideration, along with a cover sheet with comments and review observations. In recent years, about 15-20 grants were awarded annually.

Individual projects are evaluated by a staff review of interim and final reports, with comments on follow-up needed to disseminate results. A simple but effective evaluation tool for projects has been to ask grantees to identify within their reports: What worked? What didn't work? What surprised you? What will happen in five years as a result of this project?

One of the project proposals considered and approved during the 2003 grant cycle was Water Action Chelsea, relating to a community-based monitoring program in a small Quebec town.

### Description of the Project:

Chelsea, Quebec is a community of about 6,000 people in the Gatineau region which has developed a reputation for innovative environmental policies in recent years. However, the town has no municipal water or wastewater infrastructure, and its low-density housing built directly on the Precambrian Shield bedrock of the area precludes future development of such facilities. Therefore, the future health of the community and its residents is closely linked to the quantity and quality of its vulnerable water supply.

The Water Action Chelsea project implements a science-based, community-run surface and groundwater monitoring and education program, engaging residents, businesses, community groups and schools in voluntary monitoring of water quality and quantity. The project is intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of the state of surface and ground water in the area, encourage stewardship of the water supply, and create a framework for its long-term management. It also proposed to identify which indicators and sampling intensities are most efficient and effective, with results that could be transferable to other communities.

The project was designed and is coordinated by Action Chelsea for Respect of the Environment (ACRE), an ENGO that was already well-developed and highly credible in the community. ACRE coordinates the community volunteers for sample collection, and provides the educational and stewardship aspects of the project. The municipality, which has strong working links with ACRE, committed \$20,000 to subsidize the costs of laboratory analysis of the water samples and maintains a database of the results. The University of Ottawa, through Dr. Scott Findlay, provides technical advice and will assist with analysis of summary data.

At the heart of this project is the participation of dozens of community volunteers, who actually collect water samples and measure well levels on a regular, repeated basis. Their involvement provides the legwork to make a comprehensive monitoring program possible, well beyond a level that the municipality could afford. As well, these volunteers become well-informed advocates for the protection of water quality and quantity within their neighbourhoods. Through their hands-on involvement, they become truly "engaged" in ensuring that their water is protected.

This project appealed to NAFEC because it met most of their funding criteria and the thematic approach for the year, because it was seen as a great example of integration and partnership among local citizens, the ENGO, the municipality and the university, and because it has good potential to act as a model for other communities.

### Outcomes:

The project was assisted by a student hired by ACRE to coordinate sampling and other activities, but most of the actual sampling was done by citizens recruited from ACRE's supporters and from volunteers who identified themselves during the well survey (see below). During 2003, the project completed a series of activities focusing on wells and local lakes, including:

- a survey of historical information on individual wells, with about 7-800 responses;
- setting up teams of citizen volunteers for each of 13 sections within the town to regularly monitor static water levels in wells, using equipment from the municipal office;
- water quality sampling in about 800 wells (out of 3,200 total in the town);
- initial sampling of lake water quality, with some preliminary data on stream sites;
- establishment of a geospatial electronic database by the municipality.

The project has recently received a major grant from the Quebec Ministry of the Environment to continue and expand the volunteer monitoring program, including looking at water quality problem locations. The Province wants to use this as a model for potential similar programs in other municipalities.

**Summary Comments:**

The Chelsea example demonstrates that effective citizen engagement often does not spring up spontaneously; rather it flourishes within a framework that provides direction and meaning. The

role of a credible environmental nonprofit, which often will have much higher public trust than either government or industry, can be a key factor.

**Key Learning Points:**

- A key feature of this project is the partnership among a community ENGO and its volunteers, the municipal government, and a university. This multi-stakeholder approach provided assurance that the project was technically sound and would produce concrete outcomes, while also provided leverage in attracting additional funding and donated time and expertise. NAFEC was particularly interested in the encouragement of people to apply their professional skills within their home community as volunteers.
- The history, community profile, and credibility of ACRE were significant factors in attracting citizen participation in the project. Citizens could see that their involvement would be meaningful because they trusted ACRE's reputation. It is interesting to note that while ACRE has had clear differences of opinion from the municipality on some issues, both organizations have the maturity to be able to work harmoniously on projects such as this one.
- Another key element in attracting citizen engagement is the direct relevance of water quality to the health of the community and its residents. Because of the lack of municipal infrastructure to provide water and sewage treatment, people were aware of their vulnerability to water quality impairment, and more ready to participate.
- This project raises the question of the extent to which citizen monitoring of water quality and quantity impinges on activities which governments would normally be expected to provide. In Quebec, government water sampling is mostly in response to problems rather than systematic, but that is not the case in some other provinces. However, the Chelsea volunteer monitoring is far more intensive and comprehensive than most government programs. It also reflects the NAFEC philosophy that citizen participation and awareness are the best safeguards for environmental quality, and are likely to be reflected over time in government programs and policies.
- The list of funding criteria laid out by NAFEC provided a useful framework to highlight the merits of this proposal. ACRE had done its homework to make the project technically sound (e.g. by ensuring that their database was compatible with federal and provincial standards) and to build on results from previous projects. The nature of the project and the high environmental profile of Chelsea made this a project with good potential for showcasing, especially for demonstrating, the value of preventing water quality degradation rather than investing large sums in later treatment.

## 5.2.2 Case Study:

### Increasing the diversity of participation

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<b>Engaging Multicultural Communities</b>
<b>Grantmakers:</b>	Environment Canada (EcoAction) and Ontario Trillium Foundation
<b>Grant Recipient:</b>	Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA)
<b>Location:</b>	Greater Toronto Area (GTA)
<b>Time Frame:</b>	1998-2000
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	\$100,000 Environment Canada, \$150,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation over 2 years

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#### Grantmaking Strategy:

The diverse “Canadian mosaic” continues to be a major characteristic of Canadian communities. Immigrants totaled 5.4 million or 18.4% of the population in 2001. The First Nations population in Canada has grown as well, and First Nations people form a majority in some communities.

Immigrants often concentrate near family and friends of the same cultural origin and as result these cultural communities can become a large proportion of the local population in some centres. Chinese speakers represent 26% of the population in Vancouver, where only 50% designate English as their mother tongue. About one-third of Toronto’s residents speak neither English nor French at home. Diverse communities are common in the Greater Toronto Area and in other centres across Canada.

Traditionally, the environmental movement has been dominated by the English or French speaking membership and culture. Clearly it is very difficult to make progress in protecting the environment at the community level when there is very little effective communication or engagement with large segments of the community. This “cultural disconnect” is a serious problem for ENGOs in many communities.

Engaging new immigrants and diverse cultures presents special challenges for environmental organi-

zations and grantmakers. Language is an obvious barrier to information exchange, but there are other obstacles, both cultural and economic. For example, new immigrants have special “settlement” priorities arising from the urgent need to find employment, housing, language skills and new friends, and to maintain links to their country of origin. There are additional barriers arising from the lack of established association with environmental organizations. New immigrants and people belonging to diverse cultural groups are typically under-represented in environmental organizations.

