

# BUILDING COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS



Philanthropic  
Ventures  
Foundation

Bill Somerville  
President

## Grantmaking Consulting Program

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### NEW USES OF COMPUTER SOFTWARE

From time to time Building Community Foundations invites people to share their expertise. This issue is written by Noah Wasmer of the East Bay Community Foundation in Oakland, California, a very talented person regarding community foundations and new uses of computer software.

Noah has developed new processes for the Arizona Community Foundation and the East Bay Community Foundation. The exceptional part of his work is to be able to see a need and then to develop computer capabilities to meet that need.

Noah is an excellent resource person to the community foundation field and readers should feel free to contact him with their questions or inquiries at [nwasmer@eastbaycf.org](mailto:nwasmer@eastbaycf.org).

The focus of the following article is on building better internal infrastructure, and growing better Intranet and Extranet communication especially with regard to smaller community foundations. For larger community foundations, an expanded version of this article can be found at [www.venturesfoundation.org](http://www.venturesfoundation.org).

#### A CASE STUDY FOR COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS: MAINTAINING HEART IN A WIRED WORLD.

by Noah Wasmer

As a community foundation, our work is strategic matchmaking. We seek out and work with outstanding community programs, and simultaneously work with donors to fulfill the donor's philanthropic agendas. Although at first glance it may appear simple, complexity arises due to layered donor interests, intricate community programs, and the large number of funds housed at any particular community foundation.

A few years ago at a large community foundation, I sat with a donor who had \$200,000 to spend to meet his 5% allocation. Looking me square in the eye, he said, "You know, I believe in [this issue]. I want to know how my money can help nationally, and if I like the program, I would be interested in making additional contributions to this fund."

The conversation would have been enriched if I had been able to quickly pull up information about trusted non-profits doing pertinent work, identifying these organizations' current needs, show funding history and progress reports across funders, and in the best of all worlds, schedule a site visit with that donor.

However, we did not have the information the donor desired. Additionally, we did not have the people resources to research such a complex issue at a national level, or provide a strategic way to

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guide the donor's objectives. Because we were unable to assist this donor in a timely fashion, the donor explored other alternatives for his fund, including moving it from the community foundation.

Although this story is dramatic, it is not unique. More and more, community foundations large and small, are finding that donors are more engaged and require more thorough information to meet their agendas. As a result, even the smallest community foundations must address their capacities to deliver on the stated mission. To do so, it is necessary to build better technology-based systems that facilitate our work and improve our personal relationships with our different constituents.

### **Better Technology in Small Shops: the Intranet**

To improve our personal relationships with external constituents, we must find user-friendly, efficient tools that help us share information internally. This might be as simple as exploring how the computers are connected together. Networked computers (computers that can share files, printers, and other resources such as Internet connection) reduce redundancies and open the doors for effective processes. Once a network is established, the organization must address how to share information across this network.

One way to make the best use of networked computers is to create an "intranet." An intranet is basically a web-based site that is accessible to all of your internal staff, and typically contains shared semi-confidential information that is useful to other employees of your organization. Intranets can be very low cost to very expensive. One option among many is a Microsoft product called, "SharePoint Team Services" ([www.microsoft.com/sharepoint](http://www.microsoft.com/sharepoint)). This software integrates seamlessly with Office 2000 (even better with Office XP), has a tremendously simple install process, and creates an intranet for your entire organization.

### **What Benefits can be achieved with an Intranet?**

Fundamentally, technology should only be added because it is going to either directly or indirectly meet the mission of the organization. Intranets facilitate our work by offering many benefits including sharing documents, current happenings, as well as, facilitating our business processes.

I presume almost all community foundations are sharing documents right now on a "shared drive," (meaning that there is one place where multiple users can contribute documents, etc.) or via carrying around a floppy disk between computers. As the organization grows however, many of us have learned how unruly, outdated, and useless this resource becomes.

An intranet, like the SharePoint Portal reduces this problem by adding "meta-data" to documents and files. So, in a very simple web interface, even the most unsophisticated users, with a little practice, can upload a document, a brief description, the date it was created, and with whom you would like this document to be shared externally. This extra data does take a few extra seconds to add, but once added, provides enormous reward.

Recently, we created a shared documents directory for our staff members creating marketing materials. They diligently added the necessary "extra data" to the documents. When a board member asked for material to share with a prospective donor, I was able to provide him with the correct updated version of the document within seconds, and knew that the document was updated and relevant. The same help was offered when a donor asked what was happening in the community over the coming months.

Not only can an intranet collect and store documents, but it can also provide an easy mechanism for staff to alert other staff to community events. With a few simple clicks, staff can add local events, a link if there is one, and view all the events on a printable calendar. By providing all this information in a centralized place, we can better and more quickly answer donor and community questions.

