Find Our Focus

Forensic Discovery

List 100

Ask Good Questions

Mind the Gap

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Bits & Pieces of the Future

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10 Activities for Community Foundations

The GIVING PRACTICE

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The Giving Practice is the national consulting team of Philanthropy Northwest. If you're interested in working with us or would like more information on our work with foundations on strategy, please contact our managing partner, Audrey Haberman, at ahaberman@philanthropynw.org or at 206-267-9956.

PART A: Good Strategy Takes Practice (Not JustPlanning)

Why A Guide Like This?

What comes after "strategic...?" If you said, "planning," you're not alone. And for many leaders of community foundations, especially small ones who don't have the time or money for a big process, anxiety is the feeling that follows. If that's the case, this guide is for you.

It invites you to test-drive some activities to bring your current program, operations and community leadership strategies into focus before you decide whether to create a plan or not. It helps you discover ongoing strategic practices and decide whether to keep them or not. If you already have done a strategic plan, and it is languishing on a shelf, this guide will help you refresh it.

First, the good news: your organization is already living its strategy. No organization is strategy-less. What your community foundation is doing may or may not have been the result of a planning process, and your strategy-in-action may be in conflict with what staff or board describe as goals or aspirations. It helps to begin with an inquiry into what strategy your organization is living right now based on its practices. We all need that reality check.

This guide was designed to help you reflect on that strategy-as-is, understand what is happening, adjust what you are doing or what you are saying (if necessary) and, probably most important, discover a few simple ways to stay aware of strategy as you live it. It can also be used as a precursor to a more formal strategic planning process to help everyone related to the foundation strengthen the way they use strategy lenses to view current realities and potential opportunities in program, operations, donor engagement and community leadership.

Now, the bad news: If you don't know where you are going, any road will get your there. The only way to have a shared strategy is to continually check what you (staff, board and community) say against what you do and adjust one or the other. You can think of this as polishing the lenses through which you see your work. It's not a science; it's a craft. We invite you to join those who think that strategy is more in the practice than by the book.

Can you see all aspects of your strategy—even the fine print?
And since perfect vision is hard to achieve, at least without surgery, and we are in a DIY mode, which aspects do you most want to see more clearly?

Impact 70

Objectives **P**riorities 60

Donors **G**rants **L**eadership 50

Practices **V**alues **I**ssues **C**ulture **R**ole **A**ssumptions 20

What Is In The Guide?

We've put together a set of activities that The Giving Practice has used with all kinds of community and private foundations. Our clients have used these activities to support an ongoing strategy practice, versus a discrete strategic planning process. Some activities we created with our clients. Others we've adapted from the field. You can customize each for use during routine meetings or even informal conversations as well as designated learning opportunities like retreats and strategy reviews.

Most of what you'll find here is for everyday use, when there is no consultant and not a lot of time for preparation or write-ups.

That doesn't mean there is no work involved! But because your organization is already living its strategy, your staff, board and other stakeholders *already* know a lot more than has been expressed about its goals and objectives and how it's doing in relationship to them—without a single retreat, report or slide deck. Imagine what you'll find when you start talking!

Why you might feel resistant to strategic planning

For most of us, signing up to do strategic planning is about as energizing as getting your teeth cleaned. There's the tedious probing for problems, the dutiful scraping away of accumulated junk, and the occasional jolt from an exposed nerve that no one had noticed. It has the oppressive quality of someone doing something to you rather than being in charge of your own health.

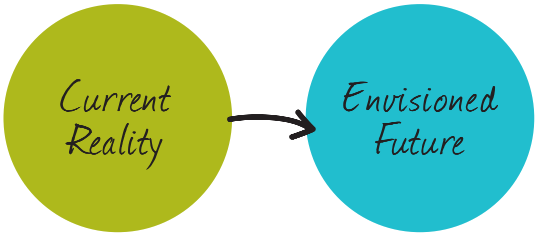
We all know that flossing and brushing our teeth daily makes the check-ups much less painful, and yet we often submit to the mind-numbing pain of deep cleaning in lieu of a regular self-administered routine. That is true at work as well. This guide provides some practical activities that are the strategic equivalent of daily dental hygiene, though we hope they're more productive and enjoyable!

What Is Strategy and Why Does It Matter?

Start with this simple question: Where do we want to go, and how do we get there? A good shorthand definition of strategy is figuring out how to get from your current reality to your envisioned future. Goals are a critical ingredient, of course. To paraphrase the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there.

But you don't plan a strategy as much as live it, and we have found with clients that it often can be more useful to start with what you're doing now, and what that tells you about both your current reality and envisioned future, than doing a discrete process of setting goals and executing them.

Most strategic plans remain tomes on a shelf, only to be read before the next planning cycle. In order to read your strategy accurately and make any plan a living document, your organization must engage multiple perspectives and craft "progressive lenses" for looking at action from a near, far and mid-point range. How can you get the sharpest look at what you're doing, with enough precision to guide your organization? How can you use stakeholders to see your work with a fresh view?



Strategy at its simplest: Where do we want to go, and how do we get there?

