EUROPEAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION INITIATIVE

A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS IN ROMANIA

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@Home in Romania

May 2018. A group of 30 people are walking into the grey Făgăraș morning. I think almost all of us have driven through Făgăraș at least once in our lifetime, since the town is on the main national road connecting Brașov to Sibiu, two of the most attractive Romanian cities. What I can't say for sure is how many of us actually stopped to visit this place, which it is situated in the centre of the country, as the locals always say with pride.

Făgăraș is a town surrounded by spectacular mountains, with a population of less than 30,000 people and with a history dating back to the 12th century. The centre of the city is the place where the heroic distant past – represented by the old fortress – meets the not-so-heroic recent past and even less heroic present. In the space of a few kilometres, those who read in stone can see in the nonsensical architectural mix the broken layers of what this community has gone through. The Middle Age fortress is surrounded by communist blocks of flats and weird colourful post-communist buildings. All this mismatch is dominated by a newly built cathedral whose golden dome sometimes competes with the rays of sun. Heavily industrialized during the communist times, Făgăraș is now one of the shrinking cities of Romania. Except for us, there are hardly any people on the streets at this hour.

We can influence for the better the life of the community we live in

We walk for 20 minutes, leaving the centre behind, until we get to a grey gate on an unpaved narrow street. The GPS tells us that we have reached our destination. We are in a part of Făgăraș that looks more like a village than a town. We call Ștefan and are happy to see him open the gate. Ștefan Cibian, our host for the day, is one of the pillars of Făgăraș Community Foundation. He was part of the initiative group and now is a board member. In fact, Ștefan is one of the pillars of the Romanian CF movement, as he was a consultant for several community foundations and is a restless promoter of this idea, which is increasingly changing the relationship of the people with their hometowns.

Ștefan is a globetrotter who feels at home wherever he goes. A few years ago he decided that, from that moment on, he would call Făgăraș home, and would try to convince more and more people to do so. One of Ștefan's ambitions is to turn part of his grandparents' house into a research institute which connects people from various places and disciplines. Today's workshop will take place at 'the institute' which is in fact his grandparents' old barn and holds a sign reading '@home in Făgăraș'. The workshop is for a group of enthusiastic people from Suceava, Buzău, Vâlcea, Maramureș and Caraș Severin who want to build community foundations in their home counties. The crowd is very mixt and includes NGO professionals, businesspeople or civil servants. The main thing they have in common is their strong belief that they can influence for the better the life of the community they live in.

Făgăraș CF was born out of a mixture of local pride and the determination of the initiative group. It focuses on young people, for whom the area doesn't have much to offer. Oana Mitea, the executive director, talked about bringing back hope and trust in a place like

» *A community foundation makes people believe in what they do and in other people until the entire social dynamics is changed.*

Rucsandra Pop, Director of the ARC Community Foundations Programme

Făgăraș. The people who came all the way to Făgăraș to understand what it takes to build a community foundation in Romania seem to have understood that one needs a lot of love for the community, the capacity to listen to the people, to empower and connect them, the ability to see resources where others see problems and, why not, a pinch of madness.

Please don't stop! I don't know if you realize it, but you have unleashed passions.

The whole emotion of what NGO jargon calls 'impact' is in the eyes and in the words of people who benefit from various programmes. A professor who received a grant to create biocosmetics with a bunch of kids reads a letter she got from one of her students. "Please don't stop! I don't know if you realize it, but you have unleashed passions with what you are doing" – this is what the girl wrote and this is the kind of message which makes everybody in the room understand with their souls, rather than their minds, what a community foundation really does. A community foundation makes people believe in what they do and in other people until the entire social dynamics is changed.

In the past ten years, approximately 3.4 million Romanians have left the country. For a better representation of this number, you can imagine a city the size of Berlin, for example, without inhabitants. Obviously, the people who fled Romania are from all over the country, but with each migrant, the fibre of society is weakening more and more. A fibre already torn apart by almost 50 years of communism – a regime that made people lose their trust in one other, in the political class and in their own power to change their lives for the better. Until recently, 'community' was a word devoid of meaning in Romania.

In the past ten years, however, 16 community foundations have been born in Romania, and in the coming year three or four more will be created. By local people, for local people. People who succeeded, in a relatively short time, to give the meaning back to the word 'community'. If anything will keep Romanians from migrating, it is taking their lives into their own hands, trusting each other and holding the politicians accountable for the way they run their village, their town, their city, their country. It is a bumpy road, but the community foundations are the kind of organizations which are willing and able to support those people who want to take this road.

Thank you, ECFI, for this great opportunity to present our thriving Romanian community foundations.

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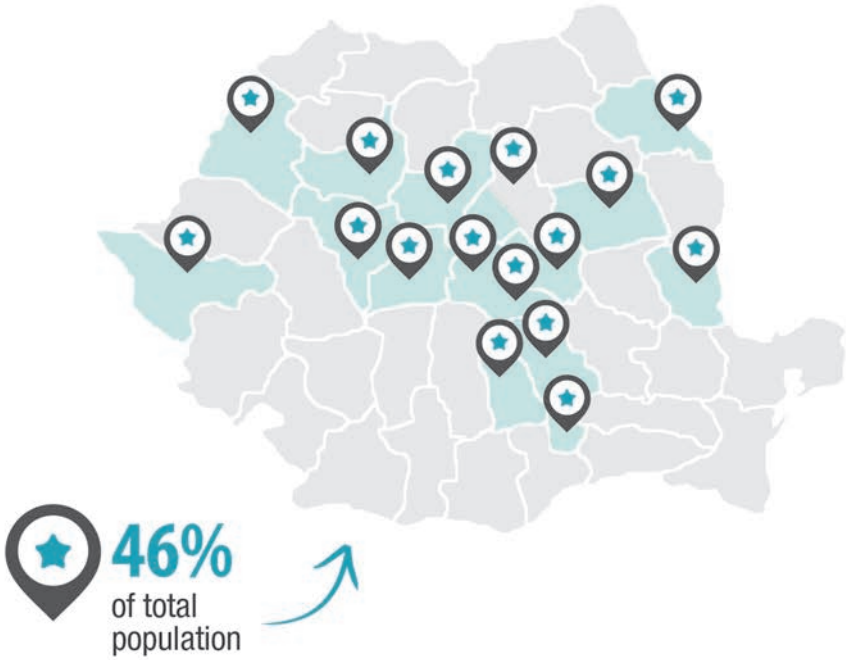
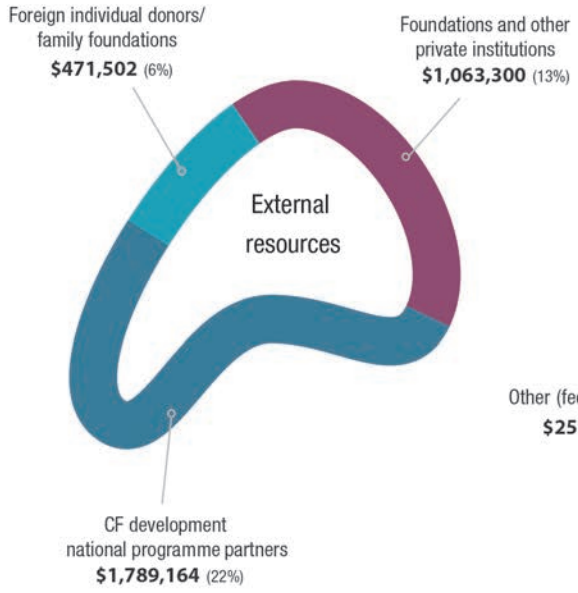
FACTS & FIGURES

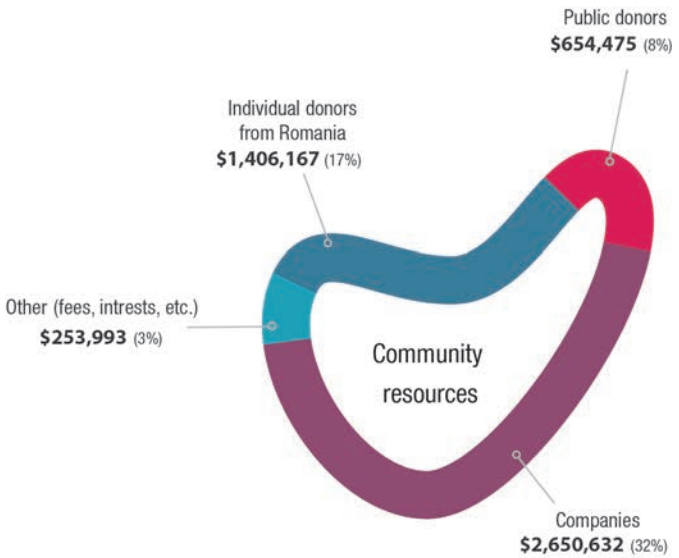
ROMANIAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS MOVEMENT 2008–2016



INCOME SOURCES 2008–2016

Total amount of funds
$ 8.289.233 (100%)

