Galati Community Foundation - a journey from responsive to strategic grantmaking and back

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Foreword

I joined the Galati Community Foundation in the summer of 2018 and found an immense challenge in the mission and role of such a non-profit, so different and versatile than any other NGO I've worked in or met.

Ever since signing on to my community foundation's mission I've heard talks and plans around the theme of **sustainability.** It is the main struggle of any NGO, and it takes a variety of factors to contribute, from the geo-political context, the social and cultural context, to the Board members and human resources in the executive team, fundraising and grantmaking strategies and so on. **Grantmaking** is a a core identity of a community foundation and is essential for ours as well. Although we have similar instruments and funds, there's a lot of diversity and mixture of strategies when grantmaking is concerned for every community foundation (CF).

In our case, a young community foundation, seasoned with some tough challenges in the past 6 years, we've mostly followed the guidelines of our support organisations and reacted to opportunities at hand. It's always felt like we are in a race to catch the proverbial carrot, while making a run for our lives. The "carrot" is our drive to make our hometown feel more like a place to be, not just some place you come from. To serve our mission, it was paramount to develop and prioritise **strategic directions** that would guide our operational plans. And even with a well-documented 60-pages strategic plan for the next 7 years, it is the process itself of **strategic thinking** that matters more that the plan. So, if you are one of those organisations that has reached the end of the year and found that it's been a busy year, with very few moments to assess or evaluate *why or how does your work impact your communities, how does it contribute* to the *strategic objectives* you've set or even if they *are still valid for your communities,* I would recommend it's time to pause and make time to ask these questions and begin a process of finding answers.

This is the story of my organisation's journey in answering these questions and facing the dilemma of responsive to strategic grantmaking and what works best for us.

Irina Șerban-Atanasiu, January 2022

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Building a strategic plan and directions

In early 2018 Galati Community Foundation found itself in a very vulnerable position, with the executive director and most of the executive team dismantled and with poor financial resources. The Board members stepped in to steer the foundation to shore, took executive roles in managing the programmes, did the administrative work and recruited new staff. The Romanian American Foundation (RAF) and the The Association for Community Relations (ARC) played an important role offering guidance and support for the Board through the rough times.

The Board members' role[1] is to steward the philanthropic resources of the foundation to its best use and it plays a critical role in directing the strategic directions of foundations. RAF gave our foundation the opportunity and the framework to build a strategic plan for the next 7 years through a grant that supports the capacity building of CFs on a long-term engagement. Thus, the Board invited me as a consultant to lead the process of strategic planning and hired an executive team to build the operational plan along it. With a new director, communications coordinator, and myself as a consultant in strategic planning and later as a grant manager, we shared multiple working sessions with the Board, interviews with founding members and consultations with strategic planning experts and managed to design the strategic plan for the next 7 years, built around the re-established mission and vision of Galati Community Foundation. By the end of the 2018, Galati CF had 3 employees and an operational plan to achieve the strategic objectives.

Our mission is to support the transformation of the local communities through mobilizing and engaging the human and local resources towards making our city a place to call "home".

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[1] https://putnam-consulting.com/resources/articles/leadership-and-governance/10-essential-roles-of-foundation-board-members/

The strategic directions are **building trust** in our communities and the city, **leadership in education**, **organizational and philanthropic development.**

The first direction speaks more to the distrust youth and mature citizens feel towards the city that is described as a former industrial, grey city, where nothing ever happens, it's politized and plain boring. We want to bring life to the city, make it cleaner and friendlier, with more opportunities for the youth, to build capacity for the non-profits to tackle grass-root problems.

We are lucky to host two big Universities and more opportunities have come up concerning informal education. There's still a huge gap between access to these resources for disadvantaged kids in the rural or marginalized areas and the middle to upper class families that can offer their children alternative education or a road to excellence. We plan on closing the gap through our versatile programme, Știinţescu, that bridges the industrial donor companies with the passionate initiators and children that want to experiment and learn STEM subjects through do-it-yourself projects from all STEM related subjects. We've also addressed the issue of school abandonment and mentoring through our scholarship programme and intergenerational mentoring programmes for the disadvantaged kids.

Everything leads back to us stewarding philanthropy, an issue that is still underdeveloped in Galati, donors and organizations are novice in transparency, steering funds to the community's needs. We are working on our glass pockets and a strategic communication inside and out, building capacity is paramount for us, our Board members, and our community.