We think sharpening strategy involves at least five elements:

1. Strengthening the relationship between espoused goals and actual activities

2. Practicing strategy review on an ongoing basis instead of as a periodic ordeal

3. Uncovering hidden assumptions about how the organization works

4. Creating an environment of authentic conversations with and among stakeholders

5. Learning to manage the inherent tensions between competing strategies

Assembling Your Team

We recommend doing the activities with a small team of colleagues. They could be staff, board or close community members. Doing them solo is doable but more difficult. Doing them collaboratively provides depth to the analysis and richness to the experience. In inviting others to join your team, it can help to clarify the time commitment, the process and the roles team members are expected to play.

Once your team is assembled, try to encourage the ingredients of good collaboration from the get-go, including a clear vision for the effort and commitment to that vision; a sense of shared trust and candor; openness to a diversity of perspectives; and a readiness to explore, experiment and learn together. It also helps to address questions that team members might have going in, including about their roles within the team, whether they're expected to represent stakeholder groups of which they're a part or only their own views, if there's one team member who is the leader or they're all peers, and how the work of the team should be communicated to those outside it.

PART B: Do Your Discovery

"If I had an hour to solve a problem I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions."
–Albert Einstein

We've learned that the best strategy experiences often start with what we call Discovery. It is amazing how helpful this is to do, though many hesitate to build time for it into the process. We recommend that you try it.

There is a lot about a community foundation that can be discovered by asking stakeholders essential questions about its program, operations, community leadership or some other topic. Discovery usually focuses on creating structured conversations to learn from internal and external stakeholders about goals and gaps in current strategy, a process that will enable you to think about your strategy from multiple perspectives. These activities can be done in groups or one-on-one interviews. Some of you may want to engage a consultant to help with the interview process, but it is not essential. Nor do you need to do all of these activities to be effective. (However, if you eliminate one, try to give yourselves an honest answer about why you choose not to do it to make sure that it is good strategy!)

Activity 1

Find Our Focus: Where Do We Want to Improve?

We've found that it's more useful to think first in terms of domains of your work that you want to explore than to jump straight to specific questions. There are many potential areas of discovery, but here are the ten hardy perennials that always pop up:

- Clarifying mission and vision
- Examining core values
- Defining impact
- Scanning the landscape for issues and solutions
- Exploring community leadership strategies
- Exploring grantmaking strategies
- Exploring donor services and development strategies
- Assessing capabilities
- Allocating resources
- Shaping a strategy process

How to choose is a strategic activity: Ask your core team to rank the areas of inquiry you identify in the order of what is most important for your community foundation right now. Discuss why the top 3 to 5 were chosen and explore explanation for any outliers. This prioritizing can help generate questions to ask and additional areas of inquiry to explore and will take your team's temperature on where the urgency is for them.

Activity 2

Forensic Discovery: What Strategy Is Already In Place?

Imagine your community foundation just interviewed candidates for new staff positions, or you interviewed as a candidate, or you talked to a newcomer to the foundation, or as a board member you talked about what your foundation is looking for in new staff. Or maybe one of these scenarios happened recently and you don't have to imagine. As an observer listening in on these conversations—imaginary or real—what did you hear?

- What did you hear that seemed most important to say about your community foundation as an organization, what it values and how that influences its strategy?

- Are there any beliefs or statements about your foundation that you shared or heard as part of that process that on reflection might be worth examining?

- In what ways do you see your foundation's grantmaking, community leadership and/or donor engagement strategies as aligned with its values? Where do you think it might not be aligned with its values?

Activity 2
continued

Pick a scenario and jot down your answers. Pair up to share what you said. Try pairing by finding a partner who picked a similar situation. Then report out to the whole group and have a recorder take notes on core important values or principles.

Activity 3

List 100: Who Do We Want to Talk To?

This activity will help you identify key stakeholders to consult as part of your Discovery.

The idea is to build toward a list of the 100 most important stakeholders for your foundation, a group that you can continually update, engage, and consult as partners in your evolving strategy. Begin by asking members of your team to each identify one stakeholder whose support for and engagement in your community foundation is especially important. For each person, identify the name, the organization (if applicable), the group/s that person represents (e.g. donor, nonprofit, government, etc.) and why that person is considered an important stakeholder.

(Note that you might pick stakeholders who can be considered "internal," such as board members. That's fine. In fact, we would suggest doing away with the internal/external distinction and instead to think of your stakeholders in terms of a series of concentric circles with your community foundation in the center. Staff and board would be in circles closer to the center, then donors, grantees, critical local leaders and so on.)

Activity 3
continued

Share and reflect on what the team came up with. Then do another round, focusing on adding key groups that might have been missing from the first round and/or other people who might belong in groups named during the first round.

Ask yourselves whether any groups are missing from your list in terms of race/ethnicity, age, relationship to the community, leadership that is not just because of title, and other categories of people who go beyond the usual suspects. Don't forget to address the "why" for this round of names as well. Decide when you have generated enough names for the purpose of coming up with a good list of people to interview as part of your Discovery. It doesn't have to be 100! It should be an ambitious but manageable list that helps you consult whom you need to consult. (You can continue to add to this list and use it for your foundation's ongoing communications efforts as well.)

