



The Neighborhood Fund

**20 Years of Connecting People,
Changing Communities**

*How the Neighborhood Fund has influenced
The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
and the people and the places we serve*



The Community Foundation
FOR GREATER ATLANTA

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta connects people to the issues and organizations making a difference in our region. We provide personalized philanthropic advice to individuals and families interested in making a long-term impact with their giving, and we provide community leadership on critical issues in our region. Together with our donors, partners, volunteers and community leaders, we are improving communities in our 23-county region through philanthropy.

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20 Years of Connecting People, Changing Communities



Table of Contents

Foreword	
Introduction	1
The Neighborhood Fund Concept	2
Origin: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	7
Key Components and Learnings	
◆ Grantmaking	10
◆ Leadership Development	13
◆ Community Coaching	15
◆ Partnerships	18
◆ The Community Foundation's Investment	20
Conclusion	22

Foreword

For two decades, the Neighborhood Fund, an initiative of The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, has been a resource for metro Atlanta residents seeking positive change in their neighborhoods. By providing support and financial resources, the Neighborhood Fund assists residents and neighborhood groups (non-501(c)(3) organizations) as they organize around their strengths and assets.

Supporting residents and communities has always been a priority for The Community Foundation. Through our involvement with the Neighborhood Fund, we have learned how to better utilize the assets in our community – be it donors, nonprofits or community groups – providing them the information and support needed to make a unique difference.

Moving forward, the Neighborhood Fund will remain a critical component of our work. We hope to expand the work by leveraging our knowledge with community partners, delving deeper to support leadership at the local level and providing continued resources to neighborhoods throughout the 23 counties we serve.

This report provides The Community Foundation's perspective about the Neighborhood Fund after 20 years: how it came to exist, how it was implemented, how it has evolved and lessons learned about making the initiative sustainable. This publication also considers how this initiative has influenced our own work as a community foundation.

HABESHA COMMUNITY GARDEN



Introduction

For 60 years The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has worked to strengthen the Atlanta region through philanthropy. We do this through service to philanthropists; support of nonprofits with grants and guidance; leadership in collaborative efforts to address community problems; and through our focus on strong organizational management.

The Community Foundation has often stepped forward to lead initiatives aimed at accomplishing specific types of change and building the community's capacity. Examples include the Atlanta AIDS Fund, Atlanta Women's Foundation, Georgia Center for Nonprofits and the Metropolitan Atlanta Arts Fund. In these efforts, The Community Foundation acts as convener, catalyst and advocate in addition to our role as funder.

One of the most significant of these initiatives is the Neighborhood Fund, which has made The Community Foundation a force at the grassroots neighborhood level, enabling groups of committed residents to realize their ambitions for local improvements through small grants and skilled coaching. In the process, the Neighborhood Fund also identifies grassroots leaders and encourages their development.

Since 1991, Neighborhood Fund grants have helped more than 300 communities across The Community Foundation's 23-county service area achieve defined goals and cultivate leadership. A wide range of improvements have beautified neighborhoods, increased safety and health, supported education and youth development, celebrated culture, fostered community identity and overall, enhanced quality of life in neighborhoods. Along with these tangible improvements, the Neighborhood Fund continues a legacy of increased local capacity to achieve positive change.

For The Community Foundation, the Neighborhood Fund has brought new perspectives that now pervade how we engage constituents and conduct the grantmaking process. This field report surveys the history, evolution and achievements of the Neighborhood Fund over its first 20 years, exploring how this initiative has shaped The Community Foundation as well as the region we serve.

20 Years of Small Grants for Neighborhoods

665 Grants Allocated

17 Counties in which Grants Have Been Made

\$2.7 million Total of Monetary Awards

225 Number of Residents Receiving Leadership Training

(May 1991 - May 2011)



RESIDENTS STAND AT FAIRWAY GREEN PARK IN DEKALB COUNTY.

The Neighborhood Fund Concept

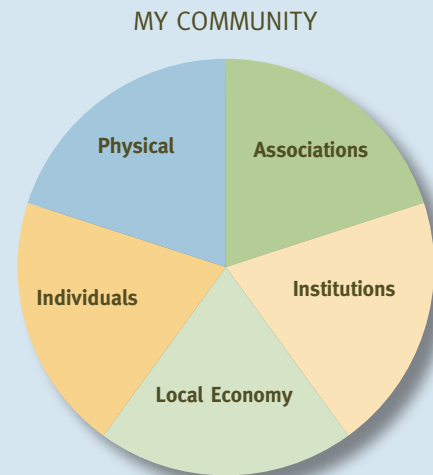
◆ Premise: Asset-Based Community Development

Every neighborhood has assets – positive qualities that can be leveraged to improve life in the community. The Neighborhood Fund incorporates the philosophy of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute of Northwestern University as the intellectual framework for engaging neighborhoods. This framework is organized around five categories of assets shown to the right: individuals, physical, associations, institutions and local economy.

The theory of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) assumes that creative use of these five categories of assets is the ideal way to affect grassroots change, accomplished by local people who have a direct stake in the outcome. Multiplied across many neighborhoods, the ABCD concept of change promotes a critical mass of skilled, confident, place-based leaders who influence the direction of the larger community.

The ABCD organizing premise of the Neighborhood Fund contrasts sharply with traditional, deficit-focused approaches to community renewal. Typically, the latter is externally driven and emphasizes perceived weaknesses and problems that must be “fixed” by outside experts. The Neighborhood Fund explicitly follows a more positive and internally driven model that concentrates on instilling the local capacity to act as change agents, embedding know-how and determination that thrives beyond the immediate project.