We are also working on including our preoccupation for keeping Galati green and our Danube River clean into our strategic directions, a field we've been testing through our past two years programmes.

The pandemic context, new team, new challenges

2020 was a tough year for all NGOs and in terms of strategy, I believe we aligned ourselves with the CFs that decided to act swiftly in aiding the health system deal with the crisis. In the period of March 2020 – August 2020 we opened lines of communication with the Public Health Department and the Prefect to aid the emergency monitoring centre for quarantine of isolated persons that were infected with COVID-19, an activity that was managed by a local NGO that we helped with goods and funds. We also partnered with another local NGO in the health area to reach the Infectious Diseases Hospital, the primary COVID-19 response unit, our first beneficiary in the "Galati - marked safe" emergency fund. By end of the summer, we managed to raise $132,604 from companies and individual donors. With these funds we acquired and donated medical equipment and supplies for 8 hospitals and 2 emergency units. Also, through Bucharest Community Foundation we accessed ING

Home Bank Fund and granted 5 associations with a total of $19,473 for their emergent needs.

We started 2020 with a new director and communication coordinator and the plan was to engage more with our community and our donors and to steward philanthropy, which was derailed into a fully operational campaign for our COVID-19 Emergency Fund. This brought two of our team members to burn-out and our team in a more distant place, whereas it should have been the year to bond and work as an effective team. Our board members were less involved than usual, which was also understandable as entrepreneurs stand and care for their businesses or activity during troubled times. As we look back to this year, we have mixed feelings: were we too responsive? If we consider the results and impact, we'd have to say no, we stepped in and adjusted. As Kris Putnam-Walkerly observed looking back on 2020: *"Crisis has made it abundantly apparent that we can't afford to spend a year on strategic planning because by the time you've created your plan, the world will have changed."* She stressed on the importance of building a strategy as well as acknowledging that any time the context might change and changes and immediate reaction should be planned, as well.[2]

So here we were, at the end of 2020, with some big questions to answer: firstly, **how can we learn from our responsive stance and be more strategic**, even when crisis hits? If not for RAF and ARC, our national partners, we would have closed our doors during the pandemic since no operational costs were imbursed in our campaign. All our efforts were steered into the emergency Covid-19 response, with the cost of our programmes, events and projects being on hold or postponed and our main-income programme, the Galati Half-Marathon, was transformed into a virtual event with live streaming that produced a very small revenue. What we did gain was more **popularity and trust** from our donors and authorities. This was when we realised it was time to get back to our strategic planning and our communities.

The questions that we wanted to answer were:

> ➢ What are the **needs and the resources** in our community towards 4 areas of interest: social, health, the environment and education? We chose these 4 since these were the areas that we have surveyed in the past 2 years (2020 – 2021) through our grantmaking programmes and the emergency fund.
> ➢ How much of our strategic goals have we reached?
> ➢ What are our gains? How about our weaknesses? What are our hurdles internally?
> ➢ Do we need to adjust our strategic directions or our strategic goals? How are we going to do that?

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[2] https://blog.submittable.com/grantmaking-strategy/#:~:text=Grantmaking%20strategy%20is%20the%20mission,you'll%20execute%20your%20program.

Community mapping and programme management beyond grantmaking

Now I should state that in every grantmaking process, especially in the design stage or when evaluating the impact of your funding, you should start with your *why*, which defines your organization's mission and vision. Simon Sinek explains in his book 'Start with Why' that people conduct business with others whose purpose aligns with theirs. People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it. In philanthropy, that means others will join your purpose — your why — because it resonates with theirs.

Defining your mission is often described as a bridge between your why, and your organization's interest (or strategic directions, as mentioned before) and the needs found in the community you are addressing and the funder. We've made a habit out of asking ourselves "why?" with every opportunity or proposal from donors, local initiatives, or national partners.

Accepting funding for our organization has always meant a lot to us, since we are not an organization with endowment funds or that has reached a long-term predictability in terms of financial resources. But it doesn't always make sense to say "yes" just because it's a low hanging fruit that keeps your organization fed and busy. I've spoken with grant managers from Bucharest CF and Timisoara CF, as well as Oradea and with experts that have been working with community foundations for the past years, they all share a common vision: what a community foundation does, through its programmes, grantmakers or events should speak to their mission and their strategic directions.

