

We believe that intentional, better-coordinated learning as a field is essential to supporting increased effectiveness. The existing educational marketplace – which includes regional associations, affinity groups, universities, advisory firms, consultants and others – already offers grantmakers of all kinds opportunities to meet, share ideas, and sharpen or learn new skills. Linking together to provide and acquire knowledge, products and services would produce positive network effects in addition to extending their reach, rate of experimentation, adoption and result. Over time, this would influence the field in itself and add value.

We believe the field is at an inflection point. We are mindful that this inquiry is happening in the context of a decades-long, ongoing debate in philanthropy on what constitutes “effectiveness.” We can’t resolve that debate, but we can be better prepared to sustain ambiguity. We can make better use of the growing body of research on what good practice looks like, and we can better adapt to and harness opportunities presented by an emerging landscape of information networks. Today, philanthropy as a field of practice seems to have developed – from expansion, regulation, diversification and the establishment of a robust infrastructure – a new state of readiness to collaboratively identify, manage and leverage these and other critical learning opportunities in order to achieve mission-driven results.

Methodology

Our inquiry is informed by formal and informal interviews with a wide range of grantmakers and practitioners in philanthropy, academics with a particular focus on this sector, and members of the KCWG. The multiple data sources noted below provided additional conceptual perspective, as well as the scans, surveys of current practices and needs, and frameworks developed over several years by the Grantmaker Education Task Force of The Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers.²

1) Priority Audiences for the Grantmaker Learning System

The KCWG suggests that to attract participants and build momentum for engagement in a new grantmaker education system, the priority audiences most likely to participate in this first phase are: current providers of formal learning and education programs for grantmakers; staff and trustees of the 4,600 foundations that employ staff; and donors and trustees of unstaffed foundations that are current members of one or more infrastructure organizations in philanthropy.

This suggestion is based on the experience of regional associations that currently provide educational programming to foundation staff, who report those that belong to and have relationships with infrastructure organizations are easier to reach, and to connect.

The potential size of this engaged priority audience is notable: Of the 84,122 foundations in the Foundation Center’s database – including staffed and unstaffed independent, community, company-sponsored, and operating foundations – a total of 5,790 were members of a regional association, affinity group or other support or infrastructure association in philanthropy.³

That said, *we believe this system can and should provide pathways to entry for all grantmakers* including, for example, participants in giving circles, social investors, and trustees managing multiple trusts. As a recent McKinsey & Co. report highlights, “Over the past 10 years, the demographics of the social sector have changed. Dot-com founders, serial entrepreneurs, venture capital investors and hedge fund managers have become influential donors and leaders of foundations and nonprofits. Freshly minted M.B.A.s, who have studied social entrepreneurship, social innovation, and the nonprofit capital markets, are taking jobs in the sector.”⁴ We believe an effective grantmaker education system must meet the needs of these changing demographics.

² C.f. The Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, *Framework for Delivering Education Programs in Your Regional Association: Ten Principles and Practices*, April 2010.

³ Of these 5,790 engaged foundations, 2,572 were staffed (out of the total 4,677 staffed foundations in the database) and 3,218 (out of 80,904) were unstaffed. *Source:* Email communication with JuWon Choi, Vice President for Educational Services, The Foundation Center, June 1, 2010.

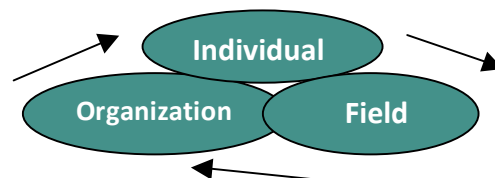
⁴ McKinsey and Company, *Learning for Social Impact: What Foundations Can Do*, April 2010.

Our suggested priority audience further segments, and often self-selects, along the following dimensions:

- Role and responsibilities within the foundation or grantmaking organization (e.g., grants manager, investment officer, program officer, executive, trustee, communications director);
- Organization’s mission, goals and culture including: issue focus (e.g., K-12 reform); geography (e.g., place-based, regional, national or global); overall strategic approach (e.g. charitable banker, perpetual adjuster; partial strategist; total strategist⁵); and strategy components (e.g., public policy, advocacy);
- Organization type (e.g., independent, community, corporate, family foundation; donor advised fund) and asset size;
- Level of experience within and outside of the philanthropic context.