Asset-Based Community Development Framework



- **Individuals** are those who call a neighborhood home, drawing upon their interests, abilities, passions and energies.
- **Physical** assets are the spaces and places within a community, both natural and built.
- **Associations** are the groups that exist in the neighborhood, such as faith congregations, social clubs, fraternal organizations and informal clusters of people with a shared interest or cause.
- **Institutions** include businesses, governmental agencies, nonprofits, schools, libraries, hospitals and other operating organizations that exist or work in the community.
- **Local economy** is the flow of money and labor in the neighborhood, determined by the presence of businesses where residents spend their money and which provide jobs for local people, as well as the degree to which these businesses are locally rooted.

◆ Think Layers Not Ladders

The Neighborhood Fund uses another ABCD intellectual pillar developed by Grassroots Grantmakers, that of “layers not ladders.” (Learn more about Grassroots Grantmakers on page 8.) In contrast to a ladder with a start point and end point, grassroots grantmaking provides support to augment existing neighborhood assets much like the layers of a cake. Building community capacity to drive change is an ongoing process. With more layers comes the need for more resources. Institutions like the Neighborhood Fund that engage in grassroots grantmaking are making an enduring commitment to support the fundamental work of encouraging active citizenship.



THE FRIENDS OF LITTLE NANCY CREEK PARK RECEIVED FUNDING AND SUPPORT TO BUILD A PLAYGROUND IN THE FULTON COUNTY COMMUNITY.

The Strategy of Grassroots Grantmakers



Courtesy of Janis Foster Richardson, Grassroots Grantmakers

◆ Grassroots Grantmaking – Special Considerations

Neighborhood Fund grants are made to loosely organized groups of neighbors rather than to formally structured 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. When the Neighborhood Fund was established, and again when it was permanently endowed, The Community Foundation had legal counsel confirm its compliance from the perspective of the Internal Revenue Service. Federal law allows grantmaking outside the 501(c)(3) arena as long as grants are used exclusively for charitable purposes.

Proving that Neighborhood Fund grants are applied strictly to charitable causes requires a well-designed monitoring framework. Elements include the thorough investigation of proposals with site visits by staff and advisory committee members, training for group leaders, documentation including reports with original receipts and the hands-on guidance of a Community Coach throughout the grant term (see p. 15). As an extra layer of oversight, donor-advised funds of The Community Foundation do not make grants directly to non-501(c)(3) groups, only through the Neighborhood Fund.

Bill Sommerville, author of *Grassroots Philanthropy*, describes such monitoring as “dismantling the conventional foundation bureaucracy and undertaking the real world of accountability: thorough, continuing, frank and honest contact with the people you fund.” In Sommerville’s view, an effective grassroots grantmaking program depends on the depth of a foundation’s knowledge of the community and its activists. As is clear throughout this field report, the Neighborhood Fund has brought a healthy degree of insight about local dynamics to The Community Foundation that has influenced all aspects of our work.

An additional factor in funding neighborhood groups is how results are evaluated. Because capacity building is such an important goal, the Neighborhood Fund

is more interested in the impact of the process than in whether a particular project has been finished. Success is measured mainly on grantee experience and the group’s development of knowledge, leadership and increased capacity. At the time, this was a dramatic departure for The Community Foundation’s evaluation of nonprofit grant results. Since then, such an approach has been taken with the Foundation’s other grantmaking practices such as general operating support.

There are undeniable risks in funding informal groups, yet the experience of the Neighborhood Fund has been overwhelmingly positive. Groups have shown a strong commitment to good stewardship and have handled funds responsibly. Over two decades we have tweaked our oversight process but have never had reason to make major changes.

Desired Outcomes

The Neighborhood Fund has supported an array of projects with widely varying purposes over the past 20 years. In broad terms, a Neighborhood Fund grant should yield or enhance one or more of these desired outcomes:

- Residents are strong, healthy and self-reliant
- Residents live in safe, supportive neighborhoods
- Residents take pride in and use neighborhood skills, talents and resources
- Residents have the power to influence and shape their own communities
- Residents create and participate in a thriving economy

The Neighborhood Fund’s approach to grantmaking continues to evolve and is centered on a more deliberate connection between the long-term process of building a strong community and the results envisioned. The following chart illustrates how the Neighborhood Fund identifies where groups are in their life cycle:

Building	Strengthening	Sustaining	Influencing
<p>The group is emerging with limited identified neighborhood assets. The group is working with its neighborhood to develop relationships with residents, local institutions, government and associations.</p>	<p>The group is dedicated and focused on making its existing identified resources stronger. The group is actively involved with residents, local institutions, government and associations on projects and/or activities.</p>	<p>The group has identified assets and has proven results. The group is organizing with residents, local institutions, government and associations to support a community-wide vision and/or plan.</p>	<p>The group is actively engaged with its neighborhood assets and is working with policy makers to address community solutions. The group shares its learning with others, monitors its success and has impact beyond its neighborhood or community.</p>

◆ The Neighborhood Fund Model

While the experience is different for each group, there is a typical Neighborhood Fund model. A group of energetic residents, led by three or more members from the neighborhood, decide to pursue a specific goal to improve their neighborhood. They have a track record of at least two years of working together toward a common goal. This goal might be to turn a swatch of kudzu into vegetable plots where residents can grow their own food and strengthen their sense of shared interest in the neighborhood; or to start an afterschool activity for neighborhood children; or to establish a community newsletter or cultural event. The Neighborhood Fund considers virtually any improvement proposal that builds on existing strengths and provides opportunity for greater civic engagement and leadership to develop.