Activity 4

Ask Good Questions: What Do We Really Want to Know?

Once you have your areas of inquiry and the key stakeholders to consult identified, the next step is for you to come up with questions to ask them. We'd suggest three steps to do this:

1. **Suggesting Questions:** Have the team review the areas of inquiry and brainstorm questions for each area. (See Appendix A for possible questions generated by dozens of foundations we've work with.)

2. **Making Some Choices:** Rank the top 10 questions to ask or the top question in each area of inquiry. Sometimes this step will lead you to merge previous questions or distill broad questions to their essence.

Activity 4
continued

3. **Anticipating Answers:** Take the key questions you're going to ask and have your team come up with hunches about how stakeholders will answer them. This can help you focus the exchange with stakeholders, get the most out of the conversations and make Discovery findings actionable and memorable.

Now it's time to discover. Picture a continuum. SurveyMonkey is at the left end and group conversations are at the right end. The best Discovery activities tend to be toward the right side of the continuum—structured, collaborative inquiry in which stakeholders discuss and build on ideas with each other (though supplementing group conversations with a broader quantitative survey of stakeholders can be effective).

If it's feasible to do these structured conversations, start with a core group of stakeholders in a room and and use a Liberating Structures[1] method called "1-2-4-All" to generate a compiled survey response.

Be sure to have recorders in the room to capture what the quartets learned from each other.

Give participants a worksheet to fill out their individual responses and ask them to give those to the recorders as well.

If it's not feasible to undertake these structured conversations, we suggest you do the next best thing: divide and conquer. Ask your core group to create and divide up a list of people in different categories who have a variety of experiences with the foundation. Narrow the list

[1] Thanks to Liberating Structures for this exercise. Please see www.liberatingstructures.com.

Activity 4
continued

so that no one has more than 3-5 people to interview. Decide to divide up the interviews by relationship to foundation, a diversity factor (age, race/ethnicity, gender), intensity of relationship, etc. It's useful data to discuss what categories are meaningful to us. Interviewers agree to a time limit for interviews and to share responses to questions in writing, using the same format. Once the interviews are done, you can organize a 1-2-4-All exercise among the team to download the information.

PART C: Jumpstart Your Strategy Narrative

Over the years we've learned and relearned an old traveler's trick: begin with the end in mind. In this case, we don't mean that you know what a new strategy will be right at the start. We mean that you'll begin *drafting* your strategy right at the start.

You'll craft a document that contains your strategy as-is, your strategy as you would like it to be, and ideas about how to narrow the gap between. Consider the document an expanding container for what you know and don't know, for your ongoing discoveries, for your half-baked ideas, for your assumptions and your challenges to them, for your questions and thoughts about how you're going to answer them. Make it as simple and accessible as possible. Think of it as thinking out loud. Get ready to do many drafts over time.

We call this document the Strategy Narrative, but you could call it anything you like. We think it's important because it provides a simple tool for you and your team to reflect on and draft your strategy *before* you put together a concrete plan. It's a place to prototype and test your strategic thinking. On your first pass, remember that you don't have to have all the answers up front, but you do want to get as many questions down as you can as well as your preliminary hypotheses about the answers. The Strategy Narrative should be a collaborative and evolving document, owned and operated by the group of people who are working on your community foundation's strategy. (You might try an online document-sharing platform so that all participants can work together on one version.)

We've found that including these four sections in your Strategy Narrative can be helpful:

- Core Values
- Areas of Impact & Work
- Impact Practices
- Key Assumptions

We encourage you to add, subtract and reframe these sections to make the document your own. On the next pages we describe each of these sections and provide activities to generate ideas.

Core Values

Values shape strategy.

Some call them "principles," others "commitments." Whatever you call them, the idea is to—in the words of Richard Barrett, author of *Building a Values-Driven Organization*—describe "what is important to us individually or collectively" as a way of distilling the essence of your identity and, more practically, laying guiderails to help you make choices. We've observed how clarifying the process of identifying core principles can be. We've also seen pragmatic people move past their skepticism about "values clarification" as they see how it can suggest a filter that does the most practical thing a good strategy can do: help you decide what opportunities you will say "yes" and "no" to.

Here are a few activities that will help you figure out what your community foundation's values are and how you might apply them.

Activity 5

Mind the Values-Strategy Gap: What Do We Espouse But Not Live?

All organizations—not to mention people—face gaps between the values they espouse and their actual behavior. Identifying these gaps and exploring how to close them can be a clarifying and constructive process.

Here's one way to do that.

First, write a list of all the values you've been generating and working through. Ask each player on your strategy team to *separately* prioritize them by ranking them in order of importance. Then compare the results, exploring similarities and differences, unpacking how each person determined "importance," determining how related values might be merged or distinguished, deciding what ways of framing the values resonate with your organization and its stakeholders. Work together to get the list down to half a dozen core espoused values.

Activity 5
continued

Using the table below, list your espoused values in Column A. Then identify one example of how your foundation tries to live each value internally (Column B) and one example of how your foundation tries to live each value externally (Column C). Looking over these examples, reflect on where it has been challenging to live each value and why that might be the case (Column D). This will generate important data about where the gaps are between espoused and lived. Finally, in light of all that reflection, rank all the values in terms of how well your community foundation is living them, from living them "best" to "least" (Column E).

