

Creating the standards of the Federation of Community Foundations in Poland



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The Federation of Community Foundations in Poland has been operating for over twenty years. At the beginning, it brought together eight organisations that regularly held meetings and discussed the needs, challenges and the future together. These meetings often took place at the premises of individual CFs, to “make some noise” in the local media to promote CF more strongly. We were like one big family.

The meetings were often attended by representatives of the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland, who supported us with their experience and finances. It was the time when the FCF standards were set defining the goal, framework and requirements for the admission of new members. Unfortunately, for many organisations, those criteria were very difficult to meet (there were a lot of numerical indicators), so there were not too many organisations willing to join us. The main reason was the obligation to have endowment capital and the period to gain it seemed too short.

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The Federation did not have too many projects on its account, despite the extensive experience and knowledge of its members, strong leaders and great knowledge of local needs, and its brand was little known. One of the reasons was that each CF was mainly focused on the operation and implementation of local initiatives, not the creation of federated joint ventures.

The breakthrough took place three years ago and since then the Federation has been developing very dynamically. During the pandemic, together with a company - a sportswear manufacturer - we implemented a program appreciating medics who worked so hard during the pandemic. We received a large financial support from a corporation that gave us 1500 gift vouchers for sports stores worth PLN 500 each. Thanks to this, we carried out 2 national competitions that strengthened our image which helped us to reach a new group of recipients. In the meantime, we won a 3-year grant aimed at

developing the FCF and its member organisations. It also provided us with the financing of the position of a coordinator and a person who constantly deals with promotion and communication with the environment. To our surprise, the war in Ukraine played a very important role in the functioning of the FCF. Thanks to the range of our activities (we currently associate 15 CF in 11 voivodeships, 4 of which are on the eastern border), great relations with Polish and foreign organisations, cooperation with local governments, business and the media, and systematic promotional activities, we acquired from two companies, TechnipFMC and Affinity Trust Limited subsidies in the amount of PLN 350,000 and in-kind donations from many companies estimated at about PLN 900,000.

The effectiveness of our activities, creating real change and being an inspiration for others made us realize how important role do we play in the society and in the CF environment that we associate. This prompted us to rethink our mission, values and the standards that should improve our functioning and set new directions of development in the long term. Especially when we think about acquiring new members. In recent months, together with the team, we have analysed and evaluated many documents and good practices drawn from Polish and foreign organisations. British standards, sent to us by James Magowan from ECFI, the study "The CUNY International Fellows Program and Community Foundations: Learning from the Field" sent by Barbara Leopold and Kathleen McCarthy. An extremely inspiring email exchange with CF representatives participating in the CUNY Program such as Bernadette Hellman from Berlin, Shaun Samuels from Johannesburg or Whilla Castelhana from Brazil also played an important role. With the knowledge about functioning models of CF and networking on three continents, we have created our own standards and operating framework, which we have adapted to the Polish cultural and regional context, at the same time strongly opening the FCF to new members.

The current FCF Standards document was released two months ago. It consists of 5 parts concerning general provisions, organisational and legal acts, financial management, activities of member organisations and cooperation within the FCF. Its development required a lot of time, energy, but also heated discussions. Two points seemed the most controversial: the issue of endowment capital and whether future members who want to join us must be CF or can only be organisations operating on similar principles.

Endowment capital

For several CF members, especially those created at the turn of the nineties and two thousand, who are in a good and stable financial situation, endowment is an absolute "must have" for newly joining organisations. They are the guarantee of efficient functioning and financial security in the future. However, there were many voices saying that endowment capital is "dead money" and its creation is a valid assumption, but it is not necessary nowadays. Especially when we have such high inflation, low interest rates in the bank or the war across the eastern border, which forces us to implement immediate projects that provide direct and real help. Finally, we agreed that the membership organisation does not have to, but should have or strive to create



endowment, understood as financial revenues combined into one pool invested in order to bring income.

FCF membership

During joint workshops, we agreed that our mission is to promote local philanthropy, strengthen member organisations and connect people who care about the needs of the local community. If we want to be even more effective in action, cooperate wisely and use our mutual potential and resources, we should create a new space that gives us new opportunities. By opening up to others, we will have access to new knowledge and good practices, and it will be easier for us to build cross-sector partnerships maximizing the effects of our activities. Therefore, together with the rest of the FCF members, we have decided that the organisation that wants to join us does not have to be called CF, but must be based on the same principles as us, common goals, vision and values.

For us, it was a long process of discussing the values, sense of operation and vision for the future of the FCF.

The document defining all the FCF standards in Poland is available here.

If you have any questions, contact us at: biuro@ffl.org.pl

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