The organizing group can form in many ways, such as through the local civic association, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), a church congregation or simply by having a shared interest. To move their idea forward,

the group applies for a Neighborhood Fund grant. The application is simple, and conditions are few although grants are highly competitive. The group does not need a permanent formal structure such as 501(c)(3) designation, just a checking account for handling grant money and other funds collected for the project. Grantees are required to turn in original receipts to the Neighborhood Fund, and basic progress reports are submitted at regular intervals during the grant. Group leaders participate in a workshop on grant optimization and compliance. Most importantly, the group agrees to work with a Community Coach, an individual experienced in helping neighborhood groups plan and implement projects, overcome obstacles and observe sound operating practices along the way.

Grants, ranging from \$500 to \$10,000, provide the resources for community groups to carry their ideas from start to completion. Oftentimes groups take from six to 18 months to complete a project.

◆ Platform for Expanding Capability

Although the Neighborhood Fund is very much place-based, grants are meant to have impact beyond the immediate environments. This impact includes providing ideas and examples to other neighborhoods, building enthusiasm that these initiatives can result in significant change and strengthening ties among leaders of different neighborhoods across metro Atlanta. Such networking and collaboration are fundamental to The Community Foundation's role of convener.

A prime example is the annual **Celebration of Neighborhoods**. It presents Neighborhood Fund projects to the community at large and brings local activists together with civic leaders for learning, sharing and networking. In 2009, the Neighborhood Fund expanded the idea of celebrating neighborhoods by hosting a **Neighborhood Summit** in partnership with the Civic League for Regional Atlanta for resident

leaders and groups from across the region. It offers capacity-building workshops and a keynote speaker with credentials relevant to local activism. The Summit has brought together more than 600 residents each year to foster relationships among community leaders by providing them with a forum to meet, exchange ideas and explore opportunities for collaboration.

For the past decade the Neighborhood Fund has played an important role in promoting formal training for grassroots leadership development. It established **The Neighborhood Leadership Institute** in 2001 and in 2009 transitioned the Institute to five existing, autonomous leadership development programs that address the distinctive leadership contexts of specific metro Atlanta counties. We continue to support these programs and encourage their replication in other jurisdictions.



STAFF AND NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE GRADUATES

Origin: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation Neighborhood Small Grants

In 1991 The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta (then named the Metropolitan Atlanta Community Foundation, Inc.) received a \$200,000 grant to join the second round of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation's Community Foundations and Neighborhoods Small Grants program. This was matched dollar-for-dollar by an anonymous gift from a donor-advised fund of The Community Foundation.

Begun in 1984, the Mott Foundation's program used a theory of change grounded in the conviction that the most effective neighborhood renewal arises from within, leveraging existing community assets and building local capacity to plan and implement improvements. This approach challenges models that seek to impose an improvement agenda from outside the immediate community.

The Mott program had three goals:

- 1** Increase the resources available to resident-based groups in low-income neighborhoods to bring about positive change locally and develop grassroots leadership capabilities in these neighborhoods
- 2** Encourage community foundations to engage more readily with non-traditional organizations working to bring about improvement within their community
- 3** Establish and reinforce national connections among community foundations and other neighborhood funders through systematic communication, technical assistance and a common method of evaluating results

◆ **Twenty-five Pioneers**

The Mott Foundation's first round of grants funded neighborhood small grant programs for eight community foundations across the country. The second round, which included Atlanta, added 13 participants, with four more involved in the information sharing and coaching components. Coaching was an integral element of every grant, in recognition of the steep learning curve faced by small groups of neighbors who had little or no experience in organizing and managing projects.

◆ **From Pilot to Sustained Program**

When funding from Mott ended in 1994, a decision loomed about moving forward. The Neighborhood Fund had added valuable dimensions to how The Community Foundation worked with and gained knowledge of issues, needs and leaders in its service area. It was viewed as a way to influence community leadership and vibrancy in a multi-generational way. The Community Foundation's Board of Directors decided to sustain the Neighborhood Fund as a fiscal priority supported by The Community Foundation's annual grantmaking budget. The fund later received a small endowment by a local donor advisor becoming a permanent fixture for engagement with the grassroots leaders of metro Atlanta. The Neighborhood Fund continues to be supported by both dollars from annual grantmaking and income endowment.

◆ Key Factors for Sustainability

A 2006-2007 review of the 25 Mott Foundation pioneers identified five key factors in determining the sustainability of a small grants program:

- 1 Goals are in line with resources,
- 2 There is return on investment beyond the impact of individual projects,
- 3 The program has a stable source of funding,
- 4 Institutional commitment is strong at the top level of the organization, and
- 5 Resident voice and influence are highly valued.

These conditions continue to guide how the Neighborhood Fund is evaluated and supported by The Community Foundation.