While individual-level learning is important, successful action often springs from awareness and understanding at the organizational and field levels. We therefore believe it is important to structure specific, focused learning opportunities for the priority and general audience that relate to individual needs but are organized around collaborative problem solving at all three of the following levels:

- Individual – Many individual grantmakers feel they are responsible for learning within their foundations in a variety of ways.⁶ Yet accessing learning in philanthropy can be a lonely, time-consuming endeavor.
- Organization – Organizational context is a key element in the development of individuals. Though a growing number of foundations embrace organizational learning, there are few organizational norms guiding learning and staff development.⁷
- Field – Philanthropy’s operating context is shifting dramatically, requiring new patterns of self-organized and systems-level innovation.⁸



In short, we recommend that a grantmaker education system meet practitioners *where* they are, is focused on the *desired result* and enables the learner to *self-select* according to need and priority. Bringing greater awareness, coordination and coherence to the first, individual level will in itself represent a significant achievement. Developing more focused organizational- and field-level learning opportunities may unlock as yet unidentified transformative potential.

2) Core Knowledge and Content

Grantmakers at all levels of experience draw on two kinds of knowledge – explicit and tacit – that are in constant interaction and continually replenished through action-oriented, reflective practice.

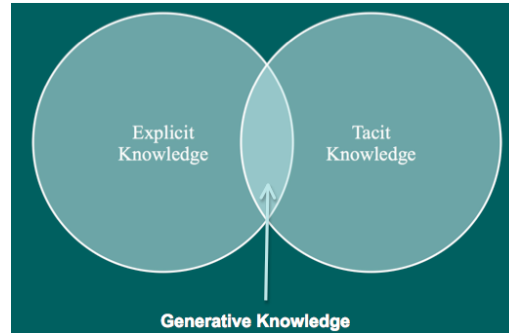
⁵ Bolduc, Kevin and Ellie Buteau et al., *Foundation Strategy: Beyond the Rhetoric*. Center for Effective Philanthropy, October 2007.

⁶ Jan Jaffe, in a recent survey of individual GrantCraft subscribers, asked: Do you have responsibilities for learning inside your organization or field? "...Almost three-quarters of them described formal and informal roles to collect and share information among peers." <http://blog.grantcraft.org/2010/04/what's-on-your-learning-agenda/#more-77>

⁷ The Council on Foundations introduced a new question in its 2009 Grantmakers Salary and Benefits Survey: "Does your foundation have any in-house staff whose principal responsibilities are promoting and supporting an organizational learning culture, including synthesizing learning across initiatives and identifying implications for practices and linking program evaluation with ongoing program planning and improvement?" Of 718 grantmakers who responded to the question, 6.3% responded "yes." Titles included CEO, President, Director of HR and Director of Research and Evaluation, and Director of Organizational Learning. Source: Email communication with Terri Ashton, April 15, 2010.

⁸ For a discussion of the short- and long-term implications of networked digital technologies for philanthropy, see Bernholz, Lucy with Edward Skloot and Barry Varela, *Disrupting Philanthropy: Technology and the Future of the Social Sector*. Duke University, 2010.

Technical knowledge and tools that can be described if not codified, and transmitted or taught in a fairly straightforward way, comprise *explicit* knowledge. Experiential or uncoded knowledge including the habits, culture and values that animate our work, comprise *tacit* knowledge. Effectively constructing, organizing, sharing and applying both kinds of knowledge in new and innovative ways results in *generative* knowledge, creative solutions that can be adopted, adapted and developed by others.

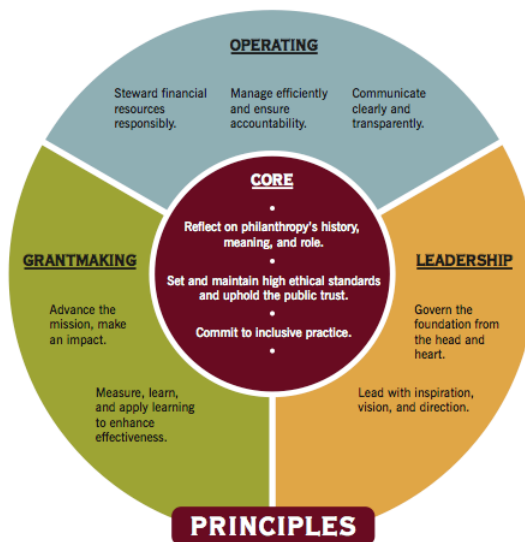


- *Explicit knowledge.* Understanding essential practices: codified tools, products. Profession.
- *Tacit knowledge.* Learning by doing: intelligent experimentation, insights, experiences. Craft.
- *Generative knowledge.* Transforming internally: Adapt, refine, innovate. Reflective practice.