A. Espoused Values	B. One Example of How We Try to Live This Value *Internally*	C. One Example of How We Try to Live This Value *Externally*	D. How Is It Challenging to Live This Value and Why?	E. Rank How Well We're Living The Values (from best to least)
Value				
Value				
Value				

To make sense of what you generate through this activity, we suggest you take three passes: What? So what? Now what? In other words, what did you come up with, what are the implications, and what are ideas about how you might proceed? Then take what you've come up with—ideas, questions, steps, etc.—and record it in your Strategy Narrative.

Areas Of Impact And Work

Where do you want to make an impact, what impact do you want to make, and how can you make it?

We've found that one useful step to answer these fundamental questions of strategy is for community foundations to spend time reflecting on their capabilities and activities in three areas of work: community leadership, grantmaking, and donor services and development. The unique value of a community foundation comes in part from understanding, mastering and applying this mix of capabilities. Some find their best strategy in the places where these domains overlap, providing synergy across activities and opportunities for people to add extra value and fresh perspectives.

Activity 6

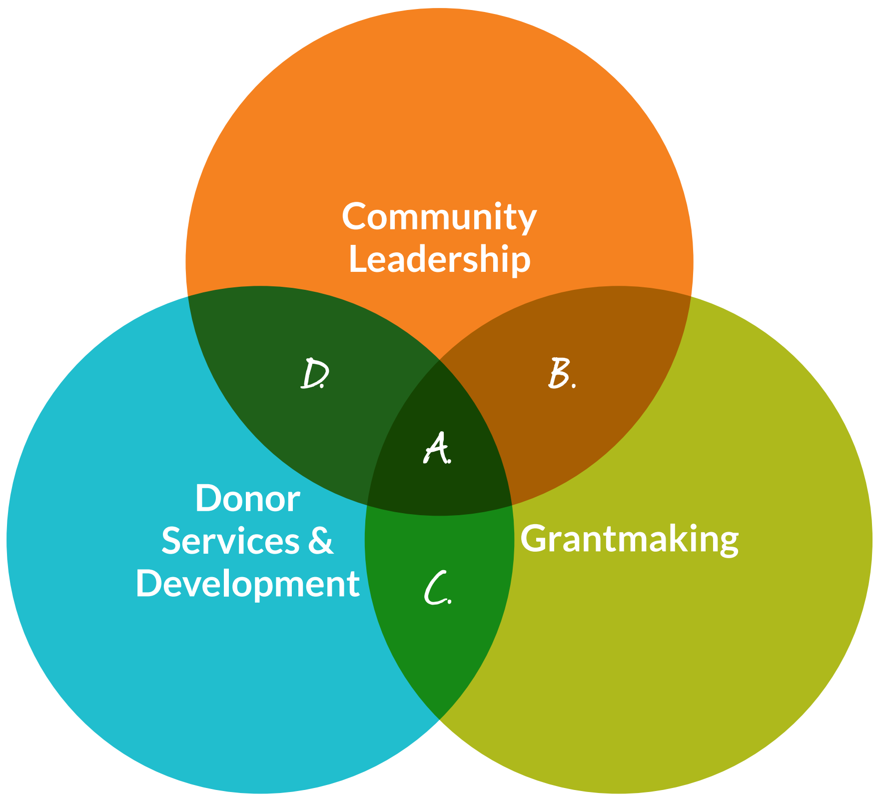
Strategic Sweet Spots: How Can We Make the Whole Greater Than The Sum of the Parts?

For starters, we suggest mapping your community foundation's main activities. They could be grant programs, community or donor engagement projects, special initiatives—any activity that takes significant time and resources. Use the diagram one the next page and take the following steps:

- Populate the circles with your current activities. You might have activities that belong in more than one circle, so put those activities in the overlap. For example, if a specific project engages donors in grantmaking, it would go in section "C." If it also gathers data on critical local issues, it involves all three capabilities and would go in section "A."

Activity 6
continued

- Look at the overlap. Are there places where your foundation's values as well as it's overall value show up most? How did the overlap happen? Was it intentional? What are the differences between activities that overlap and ones that don't?
- In what areas do you spend the most time, energy and resources? Are you happy about that?
- As a bonus, you now have mapped all your activities!



Activity 7

Bits and Pieces of the Future: What In Our Rearview Mirror Can We Learn From?

This activity is a powerful way to get to the essence of the impact you want to achieve and the organizational strengths you can bring to bear to achieve it. We suggest you use the Liberating Structures 1-2-4-All method to this activity to get the most out of it, as follows:

1: Each member of the team individually identifies what your foundation has done in the past that you are most proud of, in each of the three domains of community leadership, grantmaking, and donor services & development. Try to be as concrete as possible, illustrating with a grant, activity, event, initiative, etc.

2: With a partner, probe *why* you both made the choices you did. What impacts did it have that you're proud of? Why is that? What practices were used that you're proud of? Why do they

Activity 7
continued

make you proud? What impact might it have going forward with more money, time or other resources devoted to it, if any? Why do you think that?

