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Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collaborative
An exploration of an innovative collaborative model

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, philanthropic foundations have been increasingly focused on fostering and increasing social change. Foundations, with their independent resource base, have the opportunity to develop relationships that cultivate creative and innovative social change initiatives (Anheier & Leat, 2006; Sandfort, 2007). It is reasonable that during these challenging times of increased demand for services with dwindling available resources across the non-profit sector that foundations work together with other organizations to fulfil a variety of strategic roles and grant resources for greater social impact (Elson, 2016).

The modern funding system is characterized by a trend that calls on foundations to play an ever more active role in their philanthropy. Many foundations have begun to consider teaming up with players in other sectors to create a network for change, in hopes of forging a greater impact than they could have had on their own. However, building productive collaborative space requires organizational capacity, and time and effort necessary to coordinate, meet, and to develop trust among organizational partners. It also involves a willingness to break down silos amongst organizations in order to maximize efforts that can result in responsive grantmaking.

Because foundations operate in the spaces between the market and state, they increasingly act as intermediaries, distributing private and public wealth for cultural development or to help solve social problems. They hold the distinct position in that they are cushioned from both political pressure and bottom-line expectations, and are well positioned to risk supporting new ideas and innovative social ventures (Porter & Kramer, 1999; Anheier & Leat, 2006). In the Canadian context, there is a willingness for foundations to increase their efforts using collaboration as a strategic tool to leverage the impact of their grants (Pearson, 2010).

A great example of a network approach to granting has been the Northern Manitoba Food Culture and Community Collaborative (NMFCC), now comprising 10 funders. The NMFCC has pooled the resources of foundations, charitable organizations, individuals, and governmental departments to create a fund that is able to invest small- and medium-scale financial and strategic resources to help communities in Northern Manitoba become stronger and more effective. Over the past three years, and through the course of attending NMFCC meetings and events, several funders have connected, got to know and trust each other, and found common interests. The NMFCC Funder's collaborative is still developing and deepening its connectivity, but it has the potential to become a powerful network for change in the region.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Within philanthropy, social change depends to a large extent on the commitment and leadership of funders who are in a position to implement practices that can improve organizational performance. One of the key types of funders in this process are foundations, as they play a significant leadership role in supporting innovative practices, and coordinating and organizing peer organizations to focus on key priority areas (Crutchfield & Grant, 2008; 2012). Yet while they participate in aspects necessary for social change, one innovative practice that foundations could be taking further advantage of is multiparty collaboration. Multiparty collaboration is becoming more essential with increasing limits on foundations' capacity and increasing demands on their resources. These pressures often make it difficult for

foundations to work independently when implementing well-coordinated initiatives that effectively address societal changes in the long-term.

In the Canadian context, foundations, non-profit organizations, public agencies, businesses and communities are discovering the power of collaboration. Funder collaboration is the process by which public and private actors make formal, sustained commitments to share decision-making and expertise, to develop effective ways to expand the use of limited resources, and work on policy change (Pearson, 2010). While the notion of multiparty collaboration lends itself to grantmakers leveraging funds from a host of partners working toward mutual goals, the role of foundations in supporting collaboration is wide-ranging and blurred. It can be reminiscent of a charity paradigm centred on short-term seed funding delivering nominal impact (Anheier & Leat, 2006), or it can mean committing time to pursuing deeper relationships with partners, and placing a shared vision ahead of individual agendas (Geofunders, n.d.).

The NMFCC is a good example of how philanthropic foundations can use collaboration through a strategic network approach to affect social change. Before discussing the details of the case, this section begins by outlining three different frameworks used by non-profits to affect social change. All three approaches emphasise the value of both the internal and external environments of non-profit organizations and provide a description of the perspectives associated with these environments.

I. Creating Social Change Through Shaping the External Network

A dominant undercurrent in the literature on philanthropic foundations has been their failure to exploit their advantageous position to lead positive social change (Porter & Kramer, 1999; Prewitt, 1999; Anheier & Leat, 2006). This may, in part, be due to the traditional philanthropic sector model based on organizations doing independent, autonomous work. In contrast, social change in philanthropy increasingly relies on a new model of organizational networks operating across sectors to influence social issues. Growing numbers of organizations have realized more sustainable mission impacts through the creation of innovative networks built on longer-term, trust-based, partnerships (Wei-Skillern & Grant, 2008; Anheier & Leat 2006; Crutchfield & Grant, 2012).