We believe that the diffusion of knowledge and translating knowledge into action requires reflective practice, and therefore recommend that the grantmaker education system focus on opportunities for building generative knowledge.⁹ Specific knowledge and content needs vary according to grantmakers’ mission, goals, structure and context and, ultimately, individual roles and competencies. The KCWG scanned the sector for existing, high-quality frameworks that illustrate a range of perspectives on roles and competencies in a variety of operating contexts, with the understanding that most grantmakers work within multiple frameworks. The examples below include a mix of knowledge (what grantmakers should know) and competencies (what grantmakers should be expected to do). An important next step in system design would be to identify additional models as well as commonalities across frameworks – and to explore ways to enable grantmakers to align and/or generate custom frameworks.

Framework Examples:

The Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers’ recently released *Framework for Delivering Education Programs in Your Regional Association: Ten Principles and Practices* highlights essential principles for foundations of all types (independent, community, corporate, family, health-care conversion).¹⁰

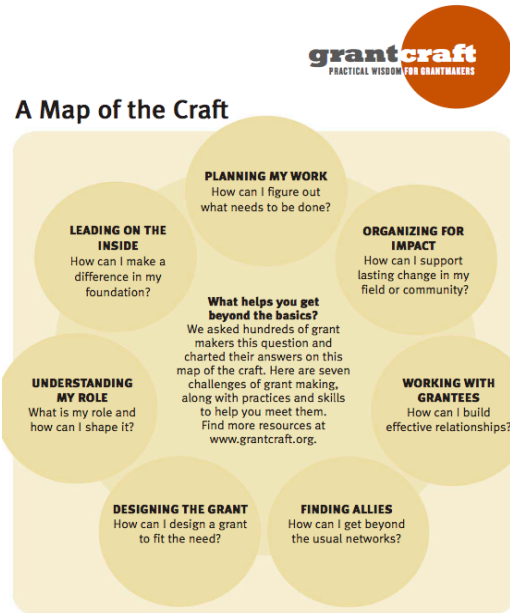


© The Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers

⁹ For an example of the knowing-doing gap in philanthropy, see Ostrower, Francie, *Attitudes and Practices Concerning Effective Philanthropy: Survey Report*, Urban Institute Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy, September 2004.

¹⁰ Ibid., The Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, *Framework for Delivering Education Programs in Your Regional Association: Ten Principles and Practices*.

GrantCraft's *A Map of the Craft* examines in depth the roles, practices and skills needed by individual grantmakers.¹¹



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Corporate grantmakers seeking to put into practice the Council on Foundations' "Stewardship Principles and Practice Options to Strengthen Performance" may turn to the Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship's outline of leadership competencies required for "developing, driving and implementing a 21st century corporate community involvement strategy," including philanthropy.¹²

For donors, Social Venture Partners Seattle developed a framework that "represents the learning and experiences that allow an individual to fully explore and develop an effective personal style of philanthropy. There is no prescribed path for where to start and where to end"¹³:



© 2007 Social Venture Partners Seattle

¹¹ For the complete list of practices and skills, see *A Map of the Craft*, GrantCraft: Practical Wisdom for Grantmakers, A Project of the Ford Foundation, 2007.

¹² *Leadership Competencies for Community Involvement: Getting to the Roots of Success*, Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship, 2010.

¹³ Social Venture Partners. *Past & Future: Reflections on SVP Seattle's past 10 years and vision for the future*, Fall 2007.

The Council of Michigan Foundations' *Philanthropy 3D-Michigan* illustrates critical elements of field-level impact based on the work of grantmakers in that state:¹⁴



© Council of Michigan Foundations

At the community foundation level, a cornerstone is the “National Standards for US Community Foundations” adopted by the Council on Foundations in 2000. More recently, CFLeads spearheaded the development of *The Community Foundation Framework for Community Leadership by a Community Foundation* “to bring clarity to the definition and practice of community leadership by individual community foundations.”¹⁵



© Council on Foundations 2008.

¹⁴ Philanthropy 3D-Michigan is a collaboration of the Council of Michigan Foundations, Hattaway Communications, the Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University and Philanthropy Awareness Initiative.

