

Getting to Know Your Local Community Foundation

By Jackie Wendland

What does a Community Foundation do?

You may be unaware of the multiple kinds of assistance offered to nonprofits in your area by a Community Foundation. Although specific programs vary from place to place, Community Foundations usually provide funding and management support to strengthen nonprofit programs and serve as a charitable vehicle for community philanthropy. Their primary function is connecting worthy programs with donors, and visa versa.

How can I find the Community Foundation in my area?

Go to the Council of Foundations' website and find the locator (www.cof.org/Locator). Then click on your state for a foundation list with contact information. Many of the Community Foundations have their own websites.

How can the Community Foundation help?

There are a number of ways in which they may be able to help:

General endowment grants. Check the foundation's website for grant guidelines. Unlike most other foundations, Community Foundations often fund operating expenses, staff salaries, etc., as long as a sound case is made for the need from a solid organization. Even if animal welfare falls outside their guidelines, make contact with someone on the staff. That staff person can in turn educate colleagues, board members, and donors about what your organization does to benefit animals in the community.

Donor-advised funds. This could be a potential source of funding even if you aren't eligible to apply for the foundation's competitive grants (general endowment funds). Community Foundations often manage charitable funds for individuals and help advise them regarding their grant-making decisions. Again, get to know someone on the program staff. He or she may recommend your group or project once a donor-advisor expresses interest in giving to animal welfare. Ask that program officer if you can put him/her on your mailing list and send a packet of information about your organization. The information will then be available for a donor-advisor if the need arises.

Management assistance grants, workshops and consulting services. Most Community Foundations have management assistance programs that provide inexpensive services to increase the effectiveness of nonprofits in the community. Check the foundation's website for what is available in your area. Program staff often provide informal advice on management issues such as fundraising and marketing, board development, financial management and planned giving. Inexpensive, local workshops are often part of management assistance programs. Grants may be available to address specific management issues that arise in organizations (for example, funding a consultant to work with you on a long-range plan). Check the guidelines to see if

conference expenses are funded. Perhaps you can apply for a management assistance grant to attend the next No More Homeless Pets Conference!

Networking. It is the job of Community Foundation staff to have a comprehensive picture of nonprofit work in their communities. They know the “movers and shakers” and may be able to connect you with new volunteers, potential donors and board members, and other organizations open to program collaboration. (Example: The local Meals on Wheels sees a need to add pet food delivery to the client services they provide, but can't take on the entire project themselves.)

If you provide information to program staff about what you and other animal groups are doing, they can, in turn, educate their board and donors. Unless people have been directly involved with an animal organization, they usually don't know the difference between the county or city shelter, a local rescue group, and the humane society or SPCA. They just assume that all the groups do the same thing. Such an incorrect presumption that services are being duplicated could prevent your grant from being funded.

If you haven't been in contact with the Community Foundation in your area, go to their website today and start getting connected. Help may be just around the corner in the form of grant dollars, management consulting, local workshops, and access to donors, community leaders and other organizations.

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