The Power of Rich Networks

In the book *Creative Philanthropy*, Anheier and Leat contend that foundations are “uniquely placed to bring genuinely creative, innovative ideas to the intransigent problems of our age ... they can take risks, consider approaches other say can’t possibly work – and they can fail with no terminal consequences” (2006, p.10). The authors contend that it is not the size of endowment, or location, or mission that matters, rather they describe a range of organizational practices and fundamental views that philanthropic foundations ought to have and sustain, in order to tackle the problems in modern day society. According to the authors, foundations that engage in “creative philanthropy” share many of the following features:

- . Role beyond conventional grantmaking, to contributing informed perspectives and encouraging others to act for change
- . Reputation and credibility through knowledge and networks
- . Theory of Change as a slow and long-term process
- . Rich networks of various types and levels
- . Flexible processes that focus on a small number of priorities
- . Active communication and dissemination to pertinent audiences
- . Adaptable and long term evaluation and performance measurements
- . Commitment to constant learning and taking risks

Creative foundations appreciate the “power of rich networks” and cross borders to build relationships and knowledge to effectively achieve their mission. However, the authors note that to be able to adopt strategies and roles that address creativity, foundations must first embody characteristics of independence and autonomy.

The Networked Nonprofit

A complementary approach to realizing greater social impact in philanthropy is the ‘networked nonprofit’ approach developed by Wei-Skillern & Marciano (2008). Like Anheier and Leat (2006) they advocate that philanthropic leaders not only focus on internal organizational goals but also leverage the resources and expertise of external peer organizations to achieve greater social change. By forming networks of like-minded stakeholders, partners can mobilize resources and activities across sectors and organizations to achieve maximum social impact. The common features for effective networking include:

- . Focus on strategies that advance the mission, even when they do not lead to direct organizational benefits;
- . Build partnerships based on trust and shared values, rather than top-down controls;
- . Share credit and promote partners rather than being concerned about individual or organizational advancement.

Wei-Skillern & Marciano caution against nonprofits such as foundations falling prey to the notion that scaling up existing programs by, for example, expanding to new locations – be an indication of social impact (2008, p. 43). By actively seeking long-term partnerships outside their immediate environment, organizations can achieve their missions far more efficiently, effectively and sustainably than they could have by working alone.

Beyond Your Four Walls

Finally, Crutchfield & Grant’s (2012) recent work demonstrates that the most successful nonprofit sector organizations, large and small, focus beyond internal organizational management to mobilize forces “beyond their four walls.” They expressly identify the first four practices as key to noticeably higher impact in the sector, while the last two are recognized as significant, though more difficult for smaller-scale organizations:

- . Share leadership by extending it outwards to local supporters;
- . Inspire ‘evangelists’ by cultivating relationships and creating experiences for supporters and volunteers who serve to advance the cause;
- . Nurture non-profit networks of like-minded organizations;
- . Master the art of adaptation to changing conditions by having the flexibility to introduce new programs or approaches;
- . Combine service delivery and advocate to change public policy;
- . Harness markets forces by partnering with, or running a business, or changing business practices.

Within this context, the gauge of a foundations power to catalyze change is in its ability to mobilize the various sectors of its external environment.

As mentioned, the three frameworks presented above are complementary approaches to understanding the ways that foundations can act innovatively to achieve greater social change. Each of the three perspectives advocates a range of strategies that nonprofit organizations can aspire towards to achieve higher impact; however, all encourage the development of relationships with like-minded organizations in their external environments. Crutchfield & Grant (2008) and Anheier & Leat (2006) share more similarities in that they both promote cultivating relationships and creating experiences for supporters to

encourage them to act for change; and that organizations ought to have the flexibility to adapt to change. The proceeding table is a review of the main practices presented above:

Share leadership by extending it outwards to local supporters	Build partnerships based on trust and shared values	Active communication & dissemination to pertinent audiences	Theory of Change as a slow and long-term process	Adaptable and long-term evaluation & performance measurements	Commitment to constant learning & taking risks	Share credit & promote partners	Flexibility to introduce new programs or approaches	Cultivate relationships & create experiences for supporters	Reputation & credibility through knowledge & networks
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The above has been a presentation of three existing frameworks in the literature on how non-profits create systemic change through innovation. However, let it be clear that in collecting the data an inductive approach was taken, so while these frameworks exist they were not considered prior to collecting data, but will be discussed in terms of presenting the NMFCC Funders collaborative.