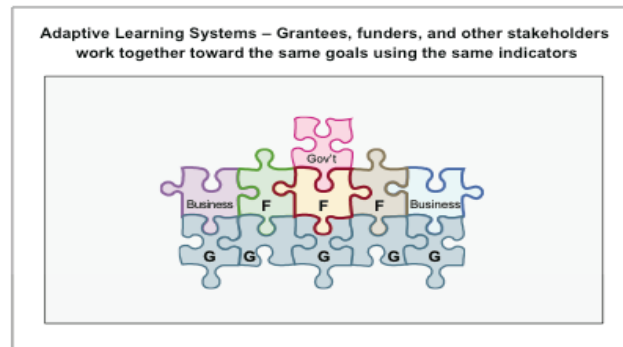
¹⁵ *The Community Foundation Framework for Community Leadership by a Community Foundation*, created by the National Task Force on Community Leadership, prepared by CFLeads and Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group, December 2008.

Though not framed in terms of competencies, the Center for Venture Philanthropy defined the following elements of venture philanthropy that, together, “increase the odds of achieving specific social goals that might be otherwise unattainable.”¹⁶



© Center for Venture Philanthropy

Today’s emerging competencies for collaborative innovation across funder, grantee and other stakeholder organizations include facilitation around shared design, more effective use of technology and formal processes for ongoing review. E.g., Emerging, more systematic approaches to outcome measurement illustrated in FSG Social Impact Advisors’ report *Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact*.¹⁷



© FSG Social Impact Advisors

The Global Impact Investing Network’s *Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (IRIS)* initiative, in conjunction with Acumen Fund, The Rockefeller Foundation, B-Lab, PwC and Deloitte, is building a common framework for measuring social and environmental performance based on a set of shared definitions and indicators. “The intent is for this framework to be applicable across sectors, and success requires the participation and adoption from a broad set of stakeholders representing the various facets of the social and environmental impact space.” This framework is suggestive of emerging roles, practices and skills.¹⁸

| | | Reporting Categories | | | | | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|--|-------------|--|
| Indicators | Description | App. Company Document – Mission, Target Population, etc. | | | | | | | |
| | Meta-Levels | Services Provided – Community Dev/Omni, Agricultural Services, Education, etc. Commercial Model – Manufacturing, Retail, Service – Franchising/Non-Franch. Organization Type – FTEs, Revenue Customer/Market (B2B, B2C, B2B2C) | | | | | | | |
| Indicators | Key Financial Indicators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revenues COGS OPEx Net Income Return on Equity Return on Invested Capital Return on Assets | | | | | | | |
| | Operations Indicators | Governance | | Community | | Jobs | | Environment | |
| Indicators | Descriptors | V: Community Dev./Finance | V: Agriculture and Artisanal | V: Education | V: Healthcare | V: Energy, Water and Environment | V: Microfinance | | |
| | Common to Sector | Product/Service | Product/Service | Product/Service | Product/Service | Product/Service | Product/Service | | |
| | Organization Specific | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ownership Company Name Multiple/Basic Company Name | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accounting Co-Operative/For-profit Product/Service Certification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How students learn/progress Teacher/Instructor Organization Support role Facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilities Equipment Staff/Instructors Organization Service/Products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy/procedure/Reg/Standard Energy/Production Water/Production Job | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Product/Service Ownership Business Model | | |

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¹⁶ Center for Venture Philanthropy, *Defining Virtue: Five Key Elements of Venture Philanthropy and Five Years of Documented Results*.

¹⁷ Kramer, Mark, Marcie Parkhurst, and Lalitha Vaidyanathan. *Breakthroughs in Shared Measurement and Social Impact*. Report by FSG Social Impact Advisors July 2009.

¹⁸ Global Impact Investing Network webinar, November 2009. http://iris-standards.org/IRIS_Webinar_Series-November_09.pdf

The Philanthropy for Social Justice Working Group, in positing “Social Justice Philanthropy: An Initial Framework for Positioning This Work,” suggests that social justice philanthropy is not one kind of practice – but a family of practices. Rather than strictly defining practices, this framework sees to draw out the strengths and critical weaknesses in social justice traditions. For the purpose of this inquiry, it also serves as a singularly powerful model in its intent and design.¹⁹