Environment Canada, through its EcoAction program, has promoted the belief that to achieve long term environmental protection, there must be broad community understanding, support for good policy and volunteerism to carry out some of the work. To have impact in communities with a large multicultural component, it is essential to reach individuals from those cultures. There are two basic strategies to achieve this:

- encourage mainstream environmental groups and government agencies to include individuals from diverse cultures in their projects; or
- encourage cultural, social service and language training organizations to include environmental programming for their members.

In 1997, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) proposed the Community Development for Multicultural Environmental Stewardship (CDMES) project that employed the second strategy, outreach to cultural organizations.

CDMES was intended to achieve short, medium and long term objectives. The most important objective of the project was to engage different cultural organizations and develop communications and working relationships between the participating organizations and TRCA. In the long term, the program hoped to introduce information about Canadian ecology to different communities, and to engage new Canadians and members of diverse cultural groups in support of sound environmental stewardship. In addition, and almost incidental to the relationship building and communication objectives, the project included stewardship work to deliver tangible benefits in the form of stream restoration and clean up, tree planting and habitat structures for wildlife.

The CDMES initiative is notable for several reasons. It placed first priority on building relationships and communication between the environmental sector and multicultural communities, with immediate environmental results in a secondary role. It avoided the simplistic “just invite them to the meeting” and “translate the English brochure” approach that has shown little success in the past.

Instead, the CDMES initiative recognized that the environmental groups must learn as well and change their ways of doing things. TRCA was employing the principles of “social marketing” and persuasion by getting to know the needs of multicultural groups and recent immigrants, identifying barriers, and then testing various ways to remove those barriers and draw multicultural groups into conservation work. For both the funders and TRCA, venturing into the soft and somewhat mysterious process of relationship building with unfamiliar cultures was a bold and important step.

The CDMES proposal was subject to an extensive technical review by Environment Canada to evaluate its technical merit. Environment Canada staff reviewed the expected benefits and the capacity of TRCA to deliver the promised program. These evaluations were provided to a Review Committee in competition with other projects. In addition, since EcoAction would provide only part of the funding, the project was reviewed by the Ontario Trillium

Foundation according to its three level review. CDMES scored highly with both funders, and was approved.

### Description of the Project:

The CDMES project consisted of outreach initiatives, community action to restore the environment and follow-through to foster the new relations and share what was learned from the project.

The outreach activity was directed to establish contact, build a relationship and greater understanding between TRCA and a range of cultural organizations with substantial representation in the region such as the Hispanic community in Toronto and the South East Asian community in Peel Region. This involved TRCA project staff identifying and meeting with leaders and influencers in many different communities, listening to the leaders and seeking understanding of their needs and interests. Other tasks included:

- developing multi-lingual, culturally sensitive communication material (changing more than the words, changing the approach and message as well);
- identifying and addressing barriers to participation;
- shaping programs to provide “value added” for different cultural groups and immigrants with settlement priorities;
- working with Adult ESL (English as a Second Language) and LINC (Language Instruction for New Canadians) programs to communicate environmental messages.

The community action component was intended to improve the natural environment in selected areas within three watersheds in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Multicultural groups were engaged in planning for the restoration of each area, an activity that provided opportunities to convey information about Canadian ecology and the connection between the natural environment and every day life. Once the restoration was planned, projects to restore the areas were undertaken including youths, school groups and members of many cultural groups. Stewardship activities included:

- stream and ravine restoration, including removal of litter and foreign objects;

- shoreline restoration and planting;
- native tree planting;
- wildflower and native planting to protect and enhance wildlife and water quality;
- installing signage to educate visitors;
- conservation workshops and slide presentations.

Finally, the project was designed to share the lessons learned from the initiative with other environmental groups, and to provide some measures to ensure sustained effort to foster the new relationships and community engagement. A video, *Human Connections: Multiculturalism and The Environment*, was produced to illustrate the experience, and TRCA made a commitment to a new staff position to foster multicultural environmental stewardship in the region.

#### Outcomes:

Both EcoAction and TRCA staff were very pleased with the outcome of this initial effort. They initiated communication with groups that represent an important part of the watershed community, groups where they had little previous contact. According to TRCA there are 43 identifiable cultural and language groups in the Greater Toronto Region, and this initiative had greater success with some than with others. However, any significant success in an area where little had been accomplished before was considered to be an important breakthrough.

As a result of this project, TRCA gained insight on the needs and priorities of these varied communities and found them receptive to learning about the Canadian environment and how it affects them. As well:

- All parties learned positive lessons from the experience: the granting agencies, TRCA, the cultural organizations, and the individuals who participated;
- Multi-cultural groups were pleased to participate in their community in a new way, and proceeded to propose their own environmental stewardship projects including:
  - two restoration, planting and environmental education projects in Peel Region sponsored by southeast Asian groups;
  - two urban environment and stewardship projects sponsored by the downtown (Toronto) Hispanic Council;
- Some of the trainees within the project found related employment and went on to do similar environmental work, and to volunteer. TRCA created a multicultural stewardship position that is staffed by a person from a cultural minority;
- The project met or exceeded most of its tangible deliverables such as trees planted, streams restored etc.;
- TRCA is beginning to change how it does things, how it looks at its employment policies, and its communications materials to reduce barriers and be more inclusive in its work, and it is helping others do the same.

Based on what it learned from this initial experience, TRCA went on to create and fund a Phase II program that has engaged many more participants from different cultures, planted more trees, restored more streams and protected more natural habitat.

As well, this initiative has spawned other projects aimed at increasing diversity in the environment community. A new partnership project, Environmental Volunteer Network (EVN) has been initiated with Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) with funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The objective of this project is to provide volunteer experience, mentorship and training to new Canadian professionals or people with environmental backgrounds who are unable to find work in their field of expertise.

#### Summary Comments:

A healthy environment is essential to the entire community, encompassing all cultural groups. Efforts to protect or restore the environment need broad cultural understanding, support and participation. To achieve this end, initiatives must be more inclusive and environmental grantmakers should use strategies to encourage and support broader participation in the task. The Community Multicultural Environmental Stewardship project illustrates the importance of creative solutions and reaching out to those groups, working with their leaders, speaking their language, understanding their cultural norms, and presenting programs that consider their needs such as job skills, employment opportunities and language development.

## Key Learning Points:

The “Engaging Multicultural Communities” initiative illustrates a number of important elements:

- The skills and capacity of the program delivery organization, in this case the TRCA, are very important to success. The program proponent must have people who can reach out to the different communities, be flexible in approach and provide the role of catalyst, trainer, and program delivery agent.
- Sustained effort is important. A multi-year program and the capacity for follow-up projects increase the probability that the groups will continue the environmental stewardship effort after the initial grant.
- The TRCA program addressed the cultural group’s needs and priorities. For immigrants, programs that provide employment or employable skills to help participants settle are attractive, and so are activities that develop English language skills. The program made leaders in the cultural community and the participants feel they were contributing to the larger community.
- While some issues – food, clean air, clean water – enjoy universal understanding, the TRCA approach also adapted to the differing interests of various cultural groups (e.g. fishing and fish safety for Chinese groups, vegetables and planting for Samoli groups).
- TRCA was consistent in its respect and engagement of community leaders when seeking support, seeking their advice on the needs and priorities of each group, and incorporating information about community attitudes into communication materials. In some cases these leaders interpreted the TRCA messages but sometimes materials were printed in the native language.
- This program has not focused solely on translating written materials, but rather has created a larger framework encompassing objectives within different time frames, opportunities for hands-on involvement in environmental projects, a range of media including video, games and volunteer kits, and opportunities for discussion and feedback throughout the program.
- Grantmakers themselves could engage directly in many of the actions and principles shown in this case study in their outreach to diverse communities – seeking the involvement of community leaders and organizations, identifying cultural needs and priorities, setting objectives to measure effectiveness in reaching diverse groups, and committing to internal organizational change to reflect community diversity.