4: With three others, share what you see as the essence of the impact you want to achieve, and the key practices to achieve it, based on your discussion with your partner. "Key practices" are signature and/or emergent and promising approaches that contributed to making something good enough to be proud of it.

All: List, review and reflect on the ideas generated about identified impacts and practices.

Impact Practices

You're on a game show called "Let's Make An Impact."

Your host, Monte Hall, presents you with two final options. Behind Door #1 is a thoroughly articulated definition of the impact your community foundation plans to achieve, complete with concrete objectives, indicators and timeline (in short, the holy grail of traditional strategic planning). Behind Door #2 is a package of practices essential to achieving impact, and they are developed enough that you can begin using them today—practices such as strategic grantmaking, community engagement, convening, highlighting local issues, evaluation, and so on. Your goal is ultimate community impact. Plans or practices: which door do you choose?

We would choose the practices door every time.

In real life, fortunately, this isn't an either/or choice. But in our experience most organizations think of strategy in terms of Door #1, and they tend not to think of it in terms of Door #2. Plans are vital, to be sure. But what practices will get you there? The following activity can help you open that that second door.

Activity 8

Many Paths to Impact: How To Choose Our Best Route?

The purpose of this activity is to identify the most critical impact practices that your community foundation needs to invest time, energy and resources into mastering. Steps to take:

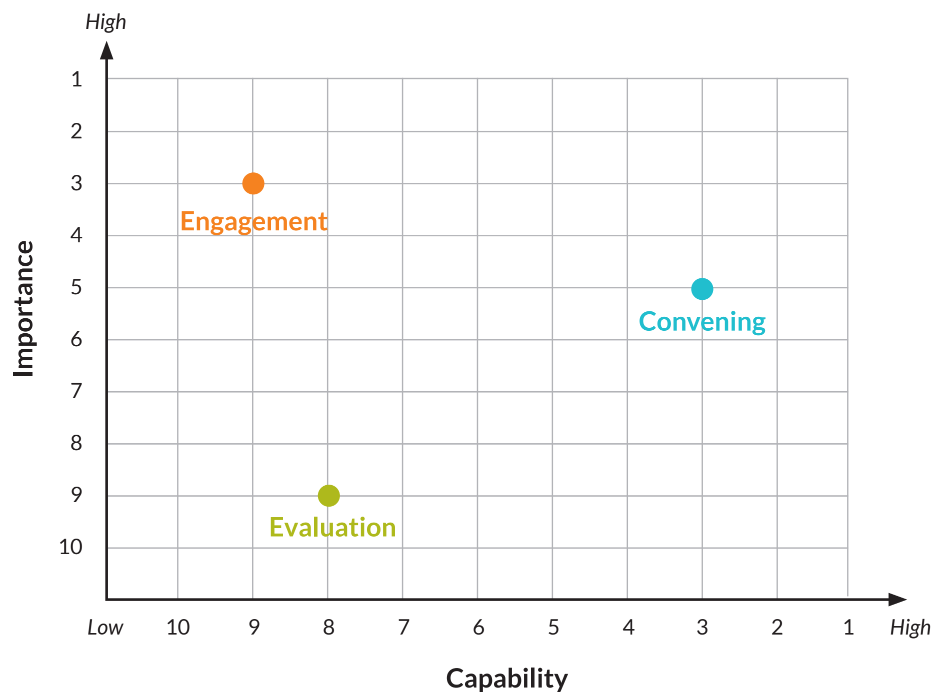
- Start by working with your team to list the various practices you think are essential to achieving community impact for your foundation. A good way to start is by reflecting on the practices that were identified through the “Proud of” activity. Try to identify around ten practices.

- Have each member of the team rank the practices, 1 through 10 (assuming you come up with a list of ten practices), based on two criteria: (a) importance to impact, where 1 = most important and 10 = least important and (b) how capable your community foundation is at this practice, where 1 = most capable and 10 = least capable.

- Review your individual rankings and see if you can come to consensus. If you can’t, then have team members do the next step individually rather than as a group.

Activity 8
continued

- Array those practices on a chart like the one pictured below. In this hypothetical example, "Convening" has been ranked fifth among ten practices in terms of importance and third in terms of capability—i.e. the community foundation sees it as an important practice that they're also good at. "Evaluation" is considered low in importance and capability. "Engagement" is a practice considered important—ranked third—but also something the community foundation doesn't do very well right now.
- As a team, reflect on the rankings, which impact practices you want to focus on going forward and how you plan to do so.



Key Assumptions

Think of your community foundation's strategy as an iceberg, with most of the important stuff below the surface.

Your organization's directions and approaches over time are based on all kinds of assumptions, made by all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances, and many of them are taken for granted and never examined.

The great opportunity in doing your discovery and reflecting on your strategy is to bring those assumptions to the surface, make sense of them, and revise as needed. What assumptions do you make about your work that go unspoken and unchallenged? Are there mistaken or competing assumptions behind trouble spots? What about your work do you not want to see?

Once you've done this sense-making, we encourage you to name and explain your community foundation's most important assumptions in your strategy narrative.