Communities grow, change and nothing speaks louder than what COVID-19 did to all of us, as persons, institutions, or NGOs. As important it is to have strategic directions is to have your ear to the ground, react to the changes and adapt to the needs of your community.

To be present, or to get the feeling of community in terms of needs and resources, community foundations have tested and tried several instruments, as presented by a recent research done by the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations (RFCF) on the grantmaking practices in the national network:

- interviews/community talks with experts
- focus groups
- questionnaires
- community cafes (lemonades with NGOs, high school students' meetings, teachers)
- thematic talks with stakeholders or round tables
- desk research
- Board meetings
- social media surveys or campaigns

- Vital Signs report that can drive funding directions in the community
- reassessing and evaluating former editions in a programme
- involving relevant stakeholders in the process of community mapping
- talking to former grantees
- participating in other related or unrelated community events to network or get into dialogue with new people and organizations and to nurture the existing relationships when they host workshops/conferences and other events
- site visits
- advisory boards

We've held a mix of several of the above mentioned after COVID-19: interviews with NGOS, former grantees and other, social media survey, Board meetings, advisory boards, and desk research.

In this process, through RAF funding, we were able to subcontract experts from an NGO that conducts anthropological studies. Their report gave us clear vision of what are the *systemic and local issues* in the 4 areas surveyed and the *resources and interests* of the local NGOs we've talked to. It is still unclear for us how and if we should address some of the issues found in our reasearch, but we believe it has revealed data, opportunities, information and has connected organizations through our community talks.

Furthermore, the process itself shared lots of resources found in different NGOs that just need to be connected. This is where I believe our community foundation could play its role of facilitator and capacity builder and work towards building trust and a bonding the civil society locally, which is one of our main strategic objectives. Our dilemma is *how can we address it more intentionally*, looking past our programmes or including these opportunities beyond our grantees?

In my interviews with other grantmaking experts, we talked about how we include capacity building for our grantees and how we can achieve a greater impact through our programmes. Usually, during a call for project, we include one on one consultations for the applicants, which is quite valuable in terms of assuring the quality of the projects proposed for funding. The problem is the funder is often focused on its objectives and less on the applicant's or grantees needs or the bigger objective itself. For example, if a programme's objective is to protect the Danube River from pollution, we'll be financing educational and environmental projects that suggest solutions to contribute to this objective.

A 360 degrees approach of this programme, apart from accepting and regranting local NGOs' projects in the field, could also include bringing together all the important stakeholders that can make a difference or raise awareness: the research community in the field, education and environmental experts, authorities, the private sector, foreign or other experts that have dealt with similar issues. Setting up meetings or round tables around this subject would work towards the

programme's objective and one of the foundation's strategic directions. This is a direction some of the community foundations in Romania are taking and we would like to test as well in one of our programmes.

From the international success stories on community leadership, one caught my attention. It's the story of *Placer Community Foundation[3]* on how they entered an active leadership by taking on a critical issue that affected the NGOs – capacity building for the local non-profits. Their journey confirmed that these kinds of efforts take on a lot of time and expertise from the staff and focuses less on grantmaking. For Placer CF it brought visibility, credibility and impact and they couldn't have done it without the support of the Board that compensated in bringing in the dollars needed to finance the activity of the CF while being focused on capacity building. *"It was labour intensive, and required a huge amount of staff time,"* says Ruth Burges, Board member of Placer Community Foundation. Both the non-profit community and the Cf had a lot to gain Board Chair, Jeff Birkholz says, *"The visibility of the Foundation has increased because of it. It ended up making people more aware of us."* We wish to steer our efforts into strengthening our community leadership and capacity, but we also need the funding for it, since we are not in the position of having enough resources, financial or human to that matter.

For us, achieving more impact and leadership in the community is important and we have embarked on a journey to discover the ways of doing it, by consulting with our peers in the community foundations and more. What we are certain is, without testing any form of community mapping on needs and/or its assets, the strategic plan is void and unrealistic.