### 5.2.3 Case Study:

## Engaging with youth

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<b>Youth in Philanthropy</b>
<b>Grantmakers:</b>	Community Foundation of Portage and District, funded in part by the Thomas Sill Foundation
<b>Grant Recipient (s):</b>	Local charities, as recommended by the Youth Advisory Committees, and approved by the Community Foundation
<b>Location:</b>	Arthur Meighen High School, Portage Collegiate Institute, Portage la Prairie, Manitoba
<b>Time Frame:</b>	2001 – ongoing (six year program)
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	\$7,000/yr for six years

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### Grantmaking Strategy:

Community foundations across Canada identify increased engagement of local youth as an important goal. An increasingly common approach is to involve youth in the actual process of community grantmaking through participation on Youth Advisory Councils or Committees (YACs). In Canada, there are currently about 40 YACs in operation and more soon to be launched. While the first Canadian YACs were established about seven years ago, most are very new initiatives. The YAC model varies greatly across the country by community size, amount of endowment and specific operating model.

Due to its prevalence as a youth engagement tool for community foundations, it is useful to consider the YAC model as a vehicle for increased youth engagement in the environment. What opportunities and challenges does the model present for community foundations interested in increasing the

engagement of youth with local environmental issues? This case study provides an excellent context for exploring these issues.

The Community Foundation of Portage and District had identified several goals that led to the establishment of its Youth in Philanthropy (YIP) initiative, including a desire to involve young people in the Community Foundation itself, to develop an appreciation among youth of volunteerism and community service, and the creation of caring and involved citizens for the future. The actual grants made under the program are intended to benefit the community under the broad charitable purposes of the community foundation, including “enhancement of the environment” and “other community activities or facilities of a charitable nature.”

This initiative originated with an application to the Community Foundation from one of the local high schools as a result of initiatives elsewhere in the province. The Youth in Philanthropy project in

Portage la Prairie is one of five communities in Manitoba funded in part by The Thomas Sill Foundation of Winnipeg. The Thomas Sill Foundation grants \$7,000 per year for the first three years and the Community Foundation of Portage and District will sponsor \$7,000 per year for another three years. Within Portage, Arthur Meighen High School and Portage Collegiate Institute each receive an allocation of \$2,500 for grants and \$1,000 toward expenses and the school endowment fund. Any additional fund raising or income augments the endowment fund, and all funds are held by the Community Foundation.

At the start of the Portage and District YIP initiative there was an expectation that involving youth in community research, developing options and making grant recommendations would provide them personal development and increase their understanding of the full range of community needs, including the environment.

#### **Description of the Project:**

YIP is a partnership with the Community Foundation of Portage and District, two local high schools and the participating youth. The high schools provide coordinators for the Youth Advisory Committee, meeting places and guidance for the process. The Community Foundation provides grant funds and administration of the YIP program. The youth provide the energy, ideas, research and decide which grants to recommend. The students also develop and pursue fundraising ideas for the endowment fund.

The youth participants are encouraged to identify their values and priorities at the beginning of each year during a workshop presented by the Community Foundation. Subsequently the youth members work in small teams to research community issues, gather information and then discuss how and where they should recommend grants.

At this stage, discussion of environmental concerns has been a part of the process. The environment usually comes up in the initial discussion of values, typically related to protection of the environment, environmental education, or animal protection projects. Sometimes the environment gets outvoted at this stage in favour of human and social service issues, but sometimes the environment makes it to the next stage of the process, which involves consideration of related local charities. At

this point, YAC members have had difficulty identifying any local charities involved in the environment.

Decisions are made by consensus, typically with a great deal of discussion on the final recommendations of grants made by the youth committee to the Foundation's Board. Five to ten projects are funded each year for each of the two high schools.

#### **Outcomes:**

The Youth in Philanthropy initiative in Portage and District is in the third of six years. Youth interest in the program has grown, with an increase in the number of students volunteering to participate. Both the high school and the community foundation have monitored the activities and community contribution of youth on the committee, and both are enthusiastic about the general indications so far including:

- the growing appreciation of volunteerism and a more positive attitude toward the community as expressed by the youth participants;
- the increased number of participants who have undertaken new volunteer work in the community;
- community enhancement and benefit from the actual grant-supported projects;
- increased incentive and initiative on the part of youth.

As noted environmental subjects are identified, explored and discussed by youth participants and there is interest every year in entertaining environmental proposals. Despite these positive environmental process outcomes, no environmental projects have yet been funded through the Portage and District YIP program. The Community Foundation and YIP staff advisor attribute this pattern primarily to a difficulty in finding any local environment groups with charitable status – making them ineligible given the foundation's granting criteria. The staff advisor also notes that while some of the students have an interest in the environment, it is a fairly new area for the YAC members overall. In addition, they seem to perceive less of a connection between the environment as a charitable activity than for other sectors such as human services.

### Summary Comments:

Community foundations find the YAC model to be a very positive mechanism to build youth awareness of the community and volunteerism. However, if foundations wish to use this approach to enhance youth involvement in the environment sector, partnering and other accommodations will be necessary because many local groups in the environment sector are not registered charities, or because other barriers limit participation.

For example, YACs tend to fund youth-led projects within their communities, yet there are often very few youth-led environmental groups – especially within smaller communities. As a first step YACs can undertake community assets mapping to identify the youth groups or individuals currently active in environmental issues. YAC members could also play an active role in community youth-environmental development by organizing capacity-building workshops themselves, or by helping any environmentally-oriented groups or individuals link with other organizations, and with existing professional development opportunities.

An increased focus on the environment can also be supported by increasing the awareness and understanding of environmental issues among YAC participants through such activities as:

- connecting the YAC members with some of the other environmental grantmakers active in their

communities including information-sharing, partnerships and mentoring;

- ensuring that the YACs include the participation of some youth with environmental backgrounds and experiences who can bring this perspective to the table;
- bringing in environmental groups to talk to the YAC participants about the environmental issues facing their communities. These groups don't have to be former or even potential applicants in order to help inform the youth.