◆ Institutionalized Network: Grassroots Grantmakers

From 1991 to 1999, Mott continued to fund peer learning, convening and information-sharing activities for member community foundations. The key agent for member networking, coaching and results evaluation was a Minneapolis-based nonprofit, Rainbow Research. When Mott support ended, community foundations pursued various avenues to continue in relationship, which in 2004 evolved into a formal umbrella organization called Grassroots Grantmakers. The first convening occurred in Atlanta in 1991 when the second round of grants were selected. Membership has grown well beyond the 25 community foundations involved in the Mott program and now includes a variety of funders who engage in place-based grantmaking. Grassroots Grantmakers is financially supported by members as a vehicle for idea and best practice sharing, interaction, continuing education and mutual encouragement.

◆ Changing the DNA of Community Foundations

A 2007 study by Grassroots Grantmakers found that of the original 25 Mott-supported community foundations, 18 continued to operate some form of the neighborhood small grants program. For some members, the experience had been comprehensively transformational. In the words of Janis Foster Richardson, executive director of Grassroots Grantmakers, “It became part of their DNA, informing the entire work of the foundation.”

This is certainly true in the case of The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. President Alicia Philipp describes the Neighborhood Fund as “intrinsic to our work” and an integral aspect of The Community Foundation.

The Community Foundation strengthens the 23-county metro Atlanta region by providing quality services to donors and innovative leadership on community issues like neighborhood development. Our work to improve the quality of life in our region is centered on four key goals:

1 Engaging philanthropists: Since the original anonymous gift that matched the Mott grant, other donors of The Community Foundation have contributed to the Neighborhood Fund. The late Roger Hallock, a donor who served on the Neighborhood Fund's advisory committee, gave generously including a contribution to start an endowment for the program. Along with financial support, donors have been enthusiastic participants in evaluating groups for grants and tracking their progress.

2 Strengthening the region's nonprofits: In building grassroots leadership and capacity, the Neighborhood Fund has helped to energize resources that complement the formal nonprofit community. Some neighborhood groups have evolved into 501(c)(3) entities, and others have collaborated with like-minded nonprofits. In some cases the leadership emerging from Neighborhood Fund grantees has served as a pipeline of talent for other civic initiatives.

3 Advancing public will: The linkage of the Neighborhood Fund to this goal is clear. It instills confidence at the grassroots level that positive change can happen when neighbors align around a goal and devote their energy to its fulfillment. Many Neighborhood Fund grantees have gone on to leadership in the region's civic systems.

4 Practicing organizational excellence: As an operating entity focused on sustainability as well as outcomes, the Neighborhood Fund has demonstrated prudent management and intentional learning. As cited in this document, the program has evolved in many ways based on practical experience and recognition of new opportunities. Neighborhood Fund leaders have shown sound judgment in trying fresh concepts, modifying existing methods and pulling back when a seemingly good idea yielded less value than anticipated. Many Neighborhood Fund grantees have gone on to assume leadership roles in the region's civic systems.

HARVEST OF THE HEART GARDEN LOCATED IN MORGAN COUNTY BRINGS THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER TO PROVIDE FRESH PRODUCE TO NEIGHBORS IN NEED.



Grantmaking

The Neighborhood Fund provides cash grants and coaching support to neighborhood groups seeking to impact their community at the local level. Grants are flexible and highly competitive, and have supported such activities as cultural fairs, block parties and beautification projects, as well as longer-term undertakings including after school programs or community organizing efforts.

The Neighborhood Fund grantmaking process reflects The Community Foundation's emphasis on innovation and intelligent risk-taking. Virtually any project will be considered if staff and the advisory committee believe it is a sound way to meet a community need.

Groups are encouraged to think expansively about additional resources that could enhance the project. Given the extensive relationships of The Community Foundation, there have been many situations in which staff has identified potential synergies for a group to pursue.

“The Neighborhood Fund is fundamentally about trusting, listening and responding to residents working together as neighbors to build healthy communities. Over the years, each staff person and volunteer has dedicated themselves to this core value. This type of synergy has resulted in an expanded, stronger program, which has helped The Community Foundation to strengthen our region as a whole.”

-Tené Traylor, program officer

◆ Funding Level

In the first decade of the program, grants were uniformly small. A first grant in the range of \$250-500 was for costs associated with planning, e.g., supplies, printing, space rental. Then a grant for implementation would follow, usually in the range of \$1,000-3,000 and capped at \$5,000. Over time, the planning and implementation grants were combined into one and increased to grants up to \$10,000. Many groups have been funded multiple times for a succession of projects.

◆ Eligibility

To qualify, a group must:

- be located in the 23-county service region of The Community Foundation;
- be led by three or more unrelated residents;
- demonstrate ability to build on the community's existing strengths and assets;
- have a formal structure for managing funds, including a group bank account;
- have a history of at least two years of working together; and
- be in good standing with the Neighborhood Fund if a previous grantee.

In the original Mott program, bringing resources to low-income neighborhoods was emphasized. The Neighborhood Fund makes grants to low- and moderate-income communities, with the rationale that cultivation of leadership and capacity is equally important for both.

A neighborhood is defined as a section, district or area with specific characteristics based on location, community and/or residents. Placed-based focus is typical; however, factors beyond geography can define a neighborhood, including background and language.

◆ Grant Management

Managing Neighborhood Fund grants is time- and labor-intensive. In addition to the grant review process, groups need training, upfront guidance and evaluation to validate that basic capability is in place to realize the desired outcome. Ongoing administration is necessary for tracking funds, assigning and supporting Community Coaches and reviewing reports and documentation periodically submitted by the group.