If you're still wondering, here is why you should do a community mapping regularly, or at least before you decide where to place your funders or programmes next:

- to meet new people
- to get out of your office, make yourself available and friendlier (for all those living in the ivory tower, no one will ask for help if you're inaccessible)
- to better understand your communities
- to map new organizations and their needs & resources assessment
- get data or lack there of
- understand a giving pattern
- gain insights for the design or support of your policies, programmes and systems that meet needs build on assets and help them reach their goals
- connect with other initiatives
- promote greater understanding
- uncover potential donors or partners
- learn about the business sector
- find partners in the academic circles

[3] Learning to Lead The Journey to Community Leadership for Emerging Community Foundations – The James Irvine foundation: https://www.cof.org/page/community-foundations-series-james-irvine-foundation

What is responsive and strategic grantmaking?

As I got more interested in assessing our grantmaking process and programmes overall, the Putnam-Wakerley article on responsive vs strategic grantmaking put things in a different perspective for me. I explored all the "symptoms" for being a responsive organization and found lots of matches in terms of drive and mindset.

To be kept in mind, while assessing your foundation's approach there is no "right" or "wrong" doing as long you are serving your foundation's mission and implicit your communities. There are several factors to be considered: the maturity of a foundation in links to experience and unrestricted funding for their operational costs, the political and social-economic context, the "NGO sea" you are swimming in, your team, your Board members, the local, regional, or national context and last, but not least, your mission.

In comparing grantmaking strategies and the Putnam article, to operate a grantmaking programme that is responsive means to give grants in response to requests received from those seeking grants. A responsive foundation is primarily concerned with today's needs and is receptive to different opportunities that come from both communities' initiatives and donors. on the other hand, a strategic grantmaking approach is often referred to as a foundation that directs its grants to address specific community needs with a very well envisioned impact in mind and does not limit itself to grants only. It is proactive, collaborative or even responsive if it works towards reaching that impact.

In the Council of Foundations paper, I also found *proactive grantmaking* that funds organizations that specific issues the CF is interested in, in a multi-year cycle, *programme* or *initiative grantmaking* that involves various stakeholders to address a specific issue, focusing on problem solving and outcomes. To this end, the Bucharest Community Foundation set to prepare the community for a big Earthquake, bringing together specialists, authorities and establishing a multi-year grants cycle to the initiatives that serve to this purpose and have a meaningful impact – "Bucharest ready"

Our agenda for grantmaking is set in the operational plan, that initially was developed from our strategic directions, and later mirrored the funding opportunities, the team's capacity to implement and a lot on what we found as needed from our grantees. We have at least two programmes that we implement yearly and it's easy for us to drive them because we've come to know them, and our grantees need it. I would say that the grantees and donors/partners drive our agenda, more than the funder, but we've always found strategic reasons to follow through these programmes. Financial sustainability has always played an important role in our agenda, and we've diversified our financial resources, but we still have a long way to reach the status of a financially stable or predictable organization.

This being the main reason why making the shift towards a more focused agenda or proactive approach is still a challenge for us.

During an exploratory discussion with Ciprian Paius, the Chair of the Romanian Federation of Community Foundations (RFCF) and CEO of Iasi Community Foundation, we shared similar concerns, that for most of the foundations we tend to be reactive and grab any opportunity or work with the grantees we find in a community rather than moving our funding to a specific goal that the CF has established. In terms of adapting to the organic movements in a community, this strategy is the right one, especially in times of emergency like COVID-19, but we shouldn't lose sight of getting back to our long-term objectives and if not set, we should revisit them in conversations with our Board and community.

We play lots of roles for our communities: grantmakers, stewards for philanthropy, facilitators, and leaders for our non-profits. Being a *financer* is however a role that few of the CFs in Romania have achieved. Giving unrestricted funds or flexible funding to grantees or diving into community asset-based mapping and community engaging processes involves resources that many of us don't have or haven't accessed. Establishing *endowment funds* or long-term partnerships with donors that support the organization's activity overall, *unrestricted by grants* could be the means to achieving this role with more relaxation. But how can we do that, unless we are visible, active, and reactive to our communities? We need time and a strategy to build trust with our donors, we need to be intentional in fundraising and nurturing philanthropy from a stance of experience and professionalism.

Where are we in terms of our programmes and strategy? - insights from philanthropy and grantmaking specialists

I spoke with Ruxandra Sasu, Senior Programme Officer Civil Society & Philanthropy at the Romanian American Foundation and Dolores Neagoe, EEA and Norway Grants Officer, Romania and grantmaking and philanthropy specialist, and shared my organization's dilemma. We started from a general question as to how we can *focus our grantmaking or programmes* to *increase our impact* with a specific example of practice while designing a new named fund in two areas: education and the environment.