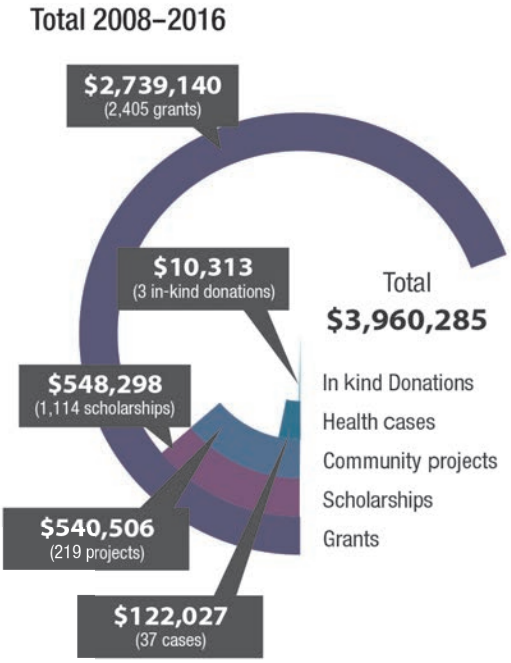




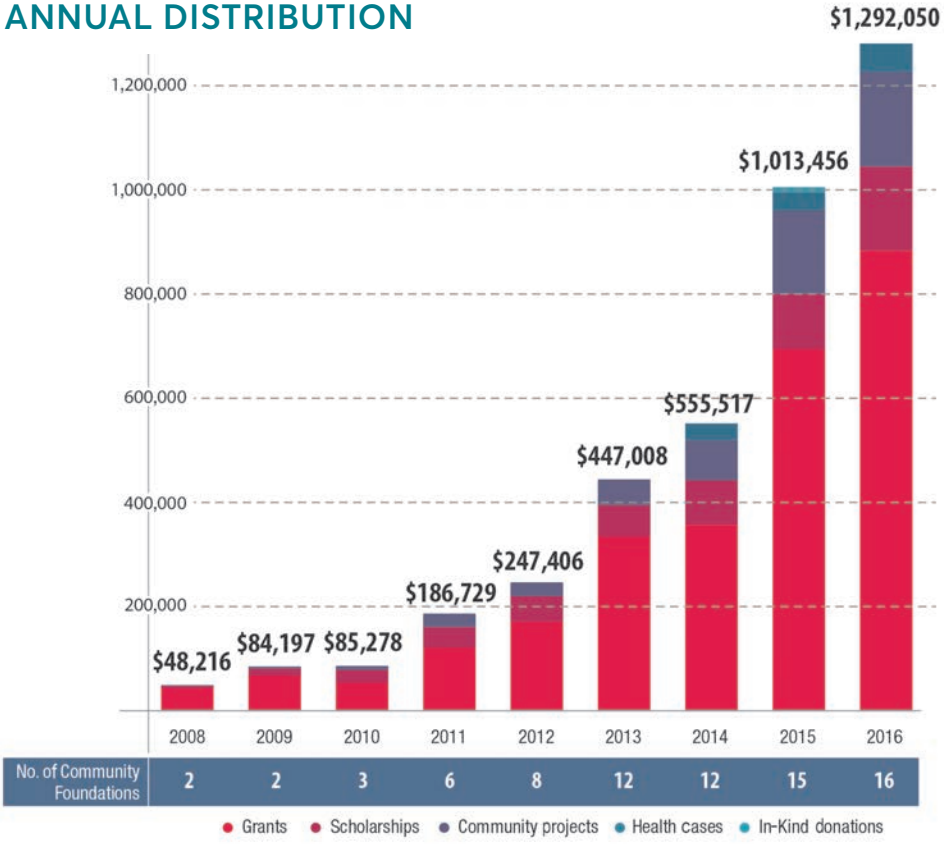
INFOGRAPH DEVELOPED BY

The infographic is based on data provided by the Romanian Community Foundations, and collected by Association for Community Relations.

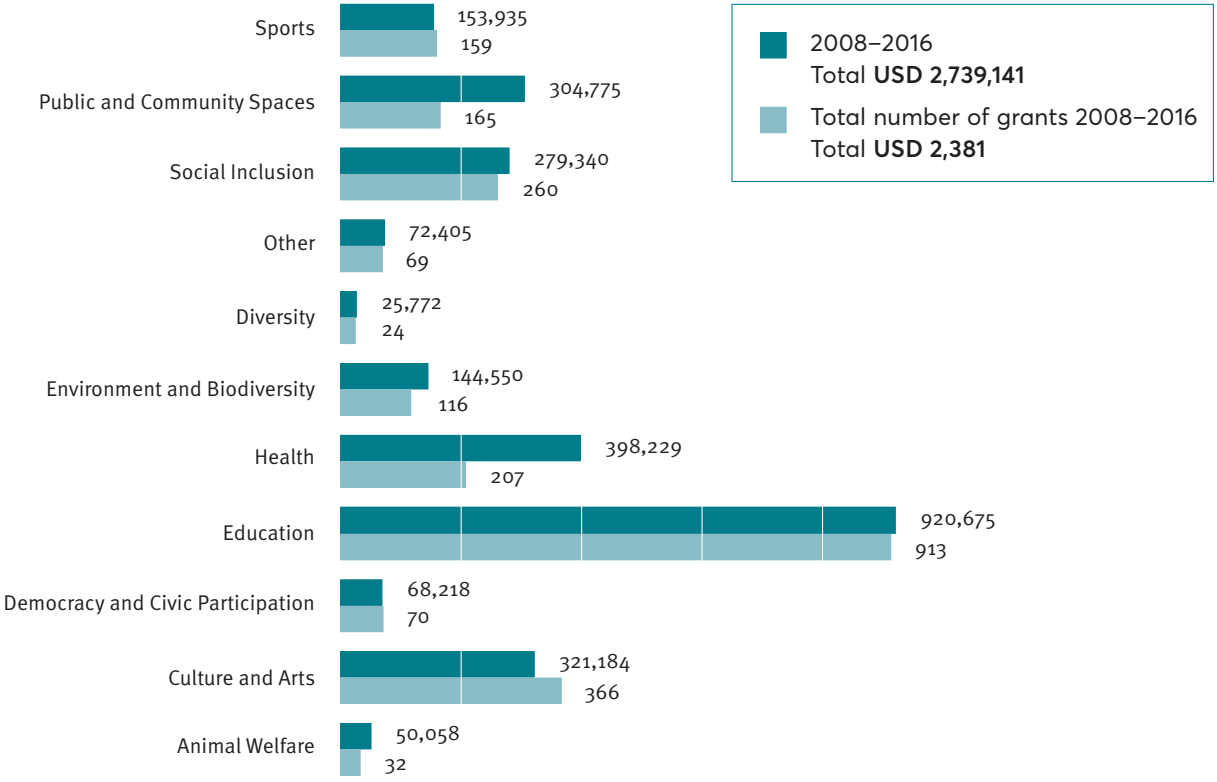
INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY



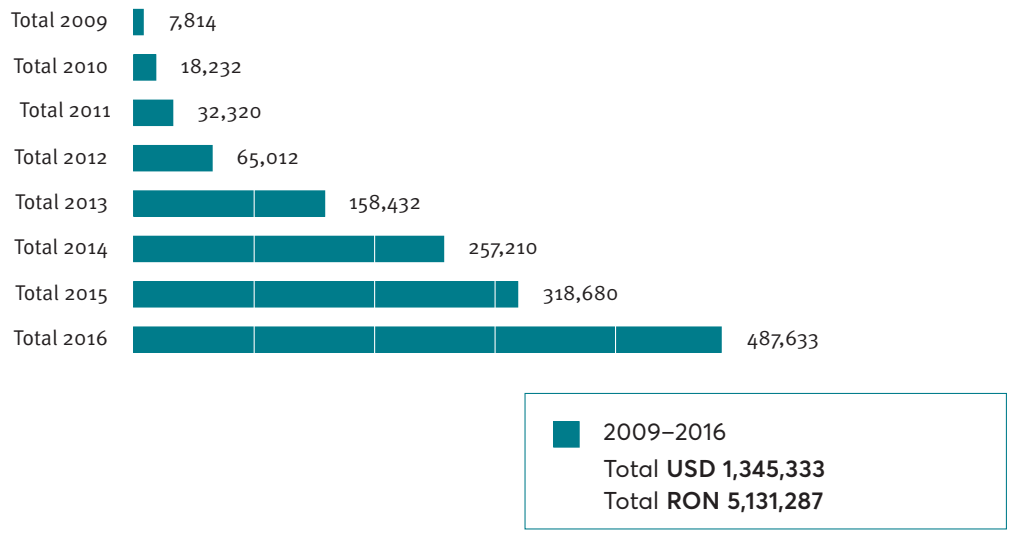
ANNUAL DISTRIBUTION



GRANTS GIVEN BY THE CFS 2008–2016



FUNDS RAISED THROUGH SPORTS EVENTS 2009–2016



HISTORY OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

In Romania, community foundations were born out of people's generosity and their desire to bring positive change to the communities they live in.

In 2005, the Association for Community Relations began to work on a vision of communities helping themselves, finding within them the strength and involvement needed to generate a positive change. In 2006, inspired by the impact community foundations had in other countries, Alina Porumb from ARC wanted to test community interest in building a local funding institution with the resources available in communities.

The pilot phase started in Transylvania with the message "If you want to do good, do it well" and after a year of discussions with four local groups, the first two community foundations in the country were registered in December 2007 and January 2008: Odorheiu Secuiesc and Cluj-Napoca.

This key moment inspired ARC to craft a ten-year strategy, at the end of which Romania would have 14 to 16 fully operational foundations. These foundations would become active philanthropy centre, supporting the involvement of private donors, responding to local needs and opportunities, with enough resources to become actors with a key role in local development.