From the beginning it was recognized that strong leadership was essential to put the Neighborhood Fund on a solid footing. One of The Community Foundation's most experienced program managers, Winsome Hawkins, was assigned to organize and implement the community initiative, and to serve as liaison with the Mott Foundation.

In addition, a very strong advisory committee was recruited to bring diverse skills and interests related to neighborhood development. During its inception, Barbara T. (Bobbi) Cleveland, executive director of the Tull Charitable Foundation, chaired the committee. Together, the committee and staff developed policies and established accountabilities for grantees. The basic framework they instituted has remained in place through the years, with occasional adjustments to address new situations and accommodate a wider range of worthy projects.

Talented, devoted staff leadership remains crucial to the Neighborhood Fund's continued vitality. Successive program officers have understood that the program is core to The Community Foundation's mission and influence on the region. Each has incorporated new ideas that keep the program relevant and effective.



Starting in 2007 the Mableton Improvement Coalition (Cobb County) has received a series of Neighborhood Fund grants to advance its vision of making the River Line Historic District an extraordinary asset of historical, cultural, environmental and recreational value. The original planning grant was instrumental in guiding the group to reach consensus on priorities and turn the big vision into a manageable agenda. An initial \$250 investment from the Neighborhood Fund has yielded more than \$135,000 worth of public and private investment including assistance from county government and the Atlanta Regional Commission's Lifelong Communities program to develop a master plan.



MABLETON IMPROVEMENT COALITION MEMBERS CLEAN UP LOCAL COMMUNITY.



Several grants have been made for programs serving a concentration of immigrants and refugees. In one case the group lived in an apartment complex that housed many recent African immigrants, and the grant helped them connect with established residents who could ease their transition.

Another grant helped a volunteer radio program for Eastern and Central African immigrants expand its funding base. This led to a partnership with Emory University for health broadcasts that featured East African youth attending the local high school.

Recently a grant has been made to a group of women of Somali origin to pursue an economic development opportunity. They have received training to make automotive oil changes.



SAGAL RADIO EMPOWERS NEW AMERICANS AND BUILDS COMMUNITY THROUGH RADIO PROGRAMMING IN THE LANGUAGE OF ITS LISTENERS.

The Neighborhood Fund's advisory committee continues to provide oversight of programs and make grant recommendations to present to The Community Foundation's board of directors. Members review recommendations from the staff, conduct site visits and provide leadership on relevant neighborhood issues. The membership of the committee is drawn from throughout the region and represents a range of perspectives including neighborhood, community, for-profit, nonprofit, faith-based, policymaking, philanthropy and others.

Grantmaking Learnings

- As a convener and intermediary for philanthropy, we are at our best when we realize that assets are everywhere, trust and engage with grantees and allow their perspectives to influence how we do our work.
- The effectiveness of a Neighborhood Fund grant cannot be measured solely in traditional ways. The tangible outcome is secondary to the leadership and community capacity that is developed through the process, which becomes more apparent over time.
- With coaching and support, small, informal groups can develop strategic, high-impact projects and successfully manage the financial and reporting requirements of a competitive grantmaking program.
- Successful grassroots grantmaking requires a major investment of time, talent and energy. The Neighborhood Fund has benefited enormously because we set a high standard for the advisory committee and staff.
- Staff should be open and available to grantee groups, as well as Community Coaches, at all times.

Leadership Development

In addition to funding support, a key offering of the Neighborhood Fund is leadership development. Recognizing the need to increase citizens' capacity to work effectively in their communities, the Neighborhood Fund has provided resources and formal training to cultivate and build leadership skills to help shape neighborhood change.

The Neighborhood Fund is a mechanism for discovering individuals with the ability and desire to become grassroots leaders, and to encourage them in that pursuit. Every Neighborhood Fund grant has the purpose of equipping residents with skills, experience and confidence to carry forward the spirit of change. The Neighborhood Fund teaches participants how to set goals collaboratively, do research, identify and secure resources, recruit and activate supporters and manage a project to the desired end. As these capabilities are attained, the original project becomes a springboard to higher goals.

“We wanted to build a team that reflects the diversity of the neighborhood, especially between long-time and newer residents.

Understanding how to do this, sharing ideas on how to bring neighbors together, was one of the main values of leadership training.”

Kyle Caldwell
Neighbor in Need – East Atlanta, grantee
Neighborhood Leadership Institute graduate

◆ Formal Leadership Training

At the 10-year mark, a formal leadership program was established to enhance the skills of past grant recipients in order to help them continue to make a difference in their neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Fund Leadership Institute was established using a curriculum developed by the J. W. Fanning Leadership Institute of the University of Georgia.

The Neighborhood Fund operated its Leadership Institute from 2001 to 2009. Each year, the program graduated a class of 20-25 residents from across the region. In 2009 The Community Foundation transitioned from implementation of the Neighborhood Fund Leadership Institute to a more comprehensive role of fostering dialogue among the region's citizen-level, grassroots programs and agencies.

Practical reasons for this shift included convenience for participants and customization of the curriculum based on local needs and conditions.

Partners include the Clayton, Gwinnett and DeKalb Counties Grassroots Leadership Institutes and the GALEO Latino Community Development Fund Leadership Institute. Other collaborative learning partners include the Civic League for Regional Atlanta, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta and the Atlanta Regional Commission.

The desired intent is to create efficiencies, expand leadership development opportunities and help shape neighborhood change by exposing participants to opportunities for policy/advocacy action on regional issues such as transportation, education and environmental sustainability.