Talking to Ruxandra and Dolores and Alina Porumb (INSPIRE), their recommendations conveyed that we should assess *what is "strategic" for us?* Which means we should refer to what is strategic in concern to what *we have* and to *what the community offers*, not more to what is aligned with an ideal plan. So yes, internal assessment and mapping your community is essential on this road. To this end, it is important to draw out the next steps starting from *what we know*. Also, all three experts shared the perspective that there are **stages in each community foundation's development**. There's a time for a community foundation to manage small funding and be reactive to all the opportunities, to learn and gain experience and there's a time for it to make bold moves like taking initiative and funding specific projects

like the ones in concern to gender equality or preparedness for a big earthquake (Bucharest CF) or shifting your funding for STEM education to the rural area (Iasi CF) and so on. Plus, as Alina concluded and I agree entirely, you can only be as strategic as your team and Board is, as to your donor's mindset and your non-profits that you'll be working with or funding. It's a partnership and it will probably take as long as it needs to educate all the mentioned stakeholders for your organization to become more focused/strategic. in this journey, strategic means even if we take small steps yearly, we have a focused objective that we include in our communication strategy, in our programmes and other events. Strategic is not that ideal set-up, it should always get back to your chess board: where are we now and where do we want to be? What are the necessary steps to get there?

We should also talk about our financers, our donors and private funding. Reality is that most of our financers are short-sighted in terms of investment. They wish for big impact and visibility, but their funding and calendar is reflected in 6 months to one year funding. How can we produce change in such short term? Developing a business takes several years and this experience is similar or takes even more time when considering systematic changes in a community. We need time and consistent funding to expect changes, that's why, whenever given the opportunity for a funding to trust you with funding, a meaningful conversation on long-term investment and multi-year programme is the strategic move to reaching a bigger impact that brings wins on every party. Through multi-annual funding we can give time and room for our projects to grow, for our grantees to build capacity with our aid.

Our road to being more strategic

To reassess our strategic directions and where we are in terms of impact and objectives, we went through several steps of evaluation and assessment. I started using the 4Cs method [4] which we discovered through the WINGS worldwide initiative and DAFNE and went back to the assessment we did back in 2018 to get a sense of progress. The 4Cs is an evaluation system for organizations that support philanthropy and measured the added value they bring to the field. It uses four key concepts beginning with the letter C to measure the difference made by organizations that support philanthropy:

- ➢ Capacity (building resources)
- ➢ Capability (building skills, knowledge, and expertise)
- ➢ Connection (relationships)
- ➢ Credibility (reputation, recognition, and influence)

Alina Porumb also suggested to steer this method not only on our programmes, but also considering the of impact on donors and our grantees. She also talked about a 5th dimension to explore, which is the "catalyst" – what does your organization bring in terms of innovation, new practices, or new organizations?

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[4] https://wings.issuelab.org/resources/28297/28297.pdf

What I took from applying this method is that we need to look at our programmes and ask yourself "what do I know?". I must admit to you, there were programmes that I couldn't finish the assessment because there isn't enough feedback, or we just haven't made the time to assess them. I also believe you should apply this instrument with your team or at least another team member, so you get fresh perspectives on each of the 4Cs.

This instrument is versatile, and you can use it after ending each edition in a programme, and it is also a lens you can use in designing a new fund or assessing your impact in the community and your organization, as well, in terms of roles, resources and every one of the 5Cs.

The 4/5Cs offers a framework with three outcome areas for each of the C and shares a total of 12 (or 15 if we consider catalyst) outcome areas. These are the areas or objectives that we are going to work on in the next period and that reflect on our strategic directions.

Other instruments we want to explore to assess our organization: the Community leadership assessment tool, developed by Candid and the Most Significant Change.

The *Community leadership assessment tool*[5] is developed by CF Insights, published by Candid, with the funding of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation that focuses on the foundations' engagement in community leadership activities, as well as their commitment to community leadership work and a self-assessment on their performance on these activities. It has five sections:

- community leadership activities
- organizational culture
- relationships
- resources
- understanding and skills

I've taken this self-assessment tool that is available online[6], as well, but I wish to include the Board members in using it as a starting point in redesigning our strategic objectives in the upcoming period. There are areas that I found to be completely unexplored, like advocacy or community development for undeserved communities. This is one of the reasons why we are exploring this year a more grass-root approach in community development for marginalised communities in the city.