3. METHODOLOGY

An effective method for learning the value and effectiveness of a process of innovation in philanthropic foundations is the review of a case study. An inductive case-based methodology provides an uncontrolled and unpredictable environment to explore present-day phenomena within its real-life context, and is especially appropriate when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear (Yin, 2003). A case-based methodology is the process by which one uses basic knowledge in an exercise of connectivity and operationalization where the researcher becomes a practitioner not only in their own fields of knowledge but also through experiential methods, using practical applicability as a “prerequisite for advanced understanding”; in that vein a single case study can provide a more stable foundation for conceptual understanding and that the parts of the research findings may be relevant for other cases (Flyvberg, 2007). This study is an example of a model of collaboration, and describes innovative standards for improving or describing the approach. Specifically, it focuses on an exemplary philanthropic collaborative initiative as it works to advance social change while also presenting limitations to collaborative grantmaking.

An explorative integrative design was followed - “a cyclic approach of a continuous dialogue between pre-chosen theories, generated data, interpretation, feedback from informants, which hopefully will lead us to a more inclusive theory building or understanding” (Maaløe, 2004:3).

The NMFCC Funder collaborative is a 3-year old initiative that engages philanthropic foundations, charitable organizations, northern Manitobans and governmental departments in social change through community development in remote communities in northern Manitoba (NMFCCF, n.d.). The Funder Collaborative was selected through consultation with the host organization, which described the involvement of the partners as an exceptional example of collaborative framework employing innovative ways to leverage resources, advance learning and build grantee capacity.

Data collected for this study consists of NMFCC internal data and information, including annual reports, meeting notes, budget information, evaluation reports, online publications, and digital media. The researcher conducted five interviews with funders, as well as two interviews with the host organization, and one interview with governmental staff. Interviewees were chosen according to their representation on

the collaborative network. By and large, interviewees hold senior roles within their organizations, including an executive director, three program directors, two program managers and a program officer. They were encouraged to express their views and experiences on the themes and other issues if they wished. A narrative analysis of the data was undertaken, focusing on the reconstruction of many stories told by different subjects to reveal a more coherent structure and plot than the scattered stories of single interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

The case study set out to understand (1) the forms of collaboration taking place between foundations and other organizations in the network, and (2) the outcomes of the collaboration for participating foundations, non-profit organizations and the community. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to guide the interview process, touching on subjects including the type of activities, organization and leadership of the funder organization, along with questions concerning the network model, the meaning and purpose for collaborating in the network, the range of roles it plays, and the perceived effects for the organization itself, and the communities with whom the network works. Interviews lasted approximately 45mins, were audio recorded, transcribed, and selectively categorized according to themes.

The results of the case study are organized by: first, an account of the problem area and the background in the proceeding *Case Selection* section; followed by a *Discussion* section comprising a rich description and analysis of the NMFCC and its network approach to collaboration.

4. CASE SELECTION

I. Problem Area

The food security crisis in Northern Manitoba is widespread. A 2013 report that examined 14 communities concluded that 75% of households are struggling with food insecurity, eight times higher than the Canadian food insecurity rate (Thompson et. al, 2011). The crisis is largely due to a variety of structural and political limitations, remnants of an exploitive system of colonialism that continues to this day (ibid). Limitations include the lack of infrastructure such as roads and grocery stores, access to healthy foods, expensive food prices, high poverty rates, structural unemployment, regulations that prevent many traditional food preparation and distribution activities (Thompson et al, 2010; 2011; 2012), and most recently legislative barriers around communities eligibility for community grants (Canada Revenue Agency, 2013).

High levels of moderate and severe food insecurity in Manitoba's northern communities have hastened the need for innovative community-based food initiatives for remote communities in Northern Manitoba (Thompson et. al, 2010; 2011). New local approaches focused on improved access to healthy foods and the development of resilient local economies are critical to greater community economic

2016 List of NMFCC Collaborative Partners

- J.W. McConnell Family Foundation;
- Thomas Sill Foundation;
- Lake Winnipeg Foundation;
- Silver Dollar Foundation;
- Anonymous Donor;
- Winnipeg Foundation;
- Province of Manitoba's Northern Healthy Foods Initiative;
- Aboriginal Economic Resource Development Fund;
- Aboriginal Secretariat;
- USC Canada;

development and ultimately to ensure the health and wellbeing of northern people.