As part of the Neighborhood Leadership Institute program, each class had the opportunity to put in practice what they had learned during the course of the program. The class was divided into small groups and charged with completing a project that would make a tangible difference in the community. One group decided to bring residents together in what was a newly formed city in south Fulton County called Chattahoochee Hills. The group hosted a day-long community event to educate residents about the city's services and community service opportunities. Nearly 100 residents attended the event at the local community center. Group members were able to explore and utilize skills they had learned, such as collaboration, volunteer management and meeting facilitation, to create a successful event that had a great impact in their local community.

Currently, the Neighborhood Fund is working to strengthen these programs to build their capacity so they can be a connected, regional network for grassroots leadership development.

While each local leadership institute is different, their goals are shared – to equip local leaders with the knowledge and resources to improve their communities.

Each program provides students a training curriculum focused on: asset-based community development, project planning, volunteer recruitment and management, values identification and diversity, community economic development, financial literacy, community organizing and organizational development/fundraising. In addition to a rigorous training program, participants work as teams to plan and implement neighborhood projects using the newly-learned disciplines and tools.

A group seeking a Neighborhood Fund grant is strongly advised to send at least two of its leaders for training in advance of applying. After receiving a grant, the group is reinforced in the skills and practices of leadership by the assigned Community Coach.

Leadership Learnings

- The capacity for leadership exists in every neighborhood.
- Grantee groups are more effective when at least two leaders have received formal leadership development training.
- While the essential components of leadership development are the same for any type of community, local variables need to be integrated into the learning experience.
- Once an individual has gained confidence in his/her leadership skills through training and experience, engaging others in neighborhood improvement will become a habit.

Community Coaching

A Community Coach works directly with Neighborhood Fund grantees to implement asset-based capacity building strategies and activities to improve the neighborhood. Coaches are the critical link between The Community Foundation and Neighborhood Fund grant recipients. These individuals translate their observations and experiences into best practices for assigned groups, ultimately promoting civic engagement and leadership development.

Providing expert assistance throughout the life of the grant has been an integral part of Neighborhood Fund grants from the beginning; however, the Community Coach role has evolved over time. Depending on the grantee group and its objectives, the Community Coach will act as a guide on:

- **Basic functions:** Meeting facilitation, asset mapping, program planning, marketing and communications
- **Intermediate functions:** Volunteer management, group decision making, conflict resolution and fundraising
- **Advanced functions:** Leadership development, community organizing, coalition building and community economic development

“I always talk to the leaders about delegating. Those who have driven the project, and it’s sometimes just one person, tend to think they must have their hands on everything. My job is to get them to focus, share responsibility and not be all over the place.”

Maryellen Gomes, Community Coach

Community Coaches, formerly known as technical assistance providers, report that helping group members resolve different visions of the project is a common need. A related challenge is to maintain the group’s focus and avoid trying to do too much. Human dynamics must be managed, especially the tendency of strong personalities to dominate.

The Coach is responsible for submitting the grantee groups’ initial assessment plans as well as his/her own quarterly updates and final reports.

◆ Coach Qualifications

Community Coaches are independent consultants who come from a range of backgrounds including community development, academia, nonprofit marketing, project management and other fields. Several grantees have also gone on to serve as Community Coaches. In addition to excellent skills and enjoyment in working with people, their key attributes are:

- Ability to understand how the needs expressed by the grantee group connect with core problems of the community
- Ability to connect local and neighborhood level assets and challenges to public policy and community will
- Cultural competency
- Capability to train, facilitate and nurture in a variety of situations and settings



“Coaching works both ways. I have learned as much as I have shared. Everyone has something to offer, so it’s about taking the time to discover what people can do – not what you expect them to do – and making room at the table for their contribution. Coaching provides me with an opportunity to grow and develop in ways that have been invaluable.”

Arlene Parker Goldson, Community Coach



In making assignments, the expertise of the coach is considered in relation to the group’s project, e.g., a green space project benefits from a coach with real estate, environmental or land use background. Other relevant factors can include past experience with similar projects and language skills.

◆ **Training and Compensation**

Coaches receive formal training specific to the Neighborhood Fund that provides the opportunity for interaction with other Coaches. This reflects a change from an approach that once emphasized self training and “learn as you go,” and permits The Community Foundation an opportunity to share lessons learned.

A project is either a six- or 12-month commitment. During this time the Coach will spend up to 10 hours a month working with the group and reporting on the project. At least one monthly meeting with the group is required, and usually there are more.

As the Coach role has evolved through the years to include greater responsibility, the most effective formula for compensation has been determined as a fixed flat fee based on duration of the project.

“Groups succeed because of people’s hearts, passion and commitment to the work. A coach can sometimes help impart technical knowledge or lead a group to new resources, but it’s the dedication and hard work of the group that leads to success. When residents gain confidence in their own abilities, and are willing to trust each others’ abilities, they accomplish a lot. Most successful groups are willing and interested in continuing to learn, listen to others and are open to new ideas as they grow and move forward.”

Jack Bedford, Community Coach

Coaching Learnings

- The Community Coach can be a make or break element in a project. His/her skill in helping the group negotiate logjams, both personal and practical, is fundamental to success.
- Conflict resolution skills are necessary in many projects in order to achieve a common view of the goal.
- Even highly-trained facilitators and group dynamic experts need training specifically about the Neighborhood Fund and the principles of Asset-Based Community Development.
- Coaches continuously benefit from opportunities to interact with each other and share experiences.