For further ideas and support, there is considerable research to support “best practices” and variations that have increased the effectiveness of the basic YAC model, youth in philanthropy programs, and youth engagement in general. For example, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation has published information, as has Karin E. Tice of Formative Evaluation Research Associates. These and other general youth-related references follow this case. Much of this work equally applies to engaging youth in the environment sector. In addition, Community Foundations of Canada plays an active role in building understanding of the principles, models and best practices in youth engagement and would be a valuable resource to community foundations on this topic.

### Addressing Barriers to Funding

The environment sector is often less developed at the local level, and as consequence few local organizations have charitable registration. Fortunately, there are many simple solutions that are widely used to overcome the problem, solutions that will help all charitable sectors, but particularly the environment. These solutions include:

- encouraging local environment groups to seek charitable registration, where this makes sense, and to be aware of regional, provincial or national environmental organizations who can often provide many kinds of support, including a charitable partnership;
- encouraging existing local charitable groups (such as service clubs) to partner with non-charitable groups doing environmental projects, and to accept grants for them to deliver environmental work;
- encouraging provincial or regional environment groups who are registered charities to accept grants and to work with local chapters or affiliates as their “agents” to deliver the local benefit;
- where the foundation charter and charitable regulations permit, the foundation may contract (rather than grant) with a non-charitable group to carry out the work; and
- set up a re-granting or “mini-grants” program that will allow making small grants for charitable work to non-charities.

A more complete discussion and list of measures that a community foundation can take to support non-charities in the community is included on page 16 of *Affecting Environmental Policy in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin: A Primer for Community Foundations*, written by John Jackson and Fe De Leon, Canadian Environmental Law Association, September 2000.

## Key Learning Points:

The experience of the Community Foundation of Portage and District's YIP program highlights a number of key points about the specific opportunities and challenges inherent in the YAC model in terms of its potential for engaging youth with the environment:

- A key feature of The Portage Community Foundation YIP program is that it is school-based. This means that the foundation works in partnership with local high schools - an approach that provides access to youth, support from staff advisors with expertise in working with youth, and the opportunity to relate science and environmental education with real applications in the community. The process encourages engagement among the youth involved in researching environmental concerns and potential projects.
- Not all Youth Advisory Committees are school-based. Many community foundations have established YACs that work effectively with a variety of delivery partners including local social service agencies and youth/adult partnerships. The type or range of delivery partners may have an impact on the program's environmental focus. For example, the environment does not fall within the specific focus of most United Ways. For this reason special efforts and outreach may be needed to bring environmental connections into the program.
- As noted, the Portage Community Foundation and YIP staff advisor have recognized that despite a strong interest in the environment by youth members demonstrated throughout the process, very few environmental projects have been recommended. They have attributed this pattern primarily to the lack of local environment groups in their community that meet the program's requirement of charitable registration – a not uncommon situation in smaller and rural communities across Canada. While a Youth in Philanthropy grant program can be effective in engaging youth in the community and volunteerism, it will not address this and other barriers to grants to environmental projects, which may be constraints to foundation funding to the environment in general (see box "Addressing Barriers to Funding").
- Another factor affecting the low level of environmental grants through the YIP program may be a general lack of familiarity with the sector among the youth participants. The Portage YIP staff advisor noted that all it would take to boost the environment within the program is one student who has a passion for the environment and some awareness of the organizations involved.
- Some foundations have had greater success in generating environmental grants through their YIP programs. For example, the Winnipeg Foundation, which has 20 school-based YIP programs, has made a significant number of grants to environmental projects including environmental education, air quality initiatives and waste reduction. The Winnipeg Foundation has the same youth interest in the environment found in Portage, and the same requirement for charitable registration, but the larger centre of Winnipeg has the advantage of a greater number of local environmental charities. In addition, organizers in Winnipeg cite other possible reasons for their program's environmental successes. For example, the youth in Winnipeg seem to be more aware of the existence of environmental groups active in the province that provide them with links to a range of environment issue areas and connections to many environmental programs.

### 5.3 Recommended Best Practices Relating to Citizen Engagement

The following recommended best practices are based on information from the three case studies, the thought leader interviews, and recent literature:

- **Environmental projects with citizen volunteers must be meaningful:**  
 Successful projects in this area must not simply provide opportunities for citizen engagement of some sort; rather they must ensure that the quality of the activity engaged in is meaningful and rewarding to the participants. For example, if citizens are being asked to collect data, there must be a well-organized framework for its storage and analysis; if they are planting trees, there should be assurance that the species are appropriate and likely to survive. Otherwise, volunteers are disillusioned and the funder's money is wasted. A strong credible ENGO as project leader, together with a well-thought-out proposal, are essential if citizen engagement is to be successful.
- **Engagement programs must respond to community needs and concerns:**  
 People become engaged when the opportunity presented by a project addresses something that concerns them directly – the quality of their drinking water, the chance to develop some employment skills, the desire for more trees in their neighbourhood. In some cases, outreach and education programs can raise awareness and encourage engagement e.g. many naturalists are involved in monitoring frog and bird populations because of information about their declining populations. But unless people have a reason to care about an environmental project, their engagement is likely to be minimal.
- **Work with cultural groups and leaders willing to integrate environmental programs:**  
 To respond to Canada's increasingly diverse population, community foundations should be supporting environmental projects that reach out to involve various cultural groups through a wide variety of programs. Seeking out the views and support of community leaders, providing information and resources in a variety of languages, respecting different community preferences, and working with existing institutions such as ESL organizations can all be part of an outreach strategy.
- **Encourage ENGOs seeking to increase diversity to first look within:**  
 The staff and board of most environmental organizations do not reflect the diverse make-up of the communities in which they work. An important step in attracting participation from diverse communities and age groups is a process of organizational change, using cultural sensitivity training, hiring policies, and other means to make ENGOs more inclusive and representative. Community foundations are in a position to point out this need, and to provide support in addressing it.
- **Address barriers to greater environmental involvement in Youth in Philanthropy and Youth Advisory Council programs:**  
 While Youth in Philanthropy programs are widely used by community foundations and are often very successful, don't assume that they will automatically attract youth involvement in, or grants for, environmental projects. Since many community-based ENGOs lack charitable status, creative ways to fund environmental projects will likely be needed to overcome this barrier to participation. Capacity-building and awareness activities should also be considered to build the success of YACs in environmental engagement.
- **Recognize that youth view environmental concerns in a different context:**  
 Today's youth differ from previous generations: they are more mobile, more influenced by technology and the media, more diverse, more apt to postpone major life decisions. They expect different forms of engagement than older Canadians, with an emphasis on supporting projects that provide long-term solutions and demonstrate results, rather than band-aids. They tend to see environmental concerns as

part of a broader social justice and/or quality of life context, and most are unlikely to be involved in traditional ENGOs or to be receptive to general appeals about the environment. To attract the participation of youth, community foundations will have to support projects with an integrated outlook, an emphasis on activism, and opportunities for youth to be in control. In fact, community foundations and their YACs could lead the way by initiating an integrated approach to community needs that emphasizes the links or bridges between the full range of issues.

- **Be willing to experiment with different approaches to engage youth:**

Engaging the current cohort of young people in programs to address environmental concerns is going to require innovation and a range of techniques – community collaborations, leadership training, partnerships with schools, effective adult-youth partnerships, and other concepts not yet developed. As with other volunteers, youth need to know their participation is meaningful, not token. Community foundations should recognize that this is an area that needs more research, and particularly more experimentation to develop a wider range of models that work.