A new phase of development started in 2009. Under ARC leadership, a national programme for supporting community foundations was built, in cooperation with the Environmental Partnership Foundation and the PACT Foundation, and with the financial support of the C.S. Mott Foundation, Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe and the Romanian-American Foundation. This framework also benefited from the expertise and participation of the two existing community foundations in Cluj-Napoca and Odorheiu Secuiesc.

» *From these ideas, from the desire to learn and innovate and a lot of courage and effort, community foundations were born and evolved in 16 cities across the country, and they developed involvement programmes with the donations, time, ideas and expertise of the inhabitants of these areas, creating a framework where the community is not just a name but rather a way of joining forces and assuming the future.*

Alina Porumb, Director of the ARC Community Foundation Programme, 2007–June 2016.

The second campaign for setting up community foundations was addressed to citizens who 'wanted to turn doing good into a life-style.' This slogan, as well as the first one, touched upon essential aspects of the activity of community foundations. Doing good through involvement in community can generate durable results if those involved are persistent, open to learn from past experiences, and apply the lessons learned to current and future practices. Another important aspect is that community foundations need to be very well organized and have a quality management system in place. Through their activities, community foundations need to offer a pleasant experience for those who are involved in donating or building successful local initiatives.

Between 2010 and 2012, six new community foundations emerged as a result of this joint support: Alba and Covasna (April and October 2010), Bucharest and Mureș (November 2011), Iași and Sibiu (May and October 2012).

Reactions of locals have shown that foundations do belong in the midst of communities and can help to generate positive and genuine change. In 2012, the first four established foundations decided to unite in a federation, to bring together their shared energy and expertise. The Romanian Federation of Community Foundations was created as a platform which represents the community foundations and supports the development of philanthropy at national level.

Although all community foundations followed a similar path, the journey itself was different for each of them. In Iași, the idea of a foundation emerged from the online environment, when the initiative group members united around a cause aimed at renovating historic buildings in the city. Their goal was to join efforts and mobilize the community around them to create a true revival of Iaşi. After two years of strengthening the concept of community foundation, and huge efforts to raise funds, the group managed to bring together 16 people, four educational and cultural institutions and one private company.

Țara Făgărașului prides itself in a much faster pace. This small community managed to start with an initiative group of 24 people and to mobilize half of the funds needed to set up in just two months. To achieve this, they organized three events which proved that a community, however small, can always find the resources and desire for change.

The Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation was officially established in 2013, at the same time as those in Bacău, Oradea and Prahova. In the same year, the National Programme for Supporting Community Foundations in Romania entered a new stage. This stage was based on a strategic partnership between ARC and the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations and benefited from the financial support of the C.S. Mott Foundation and the Romanian-American Foundation as well as grants management support from the Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation (based on CEE Trust funds).

In 2013, the foundations doubled the value of their grant-making funds and started playing an important role in terms of developing the spirit of involvement at local level. In 2014, ARC, the Federation and the 12 community foundations developed a shared vision for the year 2019, when the goal is to have 20 community foundations serving at least 50% of the entire population of Romania.

In 2015, three new communities joined the movement (Galați, Brașov, Dâmbovița), followed in 2016 by the third most populous city in the country, Timișoara.

In the ten years since the launch of the first foundation, Romania has undergone numerous changes, the non-governmental environment being now stronger, with a greater impact, and people being increasingly involved in charitable projects. Along with numerous non-governmental organizations, the community foundations have succeeded in bringing together people who work for more active, involved and stronger communities.

In 2018, we started working with new initiative groups, with the ambition of supporting four other organizations to be set up in the coming year. Currently, community foundations are serving 46% of the Romanian population for building hope and generosity.

For the Association for Community Relations, these more than ten years have been an incredible experience, with huge rewards, which helped the Association to better understand the needs of communities and develop the concept of responsible philanthropy.

» *I believe that trust is the social glue a community needs so that it can be called home. The foundations' mission is to turn this noun into a verb, to inspire and help the people in the communities in which they operate to build things together, using community resources.*

Rucsandra Pop, Director of the ARC Community Foundations Programme

PARTNERS OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

The 16 community foundations in Romania could not have been born without the support of our partners and their trust in the ARC's vision.

Association for Community Relations

ASOCIAȚIA PENTRU RELAȚII COMUNITARE

The first cornerstones of the community foundations movement were laid by the Association for Community Relations. For over ten years, ARC has been radiographing communities, inspiring leaders and people with initiative, and helping establish and develop foundations.

ARC was set up in Cluj-Napoca in 2001 by a small group of people who believed that the well-being of a country depends on the prosperity of local communities. Since then, ARC has supported and developed philanthropic behaviour in Romanian society by creating and improving mechanisms through which people, informal leaders, companies and NGOs can meet, work and generate a positive change.

For a better future, communities need a new generation of leaders who know how to connect people and build on existing local resources. ARC followed its mission to support these leaders who, in their turn, are meant to discover people with initiative from their own communities and start building together.

Through the National Community Foundation Development Programme, ARC accompanies these organizations in their setup and in the first years of operations, supporting them in developing strategies for their impact in the community.

» *The foundations are built by local leaders, and all we do is help them to find their own voice and priorities. And perhaps to not reinvent wheels already invented by others: how to organize community events, how to allocate money transparently, how to attract citizens, authorities and companies.*

Dana Pîrţoc, Director of ARC

ARC operated on a ten-year strategy of support for the field and facilitated the engagement of long-term partners and donors for the Romanian CF movement. For the next phase of programme development, ARC will enable thought leadership and self-support in the movement, and will continue to play a role in attracting allies.

Romanian Federation of Community Foundations

The Romanian Federation of Community Foundations (FFCR) has the role of representing and supporting all its members to bring about social change. Established in 2012 by the first four community foundations, the Federation provides various mechanisms for attracting funds, communicating their work, generating and disseminating community ideas, monitoring and evaluating activities in support to partner foundations.

The federation provides a space for dialogue for defining and monitoring the standards for the operations of community foundations and enables sharing experiences and expertise on joint programmes developed by multiple foundations around the country.

RFCF is a strategic partner of the ARC and the National Community Foundation Development Programme. In 2014 the two organizations worked together on a new vision of the movement for the next few years.

According to FFCR, the world we live in is better so far as people do extraordinary things together. With the needed help and guidance, communities find inner resources to grow sustainably and evolve organically. It is the only way to ensure the quality of life for generations to come.

FFCR believes that the process of generating good is more effective when multiple benefits are offered to partner companies as well. Their involvement is enabled by image benefits that give a human dimension to their work in the communities.

Charles Stewart MOTT Foundation

Since the beginning of the programme, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation has been a strategic donor of the community foundation movement in Romania. It helped ARC develop its long-term vision and a strategy for the development of community foundations. The Mott Foundation has made an important and flexible contribution that helped to cover the costs of the programme. This allowed ARC to provide consultancy and technical support to new initiatives, to organize annual conferences and meetings, and to connect to the international community foundation movement. The Mott Foundation has also supported FFCR in its development.

» *As a long-term supporter, it has been very rewarding for us to witness not only the growth of community foundations in Romania in number and capacity but also their increasing, distinctive contribution to local communities and civil society. In Romania we see examples of the next generation of community foundations — participatory, innovative, dynamic organizations, capable of harvesting and channeling energy and resources of local people to the common good.*

Vera Dakova, Programme Officer at the Mott Foundation

Established in 1926, the American Charles Stewart Mott Foundation supports organizations from around the world which strive to strengthen local communities and civic involvement. In its 90 years of activity, the Foundation has provided funding worth over $3 billion for projects in 62 countries, while for Central and Eastern Europe, "Mott cultivates a healthy civil society in Central and Eastern Europe by promoting a culture of respect, freedom and opportunity for all people" according to its mission statement.

Romanian-American Foundation

Romanian-American Foundation (RAF) invests in strategic programmes that aim to get a higher number of citizens involved in actions and projects leading to the development of their own communities. These programmes are designed to mobilize resources in support to civic initiatives and actions in the long run.

Since its founding in 2009, RAF has joined the efforts to support the creation and development of a national network of community foundations. Over the years, RAF has contributed significantly to the strengthening of this network as a partner and financial supporter of the National Community Foundation Development Programme.

RAF supported the work of existing community foundations and provided grants to set up new foundations to meet their organizational needs and in support of local projects through which they seek to mobilize financial resources from the community.

RAF currently provides grants and technical support to strengthen existing community foundations and expand the movement to a maximum of four new geographic areas. It also supports strategic initiatives coordinated locally by the community foundations and the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations at the national level, such as Fondul Științescu.

Other partners

The programme also benefits from grant-making expertise and support from the Romanian Environmental Partnership Foundation. Another strategic donor in the past has been the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe, while PACT Foundation had supported the programme's outreach in the south of Romania for the period 2009–2013. The CF movement also benefitted from support from Raiffeisen Bank (through ARC) and from the Civil Society Development Foundation (through RFCF).

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE ROMANIAN NON-PROFIT ENVIRONMENT

Romanian communities are experiencing ever faster and deeper changes. Even if the sociopolitical context doesn't truly help the NGO environment, an increasing number of Romanians are engaging in various civic activities.

The generational change has had a bigger impact in Romania than in any Western country, and now we see people educated in post-communism hold leadership positions in businesses, government and NGOs. A 'new wave' of leaders has emerged and they display a keen interest in the relation between their businesses/public affairs/ NGOs and local communities.