COMMUNITY COACH JACK BEDFORD WITH MEMBERS OF LAKE CLAIRE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST.

Partnerships

Partnerships have allowed the Neighborhood Fund to have a great impact in the various communities we serve within the 23-county region. Each partnership is unique in its design, duration and targeted community members. When considering a partnership, The Community Foundation affirms the collaboration aligns with organizational principles and goals and those of the Neighborhood Fund, and that it is important and value-added.

◆ Role of Partnerships

By partnering with organizations that have neighborhood-specific interests, the Neighborhood Fund has accessed additional resources and community connections, leading to greater diversity in how neighborhoods are engaged. Partnerships have involved public and private entities. Some have adapted the Neighborhood Fund small grant model to help a community set its own priorities. Others have focused on a specific cause or mission. Still others have leveraged the Neighborhood Fund for leadership development training.

Following are programs developed through partnerships that have helped the Neighborhood Fund achieve its goals:

Community Investment Cycle – Early in its second decade, the Neighborhood Fund engaged in its first partnership, which was with the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Atlanta Civic Site. As the location of UPS headquarters, Atlanta was the beneficiary of Casey investment targeted at stressed intown neighborhoods. This partnership was called the Community Investment Cycle (CIC) and started in 2002. It used a community resident review process to award small grants to address local issues of common concern. Residents are empowered not only to pursue specific improvements, but to prioritize and choose among them. The concept is similar to the Neighborhood Fund’s traditional awards except that grant recipients can be individuals as well as groups. Participants undergo leadership training and receive community coaching. The partnership was activated first in NPU-V, a neighborhood planning unit

where Casey is making a substantial investment to strengthen five neighborhoods. Later the program was extended to the Whitefoord/Edgewood community.

Atlanta Falcons Fitness Zone – This partnership with the Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation showed how the Neighborhood Fund can align with place-based interests that arise from business concerns. The Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation had an interest in promoting fitness and discouraging obesity, and the Atlanta Falcons NFL franchise had an interest in the well being of the neighborhoods adjacent to and near the Georgia Dome, the team’s home field. The Neighborhood Fund proved to be an ideal vehicle for activating both of these interests. Small grants of \$500 to \$3,000 were awarded for programs that encourage physical fitness and health of local youth. Certain intown neighborhoods were designated as fitness zones by the Falcons. Individuals and groups in these zones applied for funding to implement programs that promote healthy eating, reduction of obesity and/or physical fitness. The Neighborhood Fund served as the managing entity with responsibility for advertising the program, reviewing and approving proposals, providing training to grantees and supporting their projects with technical assistance.

Weed and Seed – This Department of Justice program coordinates federal, state, municipal and community resources to co-design neighborhood action plans that reduce crime, monitor juveniles, keep students in school, revitalize neighborhoods and build community capacity. Four fundamental principles underlie the Weed and Seed strategy: collaboration, coordination, community participation, and leveraging of resources.

The Weed and Seed strategy involves a two-pronged approach: law enforcement agencies and prosecutors cooperate in “weeding out” violent criminals and drug abusers and public agencies and community-based private organizations collaborate to “seed” much-needed human services, including prevention, intervention, treatment, and neighborhood restoration programs.

◆ Influence of Partnerships on the Neighborhood Fund Grantmaking Model

Partners have brought fresh thinking and innovation to our approach. Take for example the use of pre-determined program themes like the Atlanta Falcons Youth Foundation’s desire to support fitness and obesity initiatives. This has proven to be a good complement to the general practice of funding self-determined priorities of neighborhoods.

In the case of the Community Investment Cycle, the traditional Neighborhood Fund approach was modified so that instead of bringing an already-settled objective, resident committees were given access to funding and the responsibility to prioritize local improvements. In another departure, CIC allowed individuals to receive grants.

The influence of the Neighborhood Fund is also evident in other partnerships of The Community Foundation, such as **Healthy Belvedere**. This community initiative involves the Kaiser Permanente Foundation and a number of local organizations in the Belvedere community of DeKalb County. One strategy of the initiative involves providing small grants to community organizations for health-oriented projects such as nutrition, youth exercise and sports, cooking classes, a community garden and health screenings.

HEALTHY BELVEDERE PROMOTES HEALTHY-EATING AND ACTIVE LIVING THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED AND COMMUNITY DRIVEN STRATEGIES.



Partnership Learnings

- Place-based partnerships with like-minded entities increase the impact of neighborhood improvement efforts by concentrating energy, resources, insights and ideas in a “whole is greater than the sum of the parts” manner.
- Powerful partnerships are possible with a diverse range of organizations. The breadth of partner perspectives and objectives helps the Neighborhood Fund expand the impact of grants.
- Success always depends on listening to residents and valuing their sense of what is right for the neighborhood. Blending the needs of the community with the interests of all the partners can be challenging.

The Community Foundation's Investment

Through our various community initiatives like the Neighborhood Fund, The Community Foundation is focused on creating effective, long-term responses to critical issues in the metro Atlanta region. In our work with the Neighborhood Fund, we take on multiple roles including funder, convener and partner. Our investment has resulted in stronger neighborhoods across the 23-county region as well as a stronger organization, listening to and trusting more in our community partners and their abilities.

◆ Forms of Support

Many forms of support from The Community Foundation were instrumental in the Neighborhood Fund's successful beginning as well as its healthy growth through the years.