#### 5.4 Selected Resource Information on Constituency Building / Citizen Engagement

- *Sharing the Challenge: A Guide for Community-Based Environmental Planning* including guidance for the multi-stakeholder approach, Atlantic Coastal Action Program (ACAP), Environment Canada, (www.ec.ns.gc.ca)
- *Getting Citizens Involved in the Environment: Lessons Learned & Emerging Opportunities the Hamilton Area*, Lynda M. Lukasik, Hamilton Community Foundation
- *Theoretical Understandings of Citizen Engagement*, by Lynda M. Lukasik, prepared for Hamilton Community Foundation
- Quick Reference: *Community-Based Social Marketing*, Doug McKenzie-Mohr (www.cbsm.com) for techniques to improve effectiveness of environmental programs and communication. Further details in the book *Fostering Sustainable Behaviour: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing*, Doug Mackenzie-Mohr and William Smith, New Society Publishers, 1999.
- *Research on Barriers and Opportunities for Increasing Leadership in Immigrant and Refugee Communities: Public Report*, MOSIACA, prepared for the Hyams Foundation, Neighborhood Funders Group (NFG), (www.nfg.org)
- “Myths of Diversity”, *Alternatives Journal* Winter 2003 – particularly reference to Greenpeace BC success through diversity initiative
- *2001 Ontario Directory: Ethno-cultural Organizations and the Environment*. Ranjara Mitra, Sustainability Network (<http://sustain.web.net>)
- *Meeting the Challenge of Diversity*, Joan Crystal Pearlman and Breda Murphy Bova, Nonprofit World, Vol. 10, No. 4, 1992.
- *Youth Grantmakers: ...Outcomes and Lessons*, Council of Michigan Grantmakers (CMF), WK Kellogg Fdn ... How to set up a YAC
- *Youth Grantmakers: Best Practices*, (www.youth-grantmakers.org)
- *Youth and Community: Engaging Young People in Philanthropy and Service*, WK Kellogg Fdn (www.wkkf.org)
- *Engaging Youth in Philanthropy*, Karin E. Tice, New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising, No 38, Winter 2002, Wiley Periodicals Inc.
- *Citizen Re:Generation: Understanding Active Citizen Engagement Among Canada's Information Age Generations*, by Robert Barnard, Denise Andrea Campbell, and Shelley Smith (www.d-code.com/citizenregen.html)
- *Youth Philanthropy: A Framework of Best Practice*, by M. Cretsinger, WK Kellogg Foundation, 1999
- *Best Practices in Youth Philanthropy*, by P. Garza and P. Stevens, Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth, 2002.

## 6.0 Grantmakers Taking Leadership

### 6.1 Background Observations

Over the past decade, there has been a clear trend among many private foundations to become more strategic and specialized in their environmental grantmaking programs. As well, there has been a growing tendency for foundations to become more directly engaged in environmental issues, for example by participating with ENGOs in developing strategy and priorities. In some cases, foundations have taken the lead in bringing together people from all sides of an issue to attempt to negotiate, or at least discuss, potential solutions.

Grantmakers taking leadership is a delicate balance between the desire to use grants strategically to influence events and outcomes, and the desire to respond to the needs and priorities of the community. For community foundations active in the environment sector, that balance may also be affected by the capacity and confidence of the foundation to take a leadership role.

In many cases, environmental issues are profoundly affected by government policies and actions. Indeed, public consultations on land use planning and environmental standards have become a standard component in the development of public policy, often mandated by law. Contributing responsibly to these consultations is a part of civic duty. At the same time, the issues and technology involved have become quite complex. Citizens need the help of groups who can do the research, identify best practices and understand the choices.

Leadership in addressing environmental concerns tends to bring foundations and their grantees quickly into the realm of debating the merits of public policy. Despite the legitimacy of citizen engagement in public consultations and advocacy, many foundations, including most community foundations, have exhibited discomfort with funding advocacy activities by ENGOs.

For the most part, the issue here is not a legal one - the great majority of foundations are nowhere close to the limits on advocacy as set out in federal charitable policies. Rather, the prevailing cautious stance on advocacy is self-imposed, in response to concerns about community and donor acceptance, and in some cases because of the relatively small amount of discretionary grant funds available. In

response, most ENGOs are conditioned only to ask for support for conservative, "safe" projects.

Some of the larger and older foundations surveyed noted that their approach to leadership and to involvement in projects with an advocacy component has evolved over time, as their staff and boards became more comfortable in these areas. They also noted that there is a continuum between ENGO activities that are educational, to those that focus on supporting or encouraging civic engagement, to those that clearly advocate changes in public policy. Most funders are comfortable at the education end of that spectrum; very few support political kinds of activities at the extreme advocacy end. Determining how far along that spectrum a foundation is willing to go, and judging how proposed projects fit on the spectrum, can be difficult judgments.

Among the suggestions offered by experienced foundation staff were the following:

- One area where virtually all community foundations can be proactive is in finding out what is needed within their community. Convening workshops or forums on defined topics can be effective in educating the community foundation, building consensus, and fostering partnerships. Once gaps or needs are identified, the foundation may choose to focus grants around defined areas for greater impact. Attention should be paid to the capacity of ENGOs to absorb projects or grants; capacity building may be necessary first.
- Grantmakers can build their own capacity to serve a leading role within the environmental community. Local grantmakers' skills workshops can provide forums to build skills, share practices, learn who funds what, and network in ways that help close funding gaps within local communities. A community foundation's website can be used to link to reports or organizations that can provide assistance to their community.
- One way in which grantmakers can take a leadership role in the environment sector is by building in important elements such as strategic planning, evaluation, sharing results, etc. into their application process or grant conditions. Evaluation can be a helpful learning tool for both funders and grantees, but the scope of evaluation

required should be limited to factors that are practical, relevant, and appropriate to the scale of the grant and capacity of the recipient group.

- In crafting its own leadership role, a community foundation needs to decide early on how comfortable it is with controversial issues, and be up front with applicants about where on the spectrum of advocacy it will support. For example, it might agree to consider activities that promote positive solutions to problems, but refuse those that target or impugn any individual or sector in a negative way. In general, the organizations within the environment sector need more courageous grantmaking, but community foundations may choose to start with “safe” projects and gradually evolve into more contentious areas as they become more confident.
- A very useful resource for community foundations considering projects in this area is the report *Affecting Environmental Policy in the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin: A Primer for Community Foundations*, which was produced in 2000 for the Toronto Community Foundation by John Jackson and Fe de Leon. This report notes that environmental policy work is aimed at changing the ways that decisions are made by government, but it can have several components:
  - research;
  - proposals for action;
  - education of the public;
  - education of policy and decision-makers;
  - advocacy to get changes put into place;
  - watch-dogging to ensure implementation of a policy.

The report concludes with a set of suggested ways in which community foundations can best support environmental policy work.