Romanian non-governmental sector

According to the survey "Romania 2017: Non-governmental sector – profile, trends, challenges", conducted by the Civil Society Development Foundation, the National NGO Register contained 70,194 associations (including mutual aid houses) and 16,613 foundations. These data show us, according to the survey, that 'Romania's associativity index, calculated as the number of organizations per 1,000 inhabitants, has remained at a fairly high leve'[1], and at international level, 'Romania has a higher degree of associativity than the United Kingdom, which in 2014 had 3 organizations per 1,000 inhabitants.'[2] This increase in the number of organizations has been conditioned by several factors: first, the fall of the communist regime has given free rein to citizen initiatives, second, international institutions – government or private – have supported the strengthening of civil society through various programmes and grants, while the process of joining the European Union was another determinant factor that helped to develop the sector.

Yet to obtain a clearer picture of the non-governmental environment, we must also present the activity rate of existing organizations. The NGO Register, held by the Ministry of Justice, presents only registered non-governmental organizations, while data on active organizations can be obtained from the Statistical Register of the Ministry of Public Finance.

Although the Romanian non-governmental environment has been steadily developing over the years and has proven to have many defence and stabilization mechanisms in the face of legal and financial constraints and limitations, public authorities need to reform the way they relate to NGOs.

[1] "Romania 2017: Non-governmental sector – profile, trends, challenges", conducted by the Civil Society Development Foundation, page 21

[2] Ibid.

The same study by the Civil Society Development Foundation mentions the complex legal procedures for the acquisition of legal personality, the time and money-consuming obligation to obtain and produce documents, some of them for what seem to be unclear reasons.

» *More than 60% of the NGO leaders surveyed by the Civil Society Development Foundation claim that they are not consulted or informed at all about legal acts or measures pertaining to issues of interest to their organization.*

Our role

The concept and model of community foundation is still very new to Romania (the earliest CF being set up legally in 2008), therefore it is still challenging for community foundations to clarify their roles in local communities and to build a new type of local leadership to best address community needs.

Typically, a non-governmental organization operates in a very specific area of a community (e.g. social issues, environment, etc.). Community foundations, on the other hand, see the community as the final beneficiary, as they work to help increase the quality of life, develop philanthropy, and support those who want to make a positive change, whether through health, education- or environment-related projects.

Each foundation mirrors the community to which it belongs. Therefore, each organization assumes its role according to the needs and wishes of the city. However, we all strive for the same ideal: to help residents to do good much easier and with greater impact.

We do this by:
- financing local initiatives
- motivating the community
- mobilizing local resources
- managing named and themed funds

What sets us apart

The value foundations bring to a community can be seen through two lenses. We strive to develop and strengthen the community by increasing the quality of life, as well as develop local philanthropy. We want to make people understand that a community has not only problems, but also resources, and certain local obstacles can be overcome with local resources. People take their destinies in their own hands and understand that they no longer have to wait for the solution to come from local or central authorities.

» *We believe that, regardless of how a city is managed, if it can be saved, it will be by the stubbornness of informal leaders who are involved in the community out of conviction, provided that they have access to resources and are encouraged not to give up.*

Alina Kasprovschi, Executive Director of the Bucharest Community Foundation

Community foundations have positioned themselves in the non-profit environment as pioneers of local grant-making and have demonstrated that they can play the role of social binder. A foundation brings together not only non-governmental organizations, but also donors, whether individuals or companies, as well as people who have an initiative but no organizational backing.

» *I chose to get involved in the community foundation, at first out of my need to be among people willing to change something, then realized that I wanted to be part of the Timișoara Community Foundation full-time, because it gives me confidence in people's potential, in their willingness to unite and contribute.*

Daniela Chesaru, Executive Director of Timișoara Community Foundation

Last but not least, foundations assume a leadership role in the community, bringing public attention to community needs and promoting partnerships and community problem-solving in a collaborative way.

LEGAL CONTEXT FOR FOUNDATIONS

In the Romanian legislation, there are no particular references to community foundations. However, there are legal and tax incentives for individuals and organized corporate philanthropy, which also benefit community foundations.

Initial capital and foundation setup

Romanian law allows for the development of community foundations within the general legal framework for associations and foundations (Government Emergency Ordinance 26/2000, with subsequent modifications).

Foundations need an initial capital to be set up legally. The value of this capital is 100 times the national minimum salary (which varies in time). However, there is an exception for foundations established with the exclusive purpose (under the penalty of dissolution by court decision) to raise funds for supporting other associations and foundations. These support foundations can be set up with an initial capital 20 times the value of the minimum gross salary.

» *In 2017, the value of the initial capital required for establishing a foundation varied with the value of the minimum gross salary, amounting to approx. EUR 40,816 (at an exchange rate of RON 4.655 RON/EUR).*

Most community foundations are registered as regular foundations, while the Odorheiu Secuiesc Community Foundation is registered under the provision of the above-mentioned exclusive purpose. This exclusive purpose is not properly defined in other parts of Romanian legislation, the only reference to it being made in the context of the initial capital.

The initial capital does not need to be set up as a permanent endowment and can be spent after registration for grants or other expenses of the foundation.

How foundations are governed

Foundations need to have at least one founder, a board of directors of at least three people, and an auditor/audit committee. Founders control is regulated by the bylaws, but changes in the foundation purpose can be made only by the founder or the majority of living founders, or, if none of the founders are alive, by an 80% majority of the board. While public utility organizations are required to undergo an annual external financial audit by a professional registered with the Chamber of Financial Auditors of Romania, other associations or foundations are only required to undergo an internal audit.

Foundations have no legal grant-making requirements

They can use all their assets to carry out programmes directly. The only exception are exclusive purpose foundations, as defined above, which should direct all their fundraising towards supporting other associations and foundations, but no other express requirements regarding administrative, operational or grant-making activities exist. The difference between associations and foundations pertains only to the initial capital (which is much higher for foundations) and to the internal structure (associations also have a general members' assembly).

Endowments

Foundations are allowed to use income from direct or indirect investments, and there are no provisions regulating foundation spending from one year to another. Therefore, the legal framework for accumulation of reserve funds or endowments is rather flexible and controlled by foundation boards, in agreement with the donors.

FISCAL CONTEXT

In Romania, the Sponsorship Law and the Tax Code create a legal framework whereby companies can get involved in the development of civil society, but since it is not widely used or popular enough, the true potential of donations that could be made has never been achieved.

The Association for Community Relations has conducted a survey (December 2015–February 2016) to see how aware companies are of the 20% tax incentive[1]. This incentive allows companies to direct up to 20% of their corporate tax towards organizations, but no more than 0.5% of their turnover, and this amount is thus deducted from the corporate tax the company would pay.

The survey shows that only 23% of the companies that made a profit in 2015 (34,811) used this incentive, which does not involve any cost to the taxpayer. The amount directed to NGOs that year was EUR 156,997,090, which represents a mere 42% of the full potential.

According to the National Agency for Fiscal Administration data, in 2016 there was a considerable increase, meaning that out of the 119,594 companies which pay corporate tax, one-third used the tax incentive, directing over EUR 270m to eligible organizations.

In terms of legislation, another obstacle to the development of the non-governmental environment is the lack of fiscal predictability. More than 250 articles of the Tax Code were amended in 2017 alone, through ten legal acts[2], and some of these measures have a direct impact on associations and foundations[3].

No general tax incentives for individual giving

As of 2004, taxpayers have been able to benefit from a type of tax assignation. This measure allows individual taxpayers to choose a non-profit organization as the recipient for 2% of the individual income taxes paid for that year, and the state directs this money to the chosen recipient. Community foundations, as all other non-profit organizations, may benefit from these incentives, but there are no special incentives for community foundations or foundations in general.

[1] 'How would the world look if all things were half done? How about a quarter?' – a 'HOSPICE Casa Speranței' initiative, in partnership with the Association for Community Relations and EY Romania. Bucharest, 2016

[2] According to the statements of the President of the National Council of Private Small and Medium Enterprises in Romania (CNIPMMR), Florin Jianu, in the article 'The Tax Code has undergone 261 changes this year alone', Romania Libera, 21.11.2017

[3] One of them refers to modifying the revenue threshold that defines micro-enterprises: it has been increased from EUR 500,000 to EUR 1,000,000. Micro-enterprises cannot use the 20% incentive, as they are subject to a different tax system, therefore, according to ARC, nearly 50,000 of the previously eligible companies have been affected, companies which had a sponsorship potential of nearly EUR 40m.

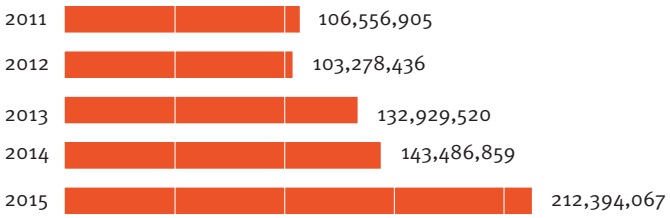
This 2% mechanism has proven to be a modest, yet reliable source of funds for many Romanian NGOs. Thanks to effective campaigns made by various organizations, the number of donations and organizations using this mechanism has increased. The 'NGO Leaders' Barometer' survey analyzed 650 answers from Romanian NGOs, and 65% of the respondent organizations said they had indeed received funds from this source.

Individuals registered as earning income from independent activities (usually professionals such as lawyers, accountants, consultants) can deduct sponsorships and private scholarships from their tax base, up to 5% of the total tax base.