Activity 9

Dig Into Dilemmas: How Do We Explore Difficult Issues?

Exploring dilemmas can be illuminating because, as dilemmas, they don't have right on just one side. They will come up in your Discovery process and need to be named and recognized as you go—not so much to be solved as to be explored to figure out how to manage.

The Giving Practice has been collecting classic dilemmas that face community foundations. You can review them in Appendix B. We find that the best way to engage with a dilemma is to frame *one side of the dilemma* in simple, black-and-white terms. For example, in the area of community leadership, we frame one dilemma as "It is better to take a stand around a controversial issue tied to your mission than to remain neutral." Again, dilemmas have right on both sides—otherwise they wouldn't be a dilemma!—and this framing pushes one side of the choice as a way to provoke discussion. Some might agree with this idea about taking a stand, some might take the other side, and it's in the back-and-forth and the exploration of the grey area in the middle that can yield the most useful understanding and ideas.

Activity 9
continued

(If our working list of dilemmas isn't the right tool for you, you can ask your core team and everyone you interview in this process, "What keeps you up at night that involves community leadership, donors or grantmaking and our community foundation?" Or you can give selected stakeholders our list and invite them to rank the issues for your community foundation and give specific examples to illustrate what they mean.)

Start with your core team. Pick the top three dilemmas and ask participants to line up according to where they stand with regard to managing the dilemma. Have people talk to each other first as they are clustered and then across the continuum to better understand the dilemma. Why are they standing where they are? What might make them move to another position on the continuum? If participants hear an opinion that changes their views, by all means have them move to another position. This is a very useful "rinse and repeat" activity to do with different stakeholders, from staff and board to community leaders.

Use the strategy narrative to track the dilemmas raised, and the conclusions you reached, from actively listening to the diversity of opinions about the dilemmas and ideas for managing them.

PART D:
Bring It Together

By now you've generated a range of ideas, reflections, and key issues that will help you improve your strategy practice. It's critical to capture that content in your Strategy Narrative as an ongoing, evolving document. It will likely be a lengthy and messy document with rich, complex content. How do you get to simplicity on the right side of all that complexity?

Activity 10

Design a Strategy Map: How Will We Distill Our Key Ideas?

We recommend you create a simple map of your strategy. This is a one-page visual that *distills the key ideas*—the ones that are most critical to your future action as a community foundation—in the different areas of your Strategy Narrative.

This is a tool to be used by key people at your foundation, so the test is what those people need to make quick sense of all your strategic thinking. It can take a few tries to get the map simple enough. Once you do, put it at the front of your Strategy Narrative document and use it as an ongoing touchstone.

See the sample map on the next page.[2] We recommend two guidelines to draft your map:

1. **Push for simplicity.** Let's say one of the key impact practices you identify for your community foundation is using evaluation thinking and tools to better design your grantmaking and community leadership programs, assess their progress, and

Activity 10
continued

figure out what you can learn from the assessment. To represent that practice on your map you could put something like "Evaluating and learning."

2. **Find the most useful level of detail.** Consider the section of the sample map on "Areas of Impact and Work." Your team might decide that the most useful elements to put there, in order to represent the target areas of impact in your strategy, are simply "Donor Impact," "Community Leadership Impact," and "Grantmaking Impact." That's as detailed as you need to get as a distillation of your strategy. Or your team might have identified key sub-areas within those three areas—for example, under "Donor Impact," you might have decided to focus your efforts on increasing the number of donors, building better relationships with your donors, and engaging your donors in work in the two other domains of community leadership and grantmaking. So on the map you might put, under "Donor Impact," labels such as "More Donors," "Better Relationships," and "Integration." In general, you know you have too much detail when the full strategy map doesn't fit on one page!

[2] There are a number of graphics applications you can use to draw the map. One we recommend is an online application called Draw.io (http://draw.io).

Activity 10
continued

Sample Strategy Map

Vision

Our vision is to...

Values

Value A | Value B | Value C | Value D | Etc

Areas of Impact + Work

Donor Impact | Community Leadership Impact | Grantmaking Impact

Impact Practices

Practice A | Practice B | Practice C | Practice D | Etc

Key Assumptions

Assumptions A | Assumptions B | Assumptions C | Assumptions D | Etc

Other Categories

Looking To What's Next

Congratulations. You've done your Discovery. You've jumpstarted your Strategy Narrative, including exploring your values, naming your strategy, mapping your activities, and identifying your impact practices. And you've drafted a shorthand map of your strategy.

You've now done exploratory, reflective work that is crucial to a successful strategy—and that is often by-passed in the rush to write a plan and "solve the problem." This deep dig is essential to build an ongoing strategy practice, which in turn is essential to having the impact you want to have. Without it, any plan you write will be far less likely to be a "living" tool that keeps your work sharp and successful on a day-to-day basis. Having a plan without a practice is like having an itinerary without the vehicle. You won't get far.

Of course, once you've done this deep work, having a plan for going forward is a helpful next step. There are lots of resources on traditional strategic planning that can help you figure out the right plan format and content for you. Here we provide a template you can use. It's based on work we've done with clients. Just one warning: you might look at the template, like it, and figure your team can skip the ten activities and go right to filling it out and drafting your plan. Time is short, daily demands are on the front burner and many a weary community foundation leader has thought the same. Resist this temptation! It is a surefire way to quickly produce a plan that no one looks at again and leaves you without the strategy you need to make a difference.