- An important ingredient in confidence is having clear specific legal advice as to the current scope and limits for charitable activities. Several excellent recent resources are available, including *Advocacy on the Agenda*, a discussion on recent legal changes by Volunteer Canada, and a September 2003 Political Activities Policy Statement that is available on the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency website

(www.ccr-aadrc.gc.ca). Most respondents believe that community foundations operate far from the current limits, for reasons that have nothing to do with charitable law.

- Community foundations should largely focus on the merits of the projects submitted, even in cases where the applicant organization may be involved in advocacy activities in other parts of its work (except in instances where the nature of their advocacy conduct is clearly unacceptable). A wide range of non-advocacy projects could assist in building capacity for these groups with minimal risk of controversy - support for facilities and training, computer support, cross-sectoral linking, workshops and events, bringing in reputable expertise or resource people to increase knowledge.
- Community foundations can use the network of other funders, contacts within the environmental community, and peer reviews of major proposals to help ensure that they understand the issues and risks associated with potentially contentious projects.

## 6.2 Grantmakers Taking Leadership Case Studies

Two case studies are provided in this section to add to the observations drawn from Foundation staff and the literature:

- a) Foundation-led initiative: Calgary Dialogue on Urban Ecosystem Health** (*How can community foundation grantmaking be made more effective through a strategic process initiated by the foundation to direct grants to areas of greatest benefit and/or through improved evaluation processes?)*

The Calgary Dialogue case study is an excellent example of a foundation using its convening role to help a community define its own environmental priorities. It is already serving as a model for similar programs elsewhere.

- b) Supporting engagement in public policy: Community Engagement in Newfoundland Forestry** (*How can community foundation grantmaking support civic engagement on environmental public policy issues while staying within the legal requirements for charitable activities?)*

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The Newfoundland case study includes several activities that are common to many environmental projects – research and analysis, networking, information sharing and training. But these activities are clearly oriented to influencing future government decisions on forest land allocation and management. As such, it provides an effective example of ways in which a foundation can support constructive citizen engagement well within the limits set out by policies on charitable activities.

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## Foundation-led Initiative

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<b>Calgary Dialogue on Urban Ecosystem Health</b>
<b>Grantmakers:</b>	Calgary pilot funded by Alberta Ecotrust Foundation with in-kind support from Environment Canada and Health Canada (Community Animation Program – CAP), Alberta Community Development
<b>Grant Recipient:</b>	Alberta Ecotrust Foundation
<b>Location:</b>	Calgary
<b>Time Frame:</b>	October 2002
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	\$1000

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### Grantmaking Strategy:

Some community focused foundations respond to applications, believing that this is the best way to let the community set priorities. This strategy assumes that groups and individuals in the community have the overview and maturity to assess the gaps and establish priorities, and know where to apply for support. Experience has shown that all too often these assumptions are not justified, and alternative ways to identify and address environmental issues would be beneficial.

One alternative is to increase expertise in the environmental field of the staff and board members of the foundation by hiring consultants and commissioning studies. This approach can lead to a set of environmental priorities and funding guidelines. While a certain amount of this is beneficial for every foundation, many lack the internal resources to establish and maintain a full environmental strategy. Fortunately, there is a second very affordable approach. An excellent example of this middle approach is the “Community Dialogues on Urban Ecosystem Health” initiative undertaken by Alberta Ecotrust Foundation.

The Alberta Ecotrust Foundation defines itself as “a non-governmental fund raising agency dedicated

to supporting grassroots environmental projects throughout the province of Alberta.” Ecotrust “works through collaborative partnerships of people and organizations that believe that the environment is integral to everything we do, everything we have and everything we need as a community.”

In the past, most project proposals received by Ecotrust have been directed to protect wilderness, nature and rural environments. All these are worthy and important, but projects that address urban environments have been much less common, and applicants in this area lacked the size and capacity of nature groups such as Ducks Unlimited or the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Given that urban environments are the ones closest to most citizens and subject to some of the greatest environmental stresses, the lack of proposals to address urban environments was a significant gap that Ecotrust felt should be addressed.

Ecotrust was aware that initiatives within the urban environment must recognize the realities that affect both environmental groups and potential funders of their projects. Foremost are the stereotypes and misunderstandings that come with the term “environmentalist”. The name and topic are commonly associated with protest, conflict, a narrow

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focus of interest, and a “doomsday” scenario. However, many individuals and groups who work on urban environmental issues such as clean air, safe water, transportation, urban planning and healthy communities don’t see themselves as “environmentalists”, even though their interest is central to urban ecology. Such groups are most interested in positive, practical solutions. They see the environment not as “an issue”, but as the broad basis for quality of life and the kind of community they want.

The Alberta Ecotrust Foundation is not an advocate, but rather an enabler that helps communities define and achieve the quality of life and kind of community the citizens desire. Ecotrust was supported in this goal by the Community Animation Program (CAP) of Environment/Health Canada (Edmonton Office), and by Alberta Community Development.

In 2002, Ecotrust conceived the concept of “Community Dialogues on Urban Ecosystem Health” with the initial pilot project in Calgary in October. The purpose was to:

- stimulate the submission of more fundable urban environment projects;
- engage more groups and individuals in projects that address the urban environment, defined broadly;
- current activities underway;
- potential future solutions;
- collaborative strategies and partnerships.

Ecotrust chaired the planning process and recruited volunteers and support from other agencies and volunteers from community groups. Alberta Community Development provided facilitator Dwayne Van Bavel, and a process to foster discussion, surface ideas and move toward practical solutions. The event was a single day, daytime event at the Inglewood Community Centre, a Calgary location, with refreshments and mid-day meal provided.

A framework for evaluation was part of the planning. Evaluation included:

- an evaluation of the event by participants as part of the day;
- a formal “Results Report” (available from the Ecotrust web page);
- post-event debrief and evaluation by the planners; and

- tracking of applications, participant comments and response from funders and agencies after the event.

#### Outcomes:

The Calgary Community Dialogue was evaluated by participants as part of the program, and by the planners and Ecotrust following the event. It was considered a substantial success as an event and as a pilot study. Specific outcomes of the pilot include:

- Alberta Ecotrust received two environmental project proposals for Calgary as an immediate consequence of the event;
- Funders present, including Alberta Ecotrust, learned about environmental priorities in the community, and as a result can make better informed grantmaking;
- Participants expressed strong appreciation of Alberta Ecotrust’s leadership in convening the session and allowing them an opportunity to network with each other and with other funders;
- Participants have set up a city environmental network and listserve operated by “Earth Day Calgary”, to share information and coordinate on an ongoing basis. There is also a proposal to make the Calgary workshop an annual event;
- Some of the participants received facilitation training that has since been employed on other projects – there has been capacity building;
- Alberta Ecotrust has committed to three more Community Dialogues in Lethbridge, Edmonton and Fort McMurray in January 2004, and the CAP program is providing funding support for travel and some other costs. Requests for participation are strong, mainly groups and individuals not traditionally regarded as environment groups, a pattern that should broaden action for enhancement of urban environments;
- There is interest in a variation, Urban/rural Dialogues, to build cooperation in addressing those environmental issues;
- Alberta Ecotrust is considering development of a “dialogue toolkit” that would permit other groups to sponsor and conduct dialogues in their communities.