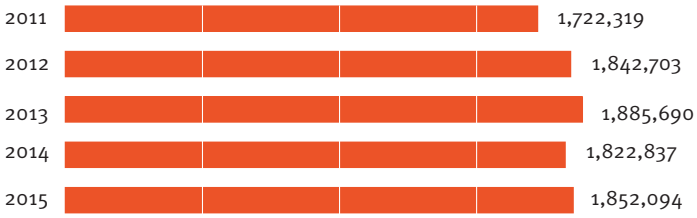
Taxation of foundations' income

There is a wide range of income sources that are tax exempt, including main income sources for NGOs: grants, sponsorship, donations, contributions from members and supporters, membership fees, interests and dividends from non-profit income, income from occasional non-profit fundraising, social and professional activities, as well as income from occasional economic activities (up to 10% of non-profit income, but no more than EUR 15,000 per year). Economic activities which exceed this threshold and any surplus they may generate are taxed accordingly. The current level of income tax is 10%.

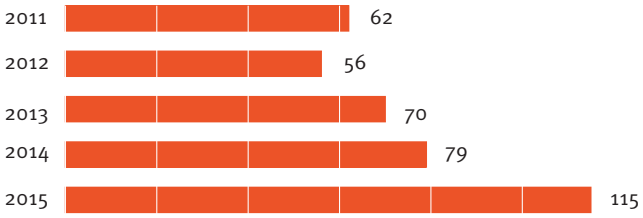
Amount of money redirected to NGOs (RON)



Number of taxpayers who redirected 2% of their tax returns



Evolution of the average donation amount (RON)



Number of NGO who received donations

TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS FOR BETTER COMMUNITIES

The Romanian community foundations movement would not have such an accelerated growth without the close ties with the international networks.

Like most countries, Romania has a solid tradition in philanthropy. Many of the local and national institutions were created in the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries with support from wealthy families who understood their responsibility to give back to their communities. The communist years broke that tradition, which after 1989 had to reinvent itself. The new philanthropy is more dynamic and participative, and offers the opportunity to contribute even to people with limited wealth but strong civic engagement.

Ten years into their existence, the community foundations in Romania have contributed to this new type of philanthropy – they proved to have a strong mobilization and innovation power, they created trust relationships between citizens for good causes and managed to support thousands of projects that have transformed local communities.

Together for a new philanthropic thinking

ARC was a pioneer in setting up community foundations in Romania, with inspiration from abroad and support from foreign partners. ARC is keeping its eyes open to developments in other countries, while community foundations test and adapt ideas and innovate at a local level. The national programme focuses on endorsing good practice from partners, organizing exchange programmes and workshops, and bringing in experts from different areas to help strengthen communities and local leadership.

The people in the movement strongly believe that having a space for sharing knowledge is one of the key factors in the success of growing communities in a philanthropic spirit. The Romanian community foundations movement would not have such an accelerated growth without the close ties with the international network on a regional, European and global level. After receiving expertise from abroad, Romanian community foundations are now at a point where they have enough experience worthy of being shared with other organizations in Europe and around the world, bringing their own contribution to the development of community philanthropy.

"ARC and Romanian CFs, especially the ones in Odorheiu Secuiesc and Cluj, had a critical role in the development of community foundations in Hungary. From day one, Hungarian CFs could not ask for better support. By hosting a study trip, sharing best practices and expressing solidarity was a priority of our friends in Romania, and we are doing our best to reciprocate it. The good relations between the community

foundations set a good example for other areas of Romanian-Hungarian cooperation", says Tamás Scsaurszki from the Roots and Wings Foundation.

An example of successful cooperation comes from the Odorheiu Secuiesc Community Foundation, which in 2016 received a research grant from the Global Fund for Community Foundations and the WK Kellogg Community Philanthropy Chair at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy to study the phenomenon of collective giving in Romania. The results were presented at the Global Summit on Community Philanthropy in 2016, held in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Between 6 and 8 September 2017, within the CFI CF2CF exchange programme, the Bucharest Community Foundation team visited the London Community Foundation. During the three days, the Bucharest CF team mixed office meetings with field trips. They had the opportunity to talk directly to donors and harvest information on good practices in the area of projects that engage the local community.

"This experience proves that, even though community foundations are in different development stages (20+ years for London, five years for Bucharest) and have different sizes (20+ staff and more than GBP 5m in annual grants in London, compared to six staff and GPB 350,000 in annual grants in Bucharest), by having the same desire and sharing their knowledge we can have a better impact of our actions and grow the philanthropic lifestyle in communities around the world", says Alina Kasprovschi, Executive Director of the Bucharest Community Foundation.

In the current context, in which democratic institutions are being put at risk, international meetings, where people create connections and exchange ideas, are now more important than ever. International meetings such as the ones in Johannesburg, Belfast Global Fund for Community Foundations Burning Issues Convening, 2017), Ottawa (Belong - Canadian Community Foundations Conference, 2017), Cardiff (European Conference of ECFI – Building Bridges for Local Good, and UK CF Conference – Leading for Local Good, 2017), Brussels (Contribution of Community Foundations in Changing Context, 2017) or Bucharest (Resilience and Dialogue Meeting, 2018) are examples of sharing space where foundations meet and put their knowledge together to find solutions for common or similar problems.

HOW TO STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITY'S RESILIENCE

"I'm afraid time is wasted. Every day I wonder if we can do more." This is one of the answers to the question 'What do we fear the most?', which kicked off the first resilience laboratory organized by ARC and ECFI in Bucharest. "My biggest fear is our own reaction to fear." The attendees' fears were the engine of the two-day workshop where we sought to find out how we can help our communities to cope with crises and change.

For community foundations, increasing resilience should go hand in hand with their own mission. Without a community strong enough to resist crises and adapt to social change, foundations cannot carry out their own mission. But how do you prepare a community, how do you help it grow, and where do you position yourself as an organization?

These are some of the questions around which the two-day workshop was built, an event attended by members of community foundations in Europe, in Romania, but also by other Romanian NGOs. This was the first joint effort of ARC and ECFI to find out the concept of resilience among European organizations and how mutual support can be built. The meeting was also attended by anthropologists and sociologists who came to share their community-related expertise.

Rucsandra Pop, Director of the community foundations programme within ARC, saw this workshop as a "first date with resilience" in which the participants succeeded in achieving their goal from the very beginning: to create a blueprint whereby organizations could assess and strengthen resilience in their community.

"Collecting stories as a starting point for examining resilience"

In this workshop, resilience was defined as "the capacity of the community to prevent, cope with and adapt to harsh situations." The first step in assessing this capacity is to understand the community. This can be achieved through various instruments as proposed by the participants: identifying social capital, mapping emotions at a community level, charting the function and trustworthiness of institutions, generating a sense of belonging, researching community memory, assessing physical strength & practical knowledge, etc.

The collected information was put on a map which also shows how resilience can be strengthened.

Strengthening resilience

A community foundation can become a key player in providing a platform for assessing and strengthening resilience. The foundation can help the community first to understand and get to know itself better and then to build a set of routines (such as simulations in the case of crises),

various experiments to test the reaction of the locals, and models to inspire confidence and courage.

Strengthening the resilience of a community depends on how the relationships within it are encouraged and developed, on constant and meaningful conversations, which everyone in the community can join. These two features – assessment and strengthening – are intertwined and in order to succeed, the foundation ultimately needs to know how to guide and manage emotions within the community.

For Laura Kelly – Assistant Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Bulgaria and the observer and chronicler of the two-day event – stories play a paramount role in both assessing and strengthening the community. Whether it's about parents who must get over the death of a child, or communities that protest against a form of injustice, stories "help us identify what we see as resilience, without resorting to abstract language."

"More concisely, in addition to an inventory of the present, we can also encourage the communities to inventory the past and harvest, tell and analyze stories of resilience and then use these stories as tools that will also serve to strenghten our communities", she added.

The method may sound empirical, but if we consider our mission, ultimately we're dealing with a living organism. Thus, this blueprint will go into 'beta testing' at participating organizations. Until the next meeting, set to take place in autumn 2018, they will try to apply this model and tune it according to the needs and profile of their community.

BEST-PRACTICE EXAMPLES

HOW A SMALL COMMUNITY FIGHTS EMIGRATION

Through their work, foundations want to help locals turn their community into a better 'home'. But how can you grow a community when its members leave? Romania is one of the EU states most affected by the phenomenon of migration, but the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation may have found a remedy.

Romania continues to be an emigration country, as announced in 2017 by the National Institute of Statistics. In the last ten years, the country's population has decreased by almost 1.5 million, the main causes being negative natural increase and rising emigration. Most Romanians leaving the country come from rural or disadvantaged areas, and for Țara Făgărașului this depopulation has overlapped with a period of economic stagnation.

At the 2011 census, Făgăraș had nearly 30,000 inhabitants, a decrease by more than 6,000 since the last count in 2002. The causes of the decline are the same at the national level, but for a city with 40% of the population employed in the industrial sector, the closure of factories after 1990 has had a much greater impact.

The people who founded the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation have realized that one of the biggest challenges for them will be to strengthen the community spirit and revitalize the areas where no investments have been made in a long time. In addition, the town of Făgăraș is only a half-hour drive from Brașov, one of the largest cities in the country, and most young people prefer to settle there.

The Foundation understood that the wealth of the area lies not only in industry, but in the cultural and social heritage it has gained over the years. The Community Foundation realized that the pride of the locals could be the engine that drives the strengthening and bonding of the community. This pride, which does not 'vanish' when one leaves town, is taken along by the many locals who settle abroad but leave their hearts in the fortress of Făgăraș.