The *Most Significant change* method is a participatory method of collecting and analysing stories from the field which focuses on evaluating or monitoring intermediate outcomes and impact. I was involved in this process using this method while assessing the End of Cycle Evaluation of the Științescu Programme for STEM Education (2015-2019), which was commissioned by The Romanian Federation of Community Foundations (RFCF). It was a qualitative one combining the Lessons

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[5] https://cfinsights.issuelab.org/resource/community-leadership-assessment-tool.html
[6] https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5889669/howwelead

Learned Exercise (LLE) with the Most Significant Change (MSC) methodology – in an adapted manner for groups. Both approaches began with the desk research phase (programme documents and quantitative information collected by RAF and RFCF during the program monitoring/implementation and collection of the information in view of conducting the field research – information about the main local stakeholders) and continued with the field research phase that involved Focus Group Discussions and the Key Informant Interview process. This methodology involved some of the CF representatives (grant managers) as volunteers, me included, in the actual process of data collection. It also comprised individual interviews with all types of stakeholders and focus groups with final beneficiaries, based on a prior set of semi-structured interview/focus-groups guidelines. Beyond contributing to a very insightful report on one of the most interesting and widespread programmes (and the only one shared by 13 of Romanian CFs), I found value in listening to other perspectives and practices with other CFs. Ruxandra Sasu recommended using this method in the evaluation process of a programme, as well as in exploratory discussions with Board members or partners that want to contribute to your mission: talking about change that has occurred or change you want to see will shift your focus to the WHY and lead on to specific goals and perspectives for your organization[7].

Conclusions

What can we do differently in grantmaking practices or internally in our organization?

Talking to my colleagues from Bucharest Community Foundation, Timisoara, and Oradea Community Foundations, I've noticed some trends in these mature organizations that I've shared as best practices with my organization as well:

The executive team roles

The dream team is the one that communicates and works effectively, shares their challenges, and celebrates all the accomplishments. The roles in a community foundation are usually divided into the grantmaking department, communications, and fundraising.

While observing the structure of the grantmaking departments in the Romanian community foundations, I've noted several roles: a director or manager, a grantmaker or project manager, programs assistant or administrative staff, depending on how large the executive team is and their HR strategy.

For larger teams, that have more than one staff in the grantmaking department, the director of programmes is the one in charge with the design and development of

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programmes procedures and instruments, community mapping or engagement process, impact assessment, mentoring the grantmakers or programme assistants and other complementary activities to grantmaking, that serve the strategic objectives of the programmes, and thus the Foundation.

The grantmakers/grant managers are responsible for the implementation of the grantmaking part of a fund: call for projects, consultations/incubator, selection, contracting, monitoring the implementation, and reporting. They are usually involved in the evaluation of the call for proposals. I've noticed there is more satisfaction and teamwork when more or all members of a team get involved in the lifetime of a programme. I was talking to Ilinca Apetrei, programme manager of "Bucharest Ready", about how the pandemic had contributed to burn-out, including their own, and working project-based or having complete ownership on a programme can be weary and it leaves you disconnected from your team. What worked for them was working in teams or sharing their challenges regularly. Ideally, each program is managed by a grantmaker, but few foundations can afford this organigram.

In the case of Timisoara CF, Teodora Borgoff (Programme Director and former Board member) shared with me that all the grantmakers have important communication skills and cover some aspect of communication in a programme and could also take on responsibilities of grant management for another programme. Thus, two team members can effectively collaborate because they both share the perspectives of a grantmaker and a communication specialist. The project assistant can also play an important role, if the organization can afford and "raise" one. This role can take on all the administrative work that can be straining on a grantmaker or executive director, creating time and space for them to work more strategically. The assistant or project operations manager is also involved in the foundation's programmes and has the potential to take on communication, grantmaking or fundraising tasks that can later grow into a bigger role.