Family of Social Justice Philanthropy: Philosophical Traditions

DRAFT

| PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS ON WHICH APPROACHES ARE BASED <small>(Most people employ a combination of approaches)</small> | CHARACTERISTICS | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| | WHAT | | | HOW |
| | GUIDING PRINCIPLES/ VALUES | SOCIAL JUSTICE GOAL | ASSUMPTIONS/ ANALYSIS | APPROACH |
| STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE | Addressing root causes of inequality | Interconnected systems no longer structured to produce unequal outcomes for different groups | Interconnected systemic policies, procedures, and practices must be changed to achieve justice | Holding interconnected systems accountable |
| UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS | Security and dignity | Individuals and groups experience security under an umbrella of commonly agreed upon universal rights | People and governments can agree that universal rights exist and have moral or legal force; all people will be better off if universal rights are protected | Building political systems that support universal human rights |
| FAIRNESS/EQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES | Equality of outcomes | Local and global resources are distributed among people in a manner that produces equal outcomes | Redistributive mechanisms can produce equal outcomes across time and place | Creating effective distributive mechanisms |
| LEGALISM/ RULE OF LAW | Equality before the law | Marginalized groups are protected when laws are rigorously upheld | Justice is defined in law; just outcomes depend on equal treatment | Ensuring that laws are enforced |
| EMPOWERMENT | Equal access to systems of power | Individuals and groups are powerful enough to have an impact on decisions about issues that affect them | Individuals and groups can be prepared to engage and be heard | Preparing people for engagement |
| SHARED VALUES | Agreement | Justice is defined and achieved when groups work together around shared values | Shared values form the basis for a system of justice | Shared values translated into justice goals |
| CULTURAL RELATIVISM | Equal recognition | All cultural perspectives, norms, and traditions are treated as equally valid relative to other cultures, especially dominant ones | All cultures must be recognized and understood in order for justice to be complete | Promoting understanding and diversity |
| TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE | Profit out of good | The market innovates in ways that increase individual, community, and planetary well-being | Unjust conditions create opportunities to which market-based organizations respond with “people, planet, profit” solutions | Creative use of markets; social ventures; creative capitalism |

Notes: Content in the “What” columns derives mostly from literature; content in the “How” column derives mostly from interviews and individual funder materials. The matrix represents current status rather than an ideal; visible trends rather than systematic study.

¹⁹ Ruesga, G. Albert and Deborah Puntenney, “Social Justice Philanthropy: An Initial Framework for Positioning This Work.” Report for the Philanthropy for Social Justice Working Group, April 2010.

3) Optimal Learning Processes

As the examples above suggest, grantmakers learn in formal and informal settings from a variety of sources including peers, regional associations, affinity groups, universities, advisory firms, and consultants. Yet learning is often atomized as a discrete, one-time event for solo practitioners. While this may support explicit and tacit knowledge transfer, the application and adaptation of generative knowledge seems to happen best through reflective peer learning in ongoing communities of practice, often supported by expert facilitators. Further, in an organizational context, intentional organizational-level approaches are key to prioritizing learning that results in improved practice.²⁰

Formalized processes for “action learning,” which are organized around a shared experience, enable teams of learners to develop the trust and mutual understanding necessary to take risks and change behaviors together. This more intensive, high-touch, peer learning approach is increasingly being adopted within the philanthropic sector. Such peer learning approaches are designed as an alternative to more common “exposure” workshops. They are designed to promote, prepare and support the adoption of new practices at the individual, organizational and field levels. Among their benefits are: enabling individual learners and teams of learners to define their needs and problem in advance of the initial learning event; learn from experts; exchange experiences and successes with peers; and benefit from the resulting community of practice in support of successfully achieving the envisioned change.

Though the very best environment for learning, including tacit and explicit knowledge, is often labor-intensive, face-to-face, in-person engagement, the reality is this cannot happen frequently and in a cost-effective way given geographic and other constraints. We need more discussion about the benefits and trade-offs inherent in face-to-face vs. self-paced, one-way learning. We have not yet embraced technology to its fullest extent, though we are seeing an attitude and aptitude shift that is leading to a more rapid adoption of on-line environments. Whether in-person or on-line, interactivity to encourage the exchange of ideas is key.

4) Existing Learning Opportunities and Gaps

Focusing on the staff and trustees of the 4,600 foundations that employ staff and donors and trustees of unstaffed foundations that are currently members of one of the infrastructure organizations in philanthropy, we find that many elements of a grantmaker education system are present, but fragmented.

The KCWG’s scan of existing programs and resources available to grantmakers through the knowledge lens described above suggests that there are many more resources available for expanding grantmakers’ explicit knowledge, but less so for tacit and generative knowledge development and application.²¹ Though a comprehensive gap analysis was beyond the scope of this inquiry, we believe that a full documentation of the range of available offerings, activities and gaps is achievable via a collaborative learning system, and will provide an important benefit to the field.