» *A few years ago, I interviewed 30 Romanians in Toronto: most of them would like to get involved in community causes, maybe even remotely or online, if they had more time and if someone could offer them the opportunity. These are exactly the kind of bridges that the Țara Făgărașului e Acasă project is trying to build.*

Laura Vișan, Professor of Communication at the University of Toronto, Scarborough, volunteer of the Țara Făgărașului Community Foundation

The diaspora engagement plan

Many of the first-generation emigrants from the Făgăraș region maintain strong ties with their family and friends back home and often wish to contribute to the life of their dear ones, particularly their children or retired parents. The Community Foundation aims to explore and identify more ways in which the diaspora can play a bigger part in local communities through their giving and involvement, and has been working on a roadmap for diaspora engagement called 'Țara Făgărașului este acasă' (Țara Făgărașului is home).

Phase one: Identify the homesick

In the first phase, the CF wants to identify and connect with the Făgăraș diaspora for social, educational, cultural, and financial remittances. This will be done through rigorous consultation and research, and the foundation already has a strong database of Romanians born in Făgăraș who currently live abroad. This data collection process started in 2016, with the first edition of our Volunteering and Civic Initiatives Days, when the first diaspora meeting took place in Făgăraș. It is worth mentioning that local authorities participated and expressed a keen interest in the project.

This resource mapping process helped the community foundation organize the first Donor Circle with participation from the Romanian diaspora, in August 2017.

Phase two: Know your diaspora

In the second phase, the CF wants to get to know the Țara Făgărașului diaspora in order to gain a better understanding of the needs, challenges and hopes of the Romanian diaspora. Existing data indicates that more than half of the recent Romanian migrants would like to start a business in Romania. Thus, the projects of the Țara Făgărașului CF could offer them the opportunity to use the entrepreneurial spirit that they have acquired abroad. The team has already created a dedicated website for the diaspora (http://tarafagarasuluieacasa.fundatiactf.ro/), which features storytelling, articles about the diaspora, ways of helping the community from abroad, and various other mechanisms that will engage its visitors and locals. Moreover, with the help of a diaspora volunteer team, they will organize special activities and invite Romanians from abroad to participate in charitable events.

Phase three: Build trust

Based on the idea that genuine trust can usually be gained through good communication and mutual positive experiences, and that all parties must feel that they derive value from the relationship, the Community Foundation has forecast various ways of practical engagement for the Țara Făgărașului diaspora.

For example, the Foundation plans to organize knowledge transfer activities (mentoring, networking, and matching) and time investment through planning sessions and workshops with the diaspora. A good practice example comes from the Partner2Gether programme, where a community in Israel is paired with a Jewish community from around the world. They share experiences, stories, culture and history, and take part in camps or volunteering programmes (charitable programmes and events for all ages).

Phase four: Mobilize stakeholders

This will happen in two steps. First, two teams of people living in Țara Făgărașului and the diaspora will work on various diaspora engagement instruments. The second step towards developing strong capacity building in the Țara Făgărașului community will be the implementation of previous ideas emerged from the design development process.

A possible engagement instrument could be a constant/recurrent giving mechanism that would facilitate a strong commitment to the foundation's activity and programmes, as well as other initiatives in the area. For example, the foundation plans to create a named fund – 'Țara Făgărașului e Acasă' – where Romanians from abroad can donate for various community causes reported by them.

Phase five: Effective engagement

The Foundation expects this model of engagement to develop into a (replicable) pilot model of diaspora engagement, with an effective mechanism, strong replication potential and long-term commitment.

Although this project is dedicated to the Făgăraș diaspora and its locals, the team believes there is a lot of inspiration here which can be applied, to a certain degree, to other local communities with an active community foundation. The 'Țara Făgărașului e Acasă' project was created with the support of partner foundations and sponsors such as VIA Foundation Praga, the Global Fund for Community Foundations, the Romanian-American Foundation, the Association for Community Relations, MKBT and the Făgăraș Research Institute.

HOW BUCHAREST SUCCEEDED TO INSPIRE EXCELLENCE IN THE COMMUNITY

What would it take to turn a company's values into a community vision? In 2015, Porsche Romania took the first steps to answer this question and launched, together with the Bucharest Community Foundation, the Mobilize Excellence Fund.

Developed by the Bucharest Community Foundation, the fund has stemmed from the company's values – excellence in innovation and design – and the premise that excellence is not an elite privilege, but is rooted in the DNA of every community. Good ideas and the desire to change and improve can be easily lost when disregarded, that's why this fund aims at supporting and helping them grow.

The fund, launched in 2015, was the company's first social responsibility strategy in Romania. Moreover, it was created as a form of long-term investment in the community, with the funds being directed in three main areas: Urban Design, Urban Education and Education Scholarships.

Fourteen ideas for reviving the city

The communist era architectural heritage still dominates Bucharest, and the effects of transition can be seen in the state of the buildings: from almost abandoned factories and residential buildings built after Soviet blueprints, to a glass and steel amalgam and mixture of incoherent styles. With projects financed through Urban Design, the fund has proposed to support those projects which redesign urban spaces, urban furniture or even buildings, bringing them back to life and making them more user-friendly for the members of the community.

In the first year of the programme, the total budget for investment in the community amounted to RON 396,000[1], while in the second edition the budget reached RON 514,500. These funds were used for 14 projects and 31 scholarships.

"For the community, the fund was a great deal. Mainly because no moneys were ever given for urban design and urban regeneration, and it was like a breath of fresh air for many projects", says Alina Kasprovschi, Executive Director of the Bucharest Community Foundation. At the same time, this fund has helped many groups that have not received any funding before, and which have grown because of the trust that Porsche Romania and Bucharest CF have shown.

[1] The exchange rate in 2015: EUR 1 = RON 4.445

Supporting ambitious ideas

"We couldn't offer them all the money they needed, but the fact that we helped them then, motivated them to attract more funding", Alina continues. Thus, the Văcăreşti Natural Park Association managed to build its first visitor footpath of almost 2.5 kilometres, and 12 young people took the first steps in converting the hall of the Cotton Industry Complex in Bucharest, to 'Grassroots' – a space for meetings, public debates and civic initiatives dedicated to the Timpuri Noi neighbourhood micro-community.

The Materials Library was another project which received financing from this fund. Developed by the Nod Makerspace Association, it is the first library of materials in Romania. Spread over an area of 1,000 square metres, MATER – as Nod Makerspace has called it – is dedicated to those who work with materials, from designers and architects to inventors, engineers and artists, but also teachers or students. Currently, it has over 3,000 samples and is located in the same industrial building as 'Grassroots'.

Under the same vision of long-term development, the Mobilize Excellence fund has supported children and young adults aged 10 to 20 years to improve and develop their talents. They chose this age group because "this is the age when talent has had time to be proven and the performance and determination to pursue a career in the field is already noticeable", as the Bucharest Community Foundation announced at the launch of the Excellency Scholarships. In its two editions, 31 scholarships were offered, and now, through a limited form of the Mobilize Excellence fund, other young people are being offered support.

Education for the future

As far as education is concerned, the fund wanted to answer the question 'How do we inspire change around us?' and supported the 'Playing architect at my school' project developed by the 'De-a arhitectura' Association. The Association had already devised an optional course called 'Architecture and Built Environment Education', which entered the curriculum in several schools in Bucharest, and the fund offered the Association the support needed to put its vision into practice.

Thus, in the schools of Bucharest where the course was taught, students had the opportunity to improve or re-design their school premises, turning ideas into reality under the guidance of an architect. In addition to putting students' creativity to the test, the programme showed them what it means, in fact, to think about the good of your community and what you can do to help.

> *This is the fund that has positioned us, at that moment, as a visionary backer.*
>
> Alina Kasprovschi, Executive Director of the Bucharest Community Foundation

FOR THE LOVE OF SCIENCE

Fondul Ştiinţescu (the Science Fund) offers students innovative and practical alternatives to discover the beauty and practicality of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics)

"I have always wanted to offer students ways to become fulfilled and happy people" says Petronela Petrea, a teacher of mathematics in Valea Lupului, Iași County. Although the commune is only a few kilometres away from Iași, the biggest city in the north-east region of Romania, the schools there don't have anywhere near the facilities of schools in the big city. Mrs. Petrea's desire to make the same resources available to her students have led to her creating the ROBOTICON club – funded through the Ştiinţescu Fund in Iași. "The fund came as a solution for motivating children", said Mrs. Petrea.

Through Roboticon, 24 students have learned how to design a smart city with Arduino plates and, at the end of the programme, over 220 students had learned that science is more than theorems and equations. This is also the mission of the Ştiinţescu Fund, launched for the first time in late 2014: to provide students with innovative and practical alternatives to learn the benefits of STEAM education.

"Fieldwork was very useful, since we had the tremendous opportunity to do practical things and be left with a memorable experience. Practice, in my opinion, helped us a lot, because it broke the chains of theory. It felt as if the heavens had opened before us", says Alexandru, 14, who participated in a project investigating the ecosystem of a river in Oradea.

An educational alternative

The Fund is developed in partnership with the community foundations and the Romanian-American Foundation (RAF), in collaboration with the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations, and by 2017, 11 community foundations have organized at least one edition of the Ştiinţescu Fund.

In these years, Ştiinţescu managed to give meaning to the equations in the textbooks and to fill an important gap in the public education system. Teachers can fulfil their true mission, as a teacher from Oradea admits, while students become more fond of science.