Big Picture

	Donor Services & Development	Community Leadership	Grantmaking
Context	What are the key elements of our and the community's current reality in this area?	What are the key elements of our and the community's current reality in this area?	What are the key elements of our and the community's current reality in this area?
Importance	Why is this area important to our community foundation?	Why is this area important to our community foundation?	Why is this area impor2tant to our community foundation?
Vision	What is our picture of success in this area?	What is our picture of success in this area?	What is our picture of success in this area?
Past	Where have we been in this area?	Where have we been in this area?	Where have we been in this area?
Future	Where are we headed in this area?	Where are we headed in this area?	Where are we headed in this area?

Next Three Years

	Objectives What are 3-5 main things you're trying to accomplish in each area?	Activities What are the activities you will do to achieve each objective?	Success Metrics For each objective, how will you know you've achieved it?
Donor Services & Development	Objective 1	Key activities	Success metrics
	Objective 2	Key activities	Success metrics
	Objective 3	Key activities	Success metrics
Community Leadership	Objective 1	Key activities	Success metrics
	Objective 2	Key activities	Success metrics
	Objective 3	Key activities	Success metrics
Grantmaking	Objective 1	Key activities	Success metrics
	Objective 2	Key activities	Success metrics
	Objective 3	Key activities	Success metrics

Let Us Know How It Goes

We want to walk our talk when it comes to this guide, approaching it as a tool evolves as we go and adapts to feedback and changing opportunities—i.e. a living document like your Strategy Narrative. To help us do that, we would love to hear what you think of the guide, how you're using it, what impact it's having on your work, and what thoughts you might have for making it better. We would also love to hear any ideas you have for helping community foundations sharpen their strategy more generally.

Good luck with building your strategy practice and we hope to hear from you!

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The Giving Practice

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Sample Discovery Questions

Clarifying Mission & Vision

1. How would you describe the mission of the community foundation?
2. How would you describe the vision of the community foundation? How do you think the community foundation measures its success?

Examining Core Values

Imagine you are being interviewed by a good friend who has been invited to be a potential new board member at X and is trying to decide whether to join or not and has asked you the following questions:

3. What is most important to say about the community foundation as an organization, what it values, and how that influences its strategy?
4. Are there any beliefs or statements about the community foundation that you would share or have heard as that on reflection might be worth examining?
5. In what ways do you see the community foundation’s grantmaking, program and/or investment strategy as aligned with its values? Where do you think it might not be aligned with its values?

Defining Impact

6. What are you most proud of when you talk about what the community foundation does and how it does it? Try to be as concrete as possible, illustrating with a grant, initiative, program or investment.
7. What impact did it have from your perspective? What impact might it have going forward with more money, time or other resources devoted to it, if any?
8. Five years from now what headline or article about the community foundation would you like to read?

Scanning the Landscape

9. How, and from whom, do you learn about what is going on in the community—formally and informally?
10. What do you see going on in the region that you think poses the greatest hope for achieving the community foundation’s mission? What roles could it play in accelerating that activity?
11. What have you seen changing in the community that the community foundation might not be paying enough attention to?
12. What have you seen elsewhere that makes you wonder “why we don’t do that in our community?”
13. What has the community foundation done in the past that might be emulated and adapted in a new, future form?

14. What issues and opportunities are facing our community right now? (Who writes about this now – journalists, academics, nonprofit intermediaries, etc.)? How do you see people addressing these issues or opportunities?
15. What would you like from a community foundation with regard to these issues and opportunities?
16. Sometimes we learn best by looking with a new lens at events in the past.

    What has happened in this community in the last five years where you can imagine that an organization playing a convener or catalyst role might have made a difference in the outcome?
17. What data is available to help us understand our communities? How do people use that data?

Exploring Community Leadership Strategies

18. What community leadership practices do you think are the community foundation's strong suits? Where are there shortcomings with regard to impact or any other important outcome?
19. What untapped community leadership opportunities do you think the community foundation could/should take advantage of?
20. What do you think are the most important elements of community leadership for the community foundation to focus on?

Exploring Grantmaking Strategies

21. What do you think is working and not working in these programs?
22. If the community foundation stopped any type of grantmaking, would it have an impact on our region and how?
23. What could make its grantmaking program have greater impact?

Exploring Donor Service and Engagement Strategies

24. How do you think the community foundation could add more value to donors?
25. What donor engagement practices do you think are the community foundation's strong suits? Where are there shortcomings with regard to impact or any other important outcome?
26. What untapped donor engagement opportunities do you think the community foundation could/should take advantage of?
27. What do you think are the most important elements of donor service and engagement for the community foundation to focus on?

Assessing Capabilities

28. What staff or board capabilities already exist that might be tapped differently for greater impact?
29. Are there capacity skill gaps, shortcomings or other barriers to address for greater impact?