Re-skilling, re-awakening important cultural traditions, strengthening local infrastructure, and taking innovative risks to support communities in their desire to break the cycle of poverty requires a meaningful shift in how projects are funded. Changing conventional grantmaking in times of scarcity can be challenging, but achievable if appropriate support, coordination and time are considered. A method to accomplishing this is through community-led collaborative funding that aligns the skills and resources of funders, local advisors and communities with a common goal.

II. About the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collaborative

To achieve meaningful impact in Northern Manitoba, the NMFCC Collaborative was established in 2014 as a strategic philanthropic collaboration to support local solutions and pool money and resources of like-minded organizations. The shared goal of the NMFCC Collaborative is to revitalize cultural traditions, improve access to healthy foods, and develop resilient local economies (Tides Canada, 2015). While this goal is not unique, it represents a level of complexity that is greatly enhanced by the size and scale of the problem in Northern Manitoba, where organizations have primarily been working in silos and in select communities. NMFCC Collaborative’s approach to reducing the high rates of poverty, food insecurity, and related health issues through community-led collaborative funding offers a creative model with great potential for change. To accomplish this the Fund works directly with municipalities in the North, and northern Aboriginal communities and organizations that are on the Qualified Donees List¹.

The Fund’s method of collaboration is based on four key approaches:

Ways of Working

- Northern Manitobans actively advise and guide the operations of the collaborative in an effort to break down traditional top-down philanthropic model
- Funders pool money and resources and collectively manage activities of the collaborative to increase efficiencies
- The collaborative supports northern communities to develop locally derived solution to acute challenges
- All partners strive to work relationally and aim for deep and intentional shared learning

(NMFCCF website <http://nmfccf.weebly.com/approach>)

As described, the key players involved are: funder and in-kind support organizations, northern Manitoban advisors, and northern communities that are grantees.

Funder & In-Kind Support Organizations

Philanthropic foundations, non-profit organizations and government agencies act as important partners in the Fund through their ability to provide resources and support risks associated with innovation. The majority of funders are private philanthropic foundations, aside from the Winnipeg Foundation that is the largest community foundation in the province. Other funding partners include three provincial departments, and four non-profit organizations comprising Heifer International Canada, USC Canada, the

¹ Since 2013, according to Canada Revenue Agency regulations Canadian foundations are only permitted to make grants to groups with Qualified Donee status. Qualified Donees are first and foremost registered charities; the designation also includes a “municipality” or a “public body performing a function of government”. Many Aboriginal communities and organizations can meet the requirements to be considered a “public body performing a function of government” through following a registration process.

Lake Winnipeg Foundation, and the Winnipeg-based branch of Tides Canada. The Fund currently receives in-kind support from Health in Common, a non-profit, in the form of program planning and evaluation since the Fund was first established. In the 2016 year, the Fund expects to grow the number of organizations providing in-kind support.

Additionally, the model of collaboration centres on one of the network partners acting as a host organization. The ‘host’ must have intellectual capital and expertise in a field and serve to cultivate, manage and guide the relationships between a network of funder partners and grantees (Council of New Jersey Grantmakers, 2002). In this respect, the Project Lead for Tides Canada is the primary architect, main coordinator and manager of the

Fund. The central role played by Tides Canada is to manage the strategic granting portfolio for the Fund, and work in active partnership with not only the funders but also the communities to help design, communicate, and implement lasting solutions. The Project Lead ensures that the collaborative effort involves a broad range of individuals that are both directly and indirectly affected by the struggles in Northern Manitoba.

Funder Responsibilities

Grantees and other stakeholders can expect the following from us:

- . **Respectful.** We will be respectful and clear with you and your community.
- . **Information Sharing.** We will try to support your work financially and also by sharing information about other grant opportunities or resources that could benefit your work. With your permission, we will share the stories of your work to the public and other potential supporters.
- . **Listening.** We will listen to your ideas and to your questions, comments, concerns or challenges. (NMFCCF website)

Hilda Dysart, elder from South Lake & northern advisor

“I help out with the NMFCC Collaborative because I was really interested in having the traditional foods coming back to the community and finding ways to help them come back. I am grateful for all of the different organizations that have decided to work together to help out in my community and so many others in northern Manitoba. It’s better to work together.” (Health in Common, 2016)

Northern Advisors

Another critical component of the Fund’s structure is the participation and guidance provided by Northern Advisors. They deliver valuable insight in shaping the strategic direction of the Fund, and in working with northern communities. There are currently five northern advisors, four Elders and one youth that offer valuable experience in living and working in the region, and in understanding the diverse cultural landscape. Though advisors are invited to participate in the granting process, the Elder advisors continue to excuse themselves from grantmaking, while the youth advisor has taken the opportunity to foster greater learning of the organizational processes of the Fund.