> *I feel so satisfied when I see the exalted looks in the eyes of 7th graders: 'Finally we're doing something practical, we see something moving, beeping or listening and executing our commands.'*
>
> Istvan Nagy, computer science teacher

But the programme has yet another mission, to raise funds for projects, by which Ştiinţescu wants to stimulate individual philanthropy and create a community of local supporters dedicated to education.

In Iași, for example, the grants offered to the community for the 2016–2017 edition amounted to a total of RON 117,501, which was used to finance 13 projects out of the 59 submitted. More to the west, in Oradea, the first edition of the Fund raised over RON 112,000, directly benefiting 1,795 students. These projects could not have been accomplished without the involvement and passion of the volunteers

in Iași and Oradea, who donated a total of over 14,000 hours.

Moreover, Sibiu and Brașov managed to turn the passion of the community generated by this fund into a permanent platform: Științescu Hub. The community foundations in the two cities have created a permanent space where students can participate in numerous informal workshops in the STEAM range, while teachers and parents can get involved in developing new courses.

How it works

At the end of 2014, a pilot project in four cities (Bucharest, Cluj, Iași and Sibiu) was carried out with the support of RAF, in order to test the premise that community foundations can be the right 'middleman' to help develop a local grant programme for small STEAM education projects. Since January 2016, the programme has expanded nationwide, being open to all 16 community foundations.

Each Științescu fund is developed by the community foundation together with local partners, and grants are awarded to teachers, non-governmental organizations, initiative groups, individuals and students who present an innovative science education project. Funding is primarily focused on projects aimed at increasing the interest of students in science and their active involvement.

Community foundations mobilize local financial resources from individual donors or companies, while the RAF grant doubles the amount raised by the community. Currently, the Științescu Fund is implemented through the local community foundations in Bucharest, Sibiu, Iași, Cluj-Napoca, Oradea, Târgu-Mureș, Bacău, Galați, Prahova, Odorheiul Secuiesc, Brașov, Timișoara and Țara Făgărașului.

'CLACA' BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER AGAIN

In Odorheiu Secuiesc, the old village custom of the 'claca', where villagers gathered and worked together, came back to life in a way which benefits the community.

'Claca' – work performed for mutual help – lies at the core of community life. Organized on feast days, during crop harvest season, the building of a house or wool spinning days, the 'claca' defined the life of a village and strengthened the feeling of belonging to a community. In 2008, the Odorheiu Secuiesc Community Foundation decided to bring this custom back to life and give local people a common goal.

The first edition of Claca Urbană or 'Városi Kaláka', as the locals call it, took place in 2008, when more than 120 local volunteers, with the help of a local newspaper and the Town Hall, renovated the playgrounds in four neighbourhoods. The project quickly took root in the community and continued to grow each year. In 2011, residents renovated the only area where sports could be played without paying a fee. The project was valued at over RON 60,000 and was accomplished by 80 volunteers, of whom the youngest volunteer was 3 years old and the oldest 74.

In 2013–2014, the funds raised for the Claca helped build a dog park, with 25 volunteers working to complete the project, and one year later they built a fairy-tale house in the city's central playground.

One of the biggest projects of Claca Urbană, 'Child-friendly Hospital', was implemented between 2015 and 2016. The Foundation has set out to transform the children's hospital unit into a more welcoming environment because "the healing process is much quicker in a friendly environment", as the project coordinator argued. In 2017, a group of young volunteers participated in creating a more colourful city.

Through Claca Urbană, the community foundation revived a tradition. The community had a chance to discover the true value of working together, while backers and volunteers found out that real change rest on their own involvement.

SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS

Education remains one of the fields in which community foundations are investing the most, and scholarships are one of the methods whereby they want to help students. Half of the foundations have created scholarship funds to support students with outstanding performances, coming from vulnerable backgrounds.

Without proper support, students may drop out of school, a phenomenon which is increasing alarmingly in Romania. Among students from disadvantaged families we see young people who are capable of performing, but who are in need of support in order to succeed. This is how Oradea Community Foundation advocates the scholarship fund, through which they have already awarded 14 scholarships during the first edition (2016–17), each amounting to RON 1,150.

The same goes for the other community foundations which created the Scholarship Fund with the help of local donors and philanthropists. In Galați, for example, with the support of local companies, the community foundation offered two excellence scholarships and nine support scholarships. In addition to financial support, the Foundation also facilitates mentorship, in which recipients and donors have constant meetings aimed at improving development, but also at identifying their needs and expectations, thus forming a community within the Fund.

"I have come so far with the help of the Galați Community Foundation, and I am convinced that I will go to college with your help. I hope that later in life I can become one of the donors for other children in need", says Ionuț-Daniel Moise, one of the scholarship recipients.

A mentoring programme within the Scholarship Fund also exists in Iași. In 2012, a group of people from Iași joined forces and offered support scholarships to five children with financial difficulties. The number of scholarships increased each year: in 2015, for instance, more than 80 young people filed their applications, putting their faith in people who do not

practice mercy but generosity. Anyone who wants to support a student can become a donor or mentor for the teenager they resonate with. In addition, recipients benefit from counselling and personal development sessions with a therapist.

In Cluj, the scholarship fund was created from the philanthropic need of a man who believes in the power of education to change lives. Fred C. Robey began working with the Cluj Community Foundation in 2008, when he supported the first two scholarship recipients to realize their dream of studying abroad. The fund has grown over the years, its purpose being extended to support motivated students who face financial difficulties in continuing their studies.

Performance scholarships are the way in which the Bacău Community Foundation conveys a message to the community: we need excellence in everything we do, and student performance must be stimulated. With the help of the company Pambac, scholarships go to young people with great results in science, humanities and social sciences, technical & applied sciences, sports, visual arts and music.

THE DONOR CIRCLE

This is not just a story about donations and generosity. It's a story about people and organizations who manage to earn the trust of others and inspire them to get involved in helping their community.

Every person or organization passionate about an idea, no matter how ambitious it may be, has the wonderful ability to draw others into their circle and attract all the resources needed to accomplish it. This is precisely the purpose of the Donor Circle and it's being successfully fulfilled by all 12 community foundations that have organized at least one such circle, as well as the foundations and partner organizations that have implemented this fundraising model – because the Donor Circle is a dynamic and friendly fundraising method, whereby NGOs or initiative groups advocate their projects to an audience made of people who want to generate change in their community.

Thus, donors have the chance to take the initiative in the philanthropic process and see how fast wisely donated money can change lives – not just for a day, but also in the long run, if not forever.

First Donor Circle

In 2012, Mădălina Marcu, one of the philanthropic counselors of the Association for Community Relations (ARC), went to London to see how people meet to donate together. The Funding Network (TFN) had previously organized more than 1,000 events and raised over GBP 7 million for local causes, chosen by members of Donor Circles. Mădălina spoke to the founders of the network, participated in several events and asked herself whether Romanian donors could come together and initiate a donation instead of waiting to be asked. Would they be able to build such trust?

She would soon find out, as the first Donor Circle was set up in the spring of 2013, in Bucharest. Ten people have agreed to talk about what makes them happy or sad, about the reasons why they donate money and to which cause, and have decided to start the first Donor Circle. They got their friends on board to support the poor communities in the southern part of Romania, and this wonderful group of 60 managed to raise a total of USD 10,000 between them.

> *The Iași Donor Circle encouraged us by giving us the boost of energy that we needed in order to overcome ourselves. We are deeply grateful to those who have shown us trust.*
>
> Theodora Arva, Street Delivery Iași

How it works

Since then, the circles have expanded, operating in each city after the same model: the event features three projects, each promoted by an ambassador. Each ambassador presents their project in 6 minutes, followed by a 6 minute Q&A session. No one is required to donate, but if they want to, it's easy: all they have to do is raise their hand and donate a sum.

The donor network grows organically through those who have taken part in a circle at one point. They promote the circle among their contacts and select in a transparent manner the projects with the greatest potential to bring communities together around a shared interest. Circle members start looking for partners and sponsors. Some may offer a venue, others may provide snacks and beverages. Each project becomes dear to a member of the circle, who then becomes a Project Ambassador.

On the evening of the event, representatives of initiative groups, projects, or organizations step forward and talk about their projects. Ambassadors also take the floor to advocate their cause and make the first donation to get things rolling. Then the auctions begin. Someone announces, for example, that they would offer RON 500[1] if five other people donate RON 100 each. After the event, each project will thus receive an implementation dowry, and each donor will get regular updates of the project they decided to support. Every step of the project is communicated to the stakeholders, transparency being the core value of Donor Circles.

All of this makes Donor Circles some of the friendliest and most successful fundraising events. No wonder such circles exist in so many cities: Ploiești, Cluj, Iași, Brașov, Mureș, Galați, Sibiu, Țara Făgărașului, Covasna, Alba, Timișoara and Dâmbovița.

[1] The exchange rate in 2018: EUR 1 = RON 4.6528

SPORT FOR THE COMMUNITY

Sport has become the way in which thousands of people bring positive change to their communities. Fundraising sporting events managed to support local causes with $1,345,333 from 2009 to 2016.

Between the first edition of the swimathon, organized in 2009 in Cluj-Napoca and 2017, 14 community foundations brought people together, at least once, to do sports for the causes they believe in, to cross the finish line knowing that by their achievement they had not only exceeded their own limits, but also helped those who cannot. Whether they are called swimathon, bikeathon or (semi-)marathon, fundraising sporting events bind communities together and give people the opportunity to be part of the change they desire.