Allocating Resources

30. Are there financial or capital assets that already exist that could be tapped differently for greater impact?

Shaping the Process

31. What other questions do you think we should be exploring during this project?
32. What feedback and/or advice would you like to share with the community foundation?
33. What are your hunches about where this process might end up?

Questions for Interviews of Donors

Donors are an important part of our core "business" serving the community. We want to learn more about how our donors approach their charitable giving here at the community foundation and elsewhere. (If you have data about their giving, you can integrate these questions with the data that you already have.)

1. Do you have a particular issue or organization that shapes your giving?
2. Do you give when asked?
3. Do you give to the same organizations each year?
4. Do you know what you like or are you open to new ideas and organizations?
5. Do you make philanthropic decisions as an individual, with your spouse and/or with your children? (If they have children, probe their interest in family/youth philanthropy and whether they have participated in community foundation youth philanthropy activities.)
6. Do you talk about the community foundation or your philanthropy with your friends?
7. Have you ever recommended the foundation to a friend or colleague?
8. What attracted you to opening a fund at the community foundation? How had you been giving before opening a DAF?
9. What is your experience as a fund-holder? Does the foundation help you feel connected to the community? In what ways?
10. How would you describe the community foundation's strengths and weaknesses? (Probe for how much learning about existing and new giving comes from the relationships at the foundation.)
11. How do you think of your Fund in the portfolio of the giving that you do? Is it the primary vehicle or do you use others? What other tools are you currently using to manage your giving (Fidelity, checkbook, etc)? How do these tools/methods compare to your experience at the community foundation?
12. If it is not too personal, can I ask if the community foundation is part of your legacy, named in your will? (You may have a lot of that data but we've found that some times donors don't think to mention that to foundations.)

13. What roles have your seen the community foundation take on that you particularly like or would like to see more of? Are there roles that you don't find useful to you? Are there roles you'd like to see from the foundation that we don't do now?
14. Let's come back to our community. Do you see opportunities or issues here that need more attention from all of us?

Questions for Professional Advisors

1. In working with your clients, do you see any changes and or trends in how your clients think about charitable giving? Tightening belt? Focus on metrics? Interest in different issues?
2. If your clients raise questions about charitable giving is it primarily in the context of on-going charitable giving and how to manage it, giving as a result of a liquidity event, or including it in their estate planning?
3. If a client does not raise charitable giving in the course of your discussions, do you raise it? If not, why?
4. Do you find that there are any common demographic characteristics among your clients who are most interested in charitable giving: age, gender, profession, education, etc.
5. What advice do you offer on how to manage charitable giving? (If not mentioned, ask about check book giving, donor advised funds, private foundations and planned giving as the options.)
6. What do you see as the pros/cons of private foundations?
7. What do you see as the pros/cons of donor advised funds? Are they clear about what is a DAF?
8. If a client is inclined to use a donor advised fund—how do you help the client choose between the DAF offerings of some of the large institutional funders (like Fidelity and Schwab) and local community foundations? How do fees and customer service influence the choices donors make?

   If you refer clients to other public foundations, how do you differentiate them?
9. If the advisor provides investment services, I will ask about his/her ongoing management of funds under the various alternatives—private foundation and donor advised funds. Is it attractive to you to be able to continue fund management if the client decides to use a donor advised fund? What do you think a reasonable dollar threshold should be for allowing someone in your position to continue to do the investment management for a DAF?
10. Opinion of our foundation. Why they refer/do not refer clients to us? Pros/cons of our foundation as a giving vehicle: What aspects of our foundation are most appealing to your clients?

APPENDIX B

Example Dilemmas for Activity 9

Organization

- Each community in our region should have its own stand-alone community foundation.
- Financial asset size is not the dominant determinant of community foundation effectiveness
- Community foundations must, above all else, minimize overhead expense (in order to attract and retain donors)
- Community foundations have such a unique business model that they really don’t have much in common with other types of foundations.
- Technology is a critical investment in our own operational and community outreach/grantmaking capacity.
- Our board members should all make significant gifts to the foundation.

Donor Service & Engagement

- Above all else, a community foundation must attract and serve donors.
- There is no way community foundations can charge donors more than 1%, no matter how much value they are offering.
- The wealthiest donor should be treated with the same courtesy as the poorest
- Donor Advised Funds are the only way fund holders will begin/continue to engage with us
- Donors need to be comfortable with our priorities

Community Leadership

- It is better to take a stand around a controversial issue tied to your mission than to remain neutral.
- The community knows who we are.
- This local place is either the only or the primary place of interest for our donors
- We are the “only game in town” when it comes to building a stronger community
- We speak for the community

Grantmaking

- If you have $100,000 to give away in grants its better to give away 20 $5,000 grants than one $100,000 grant.
- Outside experts are the best source of information to decide programmatic priorities
- Our program staff should all be generalists in the field, not focused on a particular issue.
- Poor people do not have the time or the knowledge to solve problems, that is the job of experts and important institutions, like us
- We do not have the time to waste non grantmaking time on anyone but community leaders and wealthy donors
- Making grants to non-profits can damage community capacity
- Building community connectivity and agency is more important than solving problems
- We can't serve donors who don't live here or must "hand them off" if they want to work outside of our "territory."