As mentioned, the case study focuses on the essential role of philanthropic foundations in the NMFCC Collaborative to create an innovative model of collaboration to promote healthier communities in northern Manitoba. The result has been the development of an effective model that produces several pathways to change, with multiple strategies and capacity-building for both funders and grantees at the centre. The grantees discussed in the case study have received considerable support in the application process with approximately \$491,389 granted in the past three annual funding cycles, from 2014-16. Foundation partners were a major factor in cooperatively leveraging the necessary financial and human resources for the funds success by making an important shift from simplistic charity models of philanthropy to adopting a more creative approach in practice (Anheier & Leat, 2006).

Grantee Responsibilities

Grant recipients are asked for the following things of them and their communities:

- . **Financial Responsibility** . Grantees are responsible to spend the money as planned and provide documentation. We will provide a simple template and ask recipients to keep receipts.
- . **Story Sharing, Pictures & Evaluation.** Tell us what happened! Both Tides Canada and Health in Common will help grantees to do this. We want to know what was important to the community about this project, what worked well, and what could have been improved. Together we will learn how to become stronger.
- . **Sharing with Others.** Grantees will be asked to share the benefits received (knowledge, skills, and resources) with other communities as they see fit. We would like to learn how communities do this. Grantees will also participate in four

Northern Community Grantees

Three times a year, grantees take part in a shared learning conference call centered upon stories of the projects occurring in each community. Funders and Northern Advisors are also invited to join the conversation to build their understanding. Every conference call has a central theme and assists grantees in building networks across northern Manitoba.

5. COLLABORATION

This section is a detailed presentation of the NMFCC Funder collaborative. The aim of this section is two-fold. To begin, the first sub-section provides a largely descriptive account of the history of the NMFCC Collaborative – when and why it came about, the type of work it’s doing, and how. The intention of the subsequent sub-sections is to explore the organizational practices, traits, structures and tensions that inspire the work of the Fund, in order to draw out if and how the NMFCC Collaborative has espoused an effective and innovative network approach.

I. Beginning by Building Partnerships of Trust & Shared Values

Prior to the creation of the NMFCC Collaborative in 2012, the body mandated by the province to address the challenges of the food crisis in northern Manitoba² was the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative (NHFI), located in Thompson, MB. Financial resources to the NHFI are provided through Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, with guidance from various Manitoba government departments and agencies (ANA, 2005). The NHFI has

² The initiative only targets northern Manitoba communities that fall within the Aboriginal and Northern Affairs boundary. See figure in Appendix I – Northern Healthy Foods Initiative Boundary Map.

Why use the COLLABORATIVE FUNDING MODEL?

TOP-DOWN PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING

FUNDER
(Governmental, Foundation, Non-Profit)



FUNDER
PRIORITIES

EXTERNALLY
DERIVED
SOLUTIONS

COMMUNITY
PRIORITIES

LOCALLY
DERIVED
SOLUTIONS

COLLABORATIVE PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING

HOST
(ADMINISTRATOR)



COLLABORATORS
(Private, Public, Governmental, Non-Profit)

been working in partnership with four non-profit organizations known as Regional Partners that deliver food security projects in northern and remote communities, and with a northern school division supporting the implementation of a plant, food science and nutrition curriculum. The NHFI provides administration and coordination, agricultural support and training, and agricultural equipment and materials to its partner organizations (NACC, n.d.). While the initiative's early work resulted in some noticeable achievements in school programming, equipment loan projects and greenhouse gardening, a number of disparate approaches to deal with food insecurity in the region emerged depending on the assigned Regional Partner. At the same time, it was recognized that the initial successes were small relative to the growing concern over lack of permanent infrastructure and community capacity-building to improve food security on a population level (Thompson et al, 2010).

"I was getting consistent feedback from northern communities that funders were operating in isolation and that it wasn't helping them. They [communities] kept asking for the funders to get organized with each other, speak to each other – collaborate! And then come back – then they could really begin to make some changes."