The intranet also goes as far as facilitating business processes. For example, I was asked to help with a process around our marketing campaign with the media. On the intranet, we quickly created a shared contact listing and quickly added additional fields that served to qualify the individuals. We created pull

down boxes for what type of media outlet they were with, who was the staff contact, first contact, and the message that we wished to convey with the particular media. Very quickly we had a robust database of media contacts that is becoming a tremendous valuable resource for all staff. We were able to export the data to mailing labels and letters, and even add them to our Palm pilots.

In addition, we have created technological tips and training sections, a place to request technical help, we have created a resource to post human resources information, and many other tools. Clearly, the Sharepoint portal has reorganized a considerable amount of how we share data within the organization and has truly facilitated our business processes. The best part of the story is the cost for Sharepoint. Sharepoint comes as a supplement to the purchase of Microsoft Frontpage 2002 or Microsoft Project 2002 (both of which are about \$250.) But, through [techsoup.org](http://techsoup.org), you can purchase the software for \$30.

Once an organization feels better armed with current and accurate information, it becomes critical to begin to share this data with external constituents. From a Trustee extranet (allowing Trustees to see committee meeting times, minutes, and discussions) to a Donor Extranet (fund balances, non-profit stories, current research, site visit data, progress reports, funding history), to a Non-profit Extranet (allow non-profits to apply for grants, submit progress reports, tell their story, etc.) there is tremendous value in engaging our external partners in a web based portal. This quickly launches us into a larger conversation.

### **The Larger Picture: Solutions with Vision.**

To successfully meet the demands of a community foundation mission, we must support the collective building of new systems that focus on our business processes, assist us with sharing our gained knowledge, and begin to reflect the magic of Community Foundation work on the Internet.

There are several examples of tools that are beginning to expand the capacities of community foundations accounting architecture. Examples include dotche, Community Foundation of America's Impact Manager/Vision Manager, as well as some specialized tools built by individual community foundations. These ideas are the beginnings of work to make community foundation's business processes much more streamlined and efficient. However, in addition to business processes, foundations must build tools to make use of their intellectual assets.

CIO.com states, "Succinctly put, [knowledge management] is the process through which organizations generate value from their intellectual and knowledge-based assets." These knowledge assets are what differentiate and excel community foundations from brokerage houses; we must make better use of them. Systems that help share the information from site visits, evaluations, and the synthesis of an organization's material are extremely pertinent not only to other staff, but our donor base. These evaluations also provide a level of accountability that both our donors and the community deserve.

As we engage donors around better information and processes, we will find that donors want to become more involved with their philanthropy. Typically, this can result in donors funding program driven initiatives, increased and repeat gifts to the foundation, and larger recognition in the community.

The Internet provides a mechanism to make the foundation more accessible and efficient to all of our constituents. By capturing a non-profit story digitally through the Internet, a foundation is better equipped to synthesize and share that story with donors and the community. In one example, systems can remind non-profits for progress reports, allow them to login, view the history of the grant, and submit their report. In focus groups with non-profits, they felt that an Internet based tool was advantageous as a means to continue marketing their story, while having an "always-open" user friendly mechanism.

Clearly, there are steps that community foundations can take to move forward to better achieve their mission. To do so, it is necessary to build better technology based systems that facilitate our work and improve our personal relationships. Not only must we build these systems, but we must move forward with vigor.

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## Philanthropic Ventures Foundation's Grantmaking Consulting Program

PVF has provided on-site consulting to over 245 community foundations throughout the USA, working with staff, board members and the community to improve grantmaking and operations. The Consulting Program is in its 9<sup>th</sup> year of operation and has been funded by The David and Lucile Packard Foundation since its inception. The PVF consulting fee is paid for by The Packard Foundation. Participating community foundations are asked to pay for travel, meals, lodging and program officer training fee. If you are interested in receiving consulting services, contact PVF president, Bill Somerville at (510) 645-1890.

### The services offered include:

- **Program Audit and Evaluation** - Intensive 3-day on-site sessions focusing on analysis of foundation operations, grant making programs, public relations and internal procedures. Includes meetings with foundation board, grants committee, board chair, foundation staff, and executive director. Also included are meetings with funders, interviews with local media, and meetings with local non-profit organizations. The days are full and intense with the result being new enthusiasm, new expectations and new ideas.
- **Program Officer Training** - 2 full days of training for foundation personnel, involving problem solving, interaction of participants and exchange of ideas, accompanied by 500-page reference manual created by PVF. Participants analyze actual grant requests, evaluate and make grant making decisions and engage in role-playing.
- **Board Retreats** - Facilitator for Board Retreats (1/2 to 2 days). Work through issues facing foundations including growth, planning & community outreach. Facilitator draws out strengths and weaknesses, serving as guide through strategic planning process.