**Summary Comments:**

In a few communities in Canada, groups working on environmental issues are already well networked and have found ways to tell funders the priorities and needs of the sector. However, in many communities these networks could be enhanced, and program delivery groups and funders need to be introduced to each other. In these circumstances, most community foundations will lack the information and the opportunity to make grants for the greatest environmental benefit. An initiative such as Community Dialogue on the Urban Environment can provide an opportunity for foundation leadership to address these needs at very modest cost.

Whether the initiative is achieved through an “agent” or grant to an organizer, or directly by the foundation itself, the result can be the same. The information gained by the funder may be greater if the event is conducted in-house, providing that foundation staffing and resources permit.

The community dialogue approach is an example of how the convening function can be one of the most powerful tools at the disposal of a community foundation. Because of the connections to different organizations in the community, its perceived neutrality and its broad interests, the community foundation has particular strengths and opportunities. At the same time, convening a discussion is a way to help the effectiveness of existing groups and provide support without any material risk. It also helps the foundation in the environmental field by providing insight as to the community’s needs and priorities.

**Key Learning Points:**

While there are many ways in which a foundation can provide leadership on environmental issues, this example of hosting a community dialogue has worked especially well in an urban context. Among the lessons learned:

- Convening a community dialogue to discuss environmental priorities can be a powerful, positive, non-controversial way for a foundation to show leadership in supporting groups who want to improve the quality of life and environment in the community. The dialogue contributes to that improvement through encouraging, networking different groups, helping to establish priorities, mutual support and reducing duplication of effort.
- The presence of potential funders is helpful not only to the funders (who learn about issues and community priorities), but also to groups and individuals who work on issues who learn about relevant programs and make personal connections.
- Through mechanisms such as community dialogues, foundations can provide a measure of coordination for diverse groups interested in issues that affect the urban environment, and encourage a positive and collaborative approach.
- Foundations can employ the community dialogue approach to engage a wide spectrum of groups beyond those who see themselves as “environmentalists”, and consequently increase participation and avoid some of the problems and limitations that come with that label.
- The pilot project approach in Calgary validated this approach as a useful model for funders to provide community leadership. It also recruited financial support for additional dialogues, refined the process for best value.
- The use of skilled facilitators and specialized facilitation processes were very helpful in conducting a positive and constructive dialogue

## 6.2.2 Case Study:

### Supporting engagement in public policy

<b>Case Study Name:</b>	<i>Community Engagement in Newfoundland Forestry</i>
<b>Grantmaker:</b>	George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation
<b>Grant Recipient(s):</b>	Sierra Club of Canada
<b>Location:</b>	Newfoundland and Labrador
<b>Time Frame:</b>	2003
<b>Grant Amount:</b>	\$60,000

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#### Grantmaking Strategy:

The Metcalf Foundation's Environment Program is focused on the conservation of biodiversity through preserving habitat in southern Canada, maintaining healthy northern forests, and strengthening the capacity and effectiveness of environmental groups to achieve and maintain these goals. The Foundation supports work that is rooted in strong science, responds to the needs of specific ecosystems, engages communities, and focuses on achieving meaningful, long-term conservation results. It looks for projects where its funding can make a significant difference, and where it can help to create collaborative partnerships.

Within its Northern Forests program theme, the Foundation has identified as priority areas northern Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador, because these areas offer significant short-term opportunities for conservation gains and have very limited conservation capacity at the present time.

Because nearly all decisions about northern forestry allocations and practices are made by provincial governments and industry, concerns about environmental conservation generally require access to the public policy process in some way. In some cases in the past, contentious issues over the future of significant forest areas have led to high-

profile advocacy campaigns, which may raise concerns about approaching the limits on "lobbying" which constrain both foundations and charitable organizations.

However, there are many opportunities for grantmakers to support public engagement in environmental issues, while staying within these charitable limits. For example, increasingly governments are providing formal mechanisms for public engagement in issues such as forest management, and actively seeking citizen and community input before decisions are made. In Newfoundland and Labrador, as in most jurisdictions, public consultation is required by law on forest management plans and related mechanisms, and helping people participate in this mandated consultation process is entirely charitable. As well, as this case study demonstrates, many projects simply provide background research and capacity building to allow people to engage more effectively in constructive dialogue on future resource use.

#### Description of the Project:

The island of Newfoundland (i.e. not including Labrador) has some of the oldest boreal forests in North America, providing habitat for several important native mammal species. However, most of that forest is intensively logged, with only 2% of its area in protected areas, and rapidly diminishing rem-

nants of intact forest elsewhere. While most of the boreal forest is in long-term timber licenses, a number of those licenses are coming up for review and renewal over the next several years. This presents opportunities for constructive engagement with the responsible provincial agencies to explore alternative tenure arrangements, environmental performance requirements, and pricing arrangements.

The Sierra Club of Canada has been active on forestry issues in Newfoundland since 1993, including skills training, research projects, and collaborative work on new protected areas. In 2002, it worked with other national and provincial conservation groups to develop a Forest Plan for the province, which identified six areas requiring focused attention: land use planning, land tenure, protected areas, Annual Allowable Cut, the forest management planning process, and forest resource utilization.

A major constraint on effective public participation in improved forestry practices has been the lack of local organizational capacity. Nearly all forest-related conservation work in Newfoundland had been unpaid, and volunteer burnout was a major obstacle. The Sierra Club of Canada came to the Metcalf Foundation with a proposed approach to begin to address this constraint, in a province with limited financial resources available locally.

With the support of the Metcalf Foundation grant, the Sierra Club project provided a single paid staff person and associated technical assistance to:

- Provide accurate up-to-date information to local activists and groups about forest management plans, including mapping to show areas with imminent threats to ecological integrity;
- network with conservation groups and concerned citizens across the province to encourage greater participation and a more pro-active approach to forestry issues;
- prepare a series of community-based visions, maps and action plans to focus attention on alternative approaches and raise the public profile of forestry issues.

#### Outcomes:

In association with Global Forest Watch, mapping has been prepared to show where areas of intact and dense boreal forest remain, and where cutting is scheduled over the next five years. This

mapping has been shared with local organizations and communities, and presented at the World Forestry Congress, and will form a basis for helping to focus future conservation efforts.

Networking with ENGOs and concerned citizens across Newfoundland and Labrador has taken place over the course of the project. People from small communities have been provided opportunities to understand some of the complexities of forest tenure arrangements, Annual Allowable Cuts, certification, and related issues. The role of existing groups such as the Main River Coalition and the Protected Areas Association, which are more focused on establishing new parks, has been reinforced.

The project staff person, Catherine Boyd, is from a rural Newfoundland community, which has been an important factor in engaging local people. The involvement of even a single staff person dedicated to forestry issues has been a real morale booster for the volunteers across the province, many of whom felt isolated and overwhelmed on their own.