Recommendations for a Grantmaker Learning System

As a field, philanthropy has reached an important juncture: a critical mass of core offerings is now enabling grantmakers and providers of all kinds to more readily see where they “fit” in relation to current learning and peer practices. More fully documenting the range of activities via this system would in itself yield interesting data and multiple perspectives on strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for strengthening field-level learning.

²⁰ Sources include: Darling, Marilyn J., *A Compass In the Woods: Learning Through Grantmaking to Improve Impact*, pre-publication draft, 2010 (downloaded at <http://pfc.ca/en/>) and Backer, Thomas E. “Overview of Foundation Learning Approaches,” prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, March 2005; “Nurturing High-Impact Philanthropists: Learning Groups for Donors and Small Foundations.” Human Interaction Research Institute, September 2006; and “Peer Networking and Community Change: Experiences of the Annie E. Casey Foundation,” prepared for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008.

²¹ Sources include: DJB Consulting, “Grantmaker Education Gap Analysis,” prepared for the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, March 12, 2007. Major, Dara, “Advancing Philanthropic Practice: Educational Landscape, Current Reality and Opportunities for the Future,” prepared for Duke University, The Center for Strategic Philanthropy and Civil Society, Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy, September 2008. Roberts, Dawn, “Findings from the Survey of Providers Offering Education Programs for Grantmakers,” prepared for Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, September 2009. Siegel, Dan and Jenny Yancey, “Philanthropy’s Forgotten Resource? Engaging the Individual Donor: The State of Donor Education Today” prepared for the Donor Education Initiative, New Visions Philanthropic Research and Development, 2003.

To support experimentation while also ensuring value for participants, we suggest that the system put in place some broad and simple guidelines to ensure that all educational offerings describe up-front a clear path to gaining the knowledge, and the potential end results of that learning.

Further, the grantmaker education system should facilitate the development of tools that enable learners to set, chart and share their learning paths to foster continuous learning at all three levels: individual (e.g., by assessing objectives pre-learning); organization (e.g., by creating multi-dimensional strategic learning plans); and field (e.g., joining or creating communities of practice).

It is important to build in assessment early on in the development of this system, so that we may learn and adapt the system as it builds out. Again, the distinction between individual and organizational learning is important; positive ratings by participants at the end of learning events do not conclusively tell us about the changed behavior of individuals and subsequent impact on organizations and fields of practice. We suggest that the system create a space to share learner feedback as well as formative and summative evaluation, to better understand the difference that learning makes over time.

To summarize, the KCWG believes the grantmaker learning system should:

- Structure specific, focused learning opportunities that relate to individual needs but are organized around collaborative problem solving at the individual, organizational and field levels;
- Identify additional models as well as commonalities across existing knowledge frameworks – and explore ways to enable grantmakers to align and/or generate custom frameworks.
- Facilitate the development of tools that enable learners to set, chart and share their learning paths to foster continuous learning at all three levels: individual, organization and field. This should include staff with line responsibility for staff development and or organizational learning.
- Offer a comprehensive range of information and instructional methods, depending on the content and facilitator expertise needed, from program calendars/bulletin boards to traditional workshop settings to webinars and other distance learning tools.
- Prioritize in-person engagement and embrace technology and on-line learning environments;
- Support the comprehensive documentation of the range of available offerings, activities and gaps;
- Ensure assessment practices are embedded in its infrastructure to validate the quality of the system by collecting and analyzing practitioner feedback, and by implementing evaluation practices that track relationship to practice effectiveness over time;
- Go beyond “grantmaker education” to coordinate learning among providers, academic researchers, other practitioners and grantees;
- Utilize information analytics to develop and inform a research agenda focused on field-level learning.

Designing the system as an open, collaborative network will encourage users to identify their priority needs and providers to innovate around program development and delivery.

Conclusion

All sectors are struggling to adapt, learn and innovate – to capture and share knowledge in new ways through technology, and to keep up with the profound changes taking place within and across multiple knowledge and content domains. We believe that within philanthropy, an open, diverse and highly fluid field of practice, there is unique potential for the broader diffusion of explicit, tacit and generative knowledge.

The KCWG envisions a grantmaker learning system that helps to realize this potential by facilitating continuous learning, not the quest for any definitive “answers,” is co-created and re-created by multiple actors, and aims to be the most interesting place to access the best knowledge and to help grantmakers put it into practice. In short, a system that supports a breakthrough from learning to increased readiness, and *action*.