Regardless of which sport it is, these events follow the same mechanism in all community foundations. Organizations and initiative groups enroll the projects or causes in the competition, companies and fundraisers choose their cause, and eventually, on the day of the event, supporters donate for their favorites.

> *It's a moment when energy, financial power and civic education are being invested. People understood the importance of the community, of social initiatives, of solutions found together.*
>
> Mihai Căprioară, Executive Director of Bacău Community Foundation

Swimathon

'Things start moving. When you make waves' is the main idea that foundations want to pass on to their respective community. People can generate change in their communities as long as they join forces. As the Bacău Community Foundation team says, "imagine what it would be like if you were a drop of water. Perhaps you'd find it hard to believe that you alone can make waves. Now imagine all your friends as drops of water in the same ocean. Isn't it much easier to make waves now?"

Five Swimathon editions were organized in Bacău up until 2017, and each year brought an increasing number of participants, donors and volunteers. In Iași, the six editions organized so far have helped finance over 120 projects with local impact and mobilized a total of over 6,000 people. At the Swimathon 2016, the community in Iași mobilized around 29 cases, and together they contributed RON 188,053.20 to community development.

Running

In 2017, six running events were organized by six community foundations from: Bacău, Galați, Iași, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Sibiu and Timișoara. In 2017, the Bacău semi-marathon brought to the starting line more than 700 people who ran for projects supporting the development of local education.

Already a tradition for the local community, the semi-marathon on the streets of Sibiu is the largest philanthropic sporting event in Romania, and in 2017 the 21-km race turned into a marathon. Approximately 3,300 runners, including 100 marathon heroes, participated in the sixth edition of the event, which took place on 27 May 2017. They were supported by nearly 4,000 donors and together managed to raise approx. RON 475,000[1] for the 21 causes of the Sibiu community.

The event organized by the Braşov Community Foundation is called Braşov Heroes and consists of a show race where local people can register regardless of age. The event is so diverse that even a puppy participated in the family race. Over the years, in the three editions organized until 2017, programmes for children with autism, free architecture classes, counseling for young people coming from foster care centres, stray dog sterilization campaigns, and many more have been funded.

> *Together and in large numbers we can fulfill wishes, turn ideas into reality, or contribute to the accomplishment of projects beneficial to our city.*
>
> Gál Sándor, President of the Mureş Community Foundation

Bikeathon

In Făgăraș, the obstacle course gives way to a trail, and the participants ride their bikes. We are, of course, talking about the Bikeathon, the sporting event that managed to gather in its three editions over 1,800 cyclists to pedal for 52 local projects.

The community foundations in Mureș and Covasna also succeeded in mobilizing local forces by organizing cycling events. The Covasna Community Foundation organized the first race in 2012, followed by seven subsequent editions. In Mureș, fundraising races bear the same name – 'Pedal for a good cause!' – and the 2017 edition managed to raise the funds needed to equip kindergartens in Târgu-Mureș with pedal-less bicycles.

[1] The exchange rate in 2017: EUR 1 = RON 4.5681

THE JOY OF LIVING TOGETHER, A TWO-STEP STORY

Through the Mega Image Community Fund, the Bucharest Community Foundation supports people who want to transform the area where they live into a tightly knit community. Launched in 2013, the fund is noted for its confidence in initiative groups and the way it has penetrated micro-communities.

The power of a fund does not come from the sums of money that are at stake, but from the vision which helped build it in the first place and the energy that is released in the community. Mega Image Community Fund is one of the best examples in this respect.

Step I: Gathering the neighbours together

The story of this fund originates in Belgium, the home country of the Mega Image supermarket chain. Delhaize, the parent company, has backed a project through which members of Belgian communities got to know each other better and come together on the pretext of a street dinner party or fair. The rationale was that progress in the community will be much faster once people get to know their neighbours and see that they have the same interests and share the same vision.

The idea worked and so, in 2013 the company began to support micro-communities in Bucharest to become stronger and more active.

In short, this named fund provides micro-grants to associations and initiative groups that reactivate the community spirit through projects in specific areas. For example, at the fourth edition, held in 2016, the Foundation and the jury supported mainly projects which came with efficient solutions for food distribution to vulnerable groups, reducing food waste, recycling, as well as projects dedicated to actual geographic communities (blocks, streets, neighbourhoods).

In the four editions so far, 24 projects have been financed with RON 255,000. The maximum amount a project can receive is EUR 4,000.

> *What this fund does is give you the opportunity to talk to your neighbours in a relaxed setting, not just when someone erects a building next door or in a time of crisis. Not because it's a must, but because it's cool. What we expect from this project is that people, once they've met, retain at least part of the energy that brought them there in the first place.*
>
> Alina Kasprovschi, Executive Director of the Bucharest Community Foundation

Step II: Supporting grassroots initiatives

"I think it's great that Mega Image accepted the idea of working with initiative groups – especially in 2013 – so we were able to take a closer look at grassroots projects", says Alina Kasprovschi, Executive Director

of the Bucharest Community Foundation. In Romania, initiative groups do not have a legal personality. They can be made up of at least three people and do not go through the same bureaucratic procedures as non-governmental associations.

The advantage is that people can quickly mobilize to create a group to represent their interests, and an initiative group behaves like a living organism that readapts and can bring innovation. But in order for these groups to become important non-governmental players, companies and backers need to give them enough confidence; then again, many prefer to direct their budgets to large organizations with a legal personality that could ultimately be held accountable.

This confidence in grassroots initiatives is seen in the variety of projects that were funded until 2017. "We had many atypical projects", explains Alina Kasprovschi. "For example, at the first edition we financed HomeFest, the apartment theatre festival, where people invited neighbours from their building to see a play." This fund was essential for HomeFest, as the organizers submitted their application from their very first edition, when they made the transition from a few shows in a small number of homes to a festival.

Another project supported by this fund was that of the Motivation Romania Foundation, which aimed to integrate young people with disabilities into the local Bragadiru community. For example, with RON 17,000 in financing, these young people planted vegetables in a greenhouse and on the local school grounds, along with 50 students at that school.

One of the emblem projects remains 'The Neighbourhood Games', organized by the CORPOREANIMA Association in Costeasca, a neighbourhood in Bucharest. This is the only neighbourhood sporting event in Romania, which saw its first edition in 2011. Through the Fund, they have already received sponsorship three times. "The great thing about these games is that they're not just a sporting event, but one which involves many people in the neighbourhood in organizing and volunteering activities. Here, the little good neighbourhood thing comes naturally", says Alina Kasprovschi.

FONDUL MEGA IMAGE PENTRU COMUNITATE

URLs

ALBA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
https://fundatiicomunitare.ro/fundatii/fundatia-comunitara-alba/

BACĂU COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://fundatiacomunitarabacau.ro/

BRAȘOV COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
https://fundatiacomunitarabrasov.ro/

BUCUREȘTI COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://fundatiacomunitarabucuresti.ro/

CLUJ COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
https://www.fundatiacomunitaracluj.ro/

COVASNA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://www.hka.ro/

DÂMBOVIȚA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://fundatiacomunitaradambovita.ro/

GALAȚI COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
https://fundatiacomunitaragalati.ro/

IAȘI COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://www.fundatiacomunitaraiasi.ro/

MUREȘ COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://www.fcmures.org/

ODORHEIU SECUIESC COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
https://szka.org/

ORADEA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://www.fundatiacomunitaraoradea.ro/

PRAHOVA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://www.fundatiacomunitaraprahova.ro/

SIBIU COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://fundatiacomunitarasibiu.ro/

ȚARA FĂGĂRAȘULUI COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://fundatiactf.ro/

TIMIȘOARA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
http://fundatiacomunitaratimisoara.ro/ro/

ABOUT ECFI – EUROPEAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS INITIATIVE

The European Community Foundation Initiative (ECFI) is a collaborative initiative committed to strengthening and promoting the community foundation movement in Europe.

ECFI is hosted by the German Association of Foundations (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen) and is run in partnership with the Centre for Philanthropy (Centrum pre filantropiu) in Slovakia. ECFI works with community foundations (CFs) and community foundation support organizations (CFSOs) primarily through facilitating and stimulating interactions to enable learning, knowledge-building and empowerment. ECFI is also engaged in the mapping and analysis of CF activities and in disseminating information that will facilitate development of the field. ECFI strives to be a central point of contact for wider engagement within the global community foundation movement.

ECFI'S THEORY OF CHANGE

ECFI believes that creating spaces and opportunities for cross-national dialogues, relationship-building and sharing experiences and practices of community foundations and other philanthropy practitioners (on a variety of themes of global and cross-national importance) at various levels will impact the capacity, capability, connections and credibility within the community foundation movement. Specifically ECFI will:

- facilitate individual and organizational learning and expertise;
- inspire individuals and organizations to leadership and joint action;
- produce practice-based knowledge;
- empower CFs in dealing with difficult issues in their communities and own development trajectories;
- grow mutual solidarity and strengthen the CF field overall;
- complement face-to-face interactions with virtual spaces and online tools and resources.

ECFI'S STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- Facilitating interaction and learning, sharing new knowledge and fostering collaboration among CFSOs in Europe to strengthen the support infrastructure
- Inspiring and facilitating growth in the CF field in Europe
- Stimulating CFs in Europe to exercise their community leadership role and collaborate on pressing issues, including inequality, migration and climate change
- Building and sharing knowledge about the CF field in Europe
- Leveraging financial resources and other support for the development of the CF field in Europe

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