Wellbeing culture

Community foundations form families that share the same values and prospects but can form a very diverse team in terms of expertise, areas of interest and assets. Beyond *motivation,* which I believe is paramount in this sector, since it's maybe not the best-paid sector, nor the easiest to work in, *sharing personal insights* with your team-members, having a safe space to vent or express your concern towards your work or the organization is therapeutic and necessary. Creating time and space and maybe assigning a role in one of the team members with wellbeing, like Bucharest CF does, could be the solution to creating a more productive and happier workplace. And who doesn't want to work with a happy person when you're dealing with the communities' worst and deepest problems?

Board engagement

There's so much literature relating to the Board members' role and mission and I'm personally in awe of these people who have taken on voluntarily such heavy weights

and responsibility. It's true, I can only refer to our organization's Board and other non-profits that I'm part of, but a community foundation Board has very different experiences, especially if it includes founding members or persons that have been with the foundation from the beginning. Talking to my peers in other CFs, it's clear we have different dynamics, some Board members like to dive into operational issues or programmes of the CF, other touch base and get involved punctually and usually in terms of fundraising or serving as an ambassador for a Donor's Circle and other philanthropic happenings. What is common to all CFs and our goal is to keep the Board focused on our strategic direction, stewarding the best fit opportunities that will serve the foundation's mission and goals. Board engagement and development is on our agenda.

Programme management

As I discovered and shared with you earlier, another key finding in my research is the perspective of programme management beyond the grantmaking area. Participatory grantmaking, community engagement, counselling in philanthropy, establishing partnerships with your donors, building capacity, or even taking on projects that involve community organization or development are all different layers a community foundation can apply in their activity, you just need time to see whatever fits your organization's capacity. It's an exploratory mission for us as well, and what I've learned in this journey is the importance of sharing your dilemmas with other people in the field, it can take you outside of your box and bring new perspectives.

This is what the ECFI Learning lab has offered me, space, and time to research and open conversations with peers and specialists about the impact of their work and how we can better serve our mission, strategically, including in our grantmaking procedures and beyond. Getting back to what Dolores Neagoe, Alina Porumb and Ruxandra Sasu shared with me is taking the time to look at your organization with different lenses, it can be your own or through a donors' or your community, so I would recommend not stopping at the field of philanthropy and civil society. For example, therefore I believe the Board or advisory members are so valuable, they come from different sectors like business, academia, research or the public sector, their input adds angles that a non-profit can't always foresee.

The process of analysis, where you are, what you can build on, own it. For Galati Community Foundation, starting from this process means moving towards proactive grantmaking by addressing some portion of our budget to more proactive strategies, reserving a portion for responsive grantmaking, and testing a new area in community development of the underserved communities.

References, articles, and interviews

Start with Why – Simon Sinek. Also, you could watch this very popular TED talk TED Talk as an incentive.

Community Foundations Mapping Guide – Connecting communities in the Americas, CF Leads, Inter-American Foundation and Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, May 2021, Author: Michael D. Layton, Ph.D. Contributor: Lisa K. Schalla, Ed.D

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Responsive vs. Strategic Grantmaking: Exploring the Options – The Putnam Guide, prepared for the Ohio State Bar Foundation by Kris Putnam-Walkerly, MSW

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No Strings Attached: A Guide to Giving Unrestricted Funds – Laura Steele

Community Leadership Assessment Tool – CF Insights, Candid

I would like to thank the people I got the chance to interview that I found mostly inspiring, they shared their practices, recommendations, and stories with me. I would also like to include my team, that allowed me the time and space to reflect and continues to join me in this journey.

Interviews:

- **Ruxandra Sasu**, Senior Programme Officer Civil Society & Philanthropy, Romanian American Foundation
- **Dolores Neagoe**, former RAF Programme Director Civil Society & Philathropy, EEA and Norway Grants Officer Romania, Netherlands Embassy in Romania
- **Alina Porumb,** Strategic design, Inspire
- **Ciprian Paius**, Chair of RFCF, CEO of Iasi Community Foundation
- **Mihaela Greşiţă**, Network manager RFCF
- **Teodora Albiter**, Grants manager FC Oradea and RFCF
- **Teodora Borghoff**, Programmes Director, Timisoara CF

- **Cristina Văileanu**, Programmes Director, Bucharest CF
- **Ilinca Apetrei**, Programme manager Bucharest Community Foundation

Galati Community Foundation executive team:

- **Liliana Cristea**, Executive Director
- **Simona Mușală**, Communications Coordinator and Project manager
- **Teodora Grigore**, Administration officer