- The Neighborhood Fund grant pool is partly funded in The Community Foundation's annual grantmaking budget.
- The Community Foundation provides staff to promote the Neighborhood Fund, support the advisory committee, interact with grantees and applicants and coordinate with Community Coaches.
- The Neighborhood Fund is physically located in The Community Foundation's offices and is an integral part of operations.
- The Neighborhood Fund's endowment was initiated by The Community Foundation. Donors whose interests coincide with Neighborhood Fund activities are proactively informed and encouraged to provide support.
- The Community Foundation has invested heavily in grassroots leadership development, first by founding and operating the Neighborhood Fund Leadership Institute and later by supporting its transition to county-specific leadership development programs.

◆ Evolution of Investments Over Time

Since the Neighborhood Fund was established, The Community Foundation has devoted considerable resources and support to ensure its growth and success. From that time, the type and significance of these resources has expanded to include unique programs and partnerships. For The Community Foundation, these resources have informed our work on community development and neighborhood transformation, helping strengthen our impact on the region and ultimately, advance the shared goal of civic engagement and stronger communities. Following are some of these investments:

Information Resources – NeighborhoodNexus.org is an online hub of information resources, community-specific data and training for community leaders and nonprofits. Users can pose questions about neighborhood topics and get expert answers. The Community Foundation convenes NeighborhoodNexus.org as a collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Atlanta Regional Commission, Civic League for Regional Atlanta, Emory University, Georgia State University and United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta.

Networking – The Neighborhood Summit is an annual event that brings together leaders and residents from across metro Atlanta to discuss such issues as transportation, health, education, crime and leadership development. It is sponsored by The Community Foundation in partnership with the Civic League for Regional Atlanta.

Community-Focused Funders – Atlanta Placed-Based Funders is a learning and action group of funders with commitments to specific areas of metro Atlanta. It is convened by The Community Foundation and is one of many channels of outreach for the Neighborhood Fund.



Recognizing the need to help neighborhood residents understand how they can play an active role in their communities, the Civic League for Regional Atlanta, in partnership with The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta and other sponsors, held the first annual Neighborhood Summit in 2009. A primary goal for the Neighborhood Summit was to identify common priorities and develop action steps that neighborhoods could take to benefit their communities and the region as a whole. The Neighborhood Summit covered topics addressing how neighborhood groups work together on issues of safety, affordable housing and other key community issues, as well as ways in which neighborhood leaders can collaborate on issues of regional scale such as transportation, water supply and water quality, green space/open space conservation and land use. Since then, the Neighborhood Summit continues to provide neighborhood leaders an opportunity to strengthen civic ties, discuss regional issues and form relationships with others committed to regional collaboration.

NEIGHBORHOOD SUMMIT ATTENDEES SHARE BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING COMMUNITIES.



Investment Learnings

- The Neighborhood Fund requires substantial institutional investment to have optimal results. This includes resources for grantmaking and time commitment of staff and advisory committee.
- The Community Foundation's commitment to the Neighborhood Fund has been a powerful force for culture change within the organization. It has influenced us to look at the assets of a community in all we do. Our minds and ears are more open. We are more proactive and creative in "connecting dots" that are relevant to grassroots leadership development and neighborhood change.
- The growing movement toward place-based funding provides natural synergy for a neighborhood-based small-grants program.
- Placed-based small grants can provide a compelling vehicle for a donor who prefers to be close to grant recipients and see first hand the results they achieve and the challenges they face.

The Power of Grassroots Grantmaking

The concept and operating principles of the Neighborhood Fund tap into characteristically American grassroots qualities: local initiative, self-determination, love of home and the free association of citizens to create positive change.

The groups that we fund resemble the “associations” that Alexis de Tocqueville noted in his classic work, “Democracy in America.” They are quintessentially local and strongly attached to a place and its institutions. Although they may organize themselves in a wide variety of ways, they accept as natural law the notion that the needs and wishes of themselves and their neighbors are important. Their sleeves are rolled up and they are willing to be accountable for results, no matter if budgets are small and manpower is limited. They often start out focused on one issue and then expand their ambitions to fit their growing confidence and impact.

Instead of being bound together by formalities and legalities, these neighborhood groups are bound by collective commitment, energy, passion and desire for change. They bring different, individual skills to the table, and then develop common skills that produce a whole greater than the parts.

Both the process and the product of their shared work lead to greater community strength and resiliency. Together they plan, prioritize, push past frustration and celebrate success. In gaining new capabilities, they also deepen their relationships and develop a larger sense of possibilities for the livability of the neighborhood they share.

In changing their neighborhoods, they also have changed The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, and the region that we serve. For understanding the grassroots dynamics and potential of the region, the Neighborhood Fund is our most powerful and revealing lens. It has reshaped how we interact with grantees and made us more effective and responsive in serving donors, nonprofits and other stakeholders.

Twenty years of community gardens, neighborhood newsletters, afterschool programs, playgrounds, health fairs, cultural celebrations and various other Neighborhood Fund projects have created a powerful legacy indeed. They are the growing seeds of a vibrant metro Atlanta region in which proactive, empowered neighborhoods – energized by committed resident leaders – will shape their own future and inspire others to do the same.



GREATER TOWERS HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION RECEIVED FUNDING AND SUPPORT TO DEVELOP SUMMER PROGRAMS TO ENRICH THE LIVES OF AREA YOUTH.



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