A provincial workshop in the autumn of 2003 brought together about 25 people from communities and organizations across Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as resource people from elsewhere in the country, to review this information and develop an action plan for future activities. The Metcalf Foundation, whose program officer attended this workshop, is currently considering a further grant application in support of ongoing forest conservation work in Newfoundland, including research on tenure alternatives such as community-based forestry. Future projects will build on the current work to allow local communities to engage effectively in the upcoming public policy discussions on forest allocation and management.

#### Summary Comments:

The Sierra Club of Canada is a charitable organization, and as such is subject to the limits on “political activity” set out by federal law. However, these limits do permit such activities as engaging in public policy discussions with government, engaging in public debate by providing information and raising concerns, and providing an expert opinion on an issue to government or the media. All of the activities within this project would fall within these permitted categories. In fact, the organizations involved could almost certainly engage in more direct advocacy activities, such as presenting briefs on their findings to the Provincial government,

without concern about infringing charitable limits. Likewise, grantmakers can fund projects like this one while staying well within those legal limits.

### Key Learning Points:

Several points emerge from this case study with relation to foundations supporting the engagement of people in public policy discussions without fear of approaching the limits on charitable activities:

- Influencing public policy is often a lengthy process, requiring sustained involvement over a period of years. In this case, the project is building an information base and capacity among local people to allow more effective participation in re-licensing decisions that will extend over several years.
- The research and mapping components of this project add value by providing technical resources that would not be available locally, and that help people to visualize how alternative concepts might affect their communities in future and focus areas of discussion to key sites. Because the mapping techniques link to broader efforts across Canada to address boreal forest priorities, they are also helpful in providing context for future issues in Newfoundland.
- A major emphasis of this project has been to bring people together to talk about common issues, to learn from each other, and to explore options and alternatives to the status quo. The project clearly does not have a predetermined agenda or a prescribed outcome; rather it seeks to engage local communities in a constructive dialogue about their preferred future, and to help give them a voice to influence future resource use decisions.
- In this case and most others, preservation of biodiversity has to go hand-in-hand with the economic sustainability of communities, or it will have no lasting support. One of the most significant benefits of civic engagement in public policy issues such as forest management is the search for creative solutions that will achieve both conservation and economic goals.
- An interesting aspect of this case study is its emphasis on support and renewal of local community efforts, but its connection to a national organization. In the view of project staff, this combination brings some advantages not accessible to strictly local organizations – access to technical and administrative support and training, awareness of broader issues, and help with fundraising. But in Newfoundland and Labrador as in most resource-based communities, the local connection of the staff is incredibly important to developing trusting relationships.

### 6.3 Recommended Best Practices Relating to Foundations Taking Leadership

- **Use the convenor role to identify community needs and opportunities:**

Community foundations are ideally placed to lead community discussions about environmental issues and concerns, and to encourage networking and future projects that will address those concerns. The community foundation does not need to be an expert in environmental matters to host such discussions; it simply needs to act as the convenor. In fact, as the Alberta Ecotrust example demonstrates, these events can be valuable learning opportunities for the Foundation, as well as forums for progress within the broader community.

- **Define your comfort level with advocacy projects:**

Each community foundation can debate and decide on its own comfort level with a range of advocacy activities, and make that boundary known as clearly as possible to potential applicants. It is useful for community foundation board and staff to become familiar with the legal limits on charitable activities in this area, to examine the practices of other foundations, and to use some of the existing activities of ENGOs in their communities as points of discussion. Recognize that the comfort level may change over time with more experience in grantmaking in this area.

- **Show leadership in supporting civic engagement:**

Overwhelmingly, the foundation staff and community leaders interviewed for this project felt that funders could and should do much more to encourage civic engagement in forming and modifying public policy. Government regulations are becoming more inclusive of many aspects of public engagement, recognizing that this role lies at the heart of many charities. The need for more courageous grantmaking is especially evident in the environmental field, where public policy plays a major role and where foundations have traditionally tended to be more cautious than in other sectors.

- **Support projects that encourage constructive dialogue on issues:**

Look for projects that bring people together to discuss issues, that provide relevant and accurate technical information, and that focus on workable solutions to broad public issues. But funders and applicants should be careful not to try to pre-define outcomes at the beginning of a process of dialogue; the emphasis should be on a solid process for community discussion and debate, not on achieving some pre-ordained solution.

- **Look for an understanding of issues and process by applicant organizations:**

The Jackson and de Leon report lists a range of factors identified by private foundation staff that contribute to an effective public policy project by an environmental group. These key factors include a focused goal with a solid understanding of the policy issue, a realistic assessment of the issue and related opportunities, an understanding of timing, the use of a range of tools, contact with appropriate policy-makers, collaboration with other interested parties, and the ability to compromise when necessary.

#### 6.4 Selected Resource Information on Grantmakers Taking Leadership

- *Planning and Evaluation at the Pew Charitable Trusts*, contains a model for three to five year evaluation cycle. ([www.pewtrusts.com](http://www.pewtrusts.com))
- Evaluation Resource Center, Innovation Network. Inc ([www.innonet.org](http://www.innonet.org))
- *Program Evaluation Practice in the Non-profit Sector*, Alison Fine, ([www.nonprofitresearch.org/publications1526](http://www.nonprofitresearch.org/publications1526))
- *Effective Philanthropy: The Importance of Focus*, Richard A. Mittehthal, The Conservation Company ([www.consco.com](http://www.consco.com))
- *New Directions in Foundation Giving*, Tim Brodhead, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation ([www.mcconnellfoundation.org](http://www.mcconnellfoundation.org))
- *The Convening Organization: A Resource*, Tamarack: An Institute for Community Engagement, 2004 ([www.tamarackcommunity.ca](http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca))
- *EPA's Framework for Community-Based Environmental Protection*, United States Environmental Protection Agency, February 1999 ([www.epa.gov/ecocommunity/frame40.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/ecocommunity/frame40.pdf))
- *Registered Charities and Political Activities*, Miller Thomson LLP, Charities and Not-For Profit Newsletter, May 2003 for interpretation and reference to new thinking as set in a Concept Draft by Canada Customs and Revenue Agency
- *Advocacy on the Agenda: Preparing Voluntary Boards for Public Policy Participation*, by Annette Hegel, Volunteer Canada, 2003 ([www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca))
- *Political Activities Policy Statement*, Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, 2003 ([www.ccradrc.gc.ca](http://www.ccradrc.gc.ca))
- *Innovation and Problem Solving: A Bolder, More Active Role for Community Foundations*, by Richard bridge, B.A., LL.B. (IMPACS), Community Foundations of Canada, January 2004 ([www.community-fdn.ca](http://www.community-fdn.ca)).
- *Affecting Environmental Policy in the Great Lakes – St. Lawrence River Basin: A Primer for Community Foundations*, by John Jackson and Fe de Leon, September 2000, Canadian Environmental Law Association; produced for the Toronto Community Foundation.
- The Joyce Foundation approach to advocacy ([www.joycefdn.org](http://www.joycefdn.org)), and its funding of Alliance for Justice “worry-free advocacy workshops” ([www.allianceforjustice.org](http://www.allianceforjustice.org))

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