- HI's Senior Field Coordinator for the Prairies

Heifer International Canada (HI), a hunger and poverty reduction organization based in Winnipeg, was a non-profit engaged in innovative, food-based community development programs,

including northern aboriginal communities.³ In 2012, HI's Senior Field Coordinator for the Prairies began to work on the concept of a collaborative funding model centred on local solutions to northern Manitoba food issues. After years of working in Northern communities, the Senior Field Coordinator had experienced an environment where the values and norms of the Northern indigenous communities often took a back seat to those of the funders, and where the programming was more aligned to the funding agencies priority areas than the needs of the communities. Consequently, the Senior Field Coordinator began crafting a model of collaboration where the capacities of philanthropic organizations working in the North could be improved, to create more effective funding relationships sensitive to indigenous culture, traditions and priorities.

Heifer's Senior Field Coordinator had contacted a number of funders concerned with food and indigenous issues in hopes that they were interested in working

"There are many stories in northern communities of well intentioned people who come into the community with an idea of what the community should do. This top-down approach has resulted in a legacy of failed projects. It was because the projects weren't ones that the communities felt ownership over."

- HI's Senior Field Coordinator for the Prairies

collectively to create a larger funding pool and to develop shared learning in supporting northern communities. Heifer had allocated a small pot of money and wanted to partner with an organization with a similar mandate. Meetings with potential partners were arranged and together a collaborative agreement was reached with the NHFI, who was eager to match the funds to support projects with a focus on both food security and community economic development.

Developing a network centred on private and community foundations was a pivotal part to this approach because of their ability to support and fund innovation, enhance grantmaking expertise and convene key stakeholders working on the same goals. A further component was the inclusion and guidance of a small team of Northern advisors committed to sharing their experiences and perspectives. Furthermore, the aim of the model was to have funders pledge to govern through trust rather than top-down controls (Wei-Skillern & Grant, 2008).

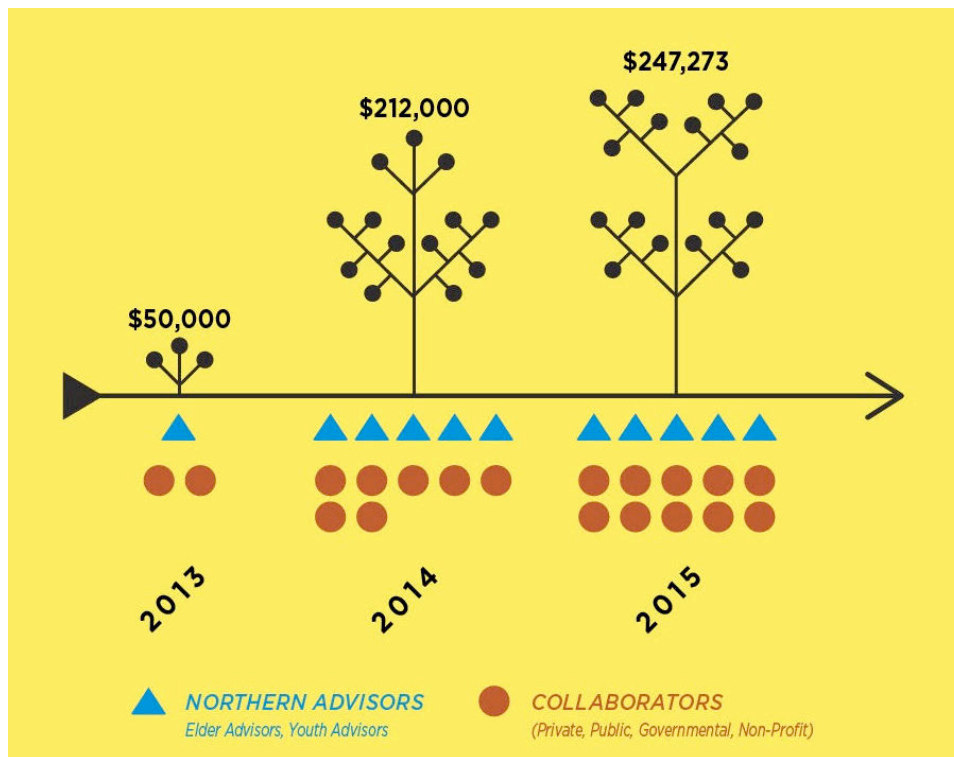
In the 2013 pilot year, an initial investment of \$50,000 - \$25,000 from the Province and \$25,000 from Heifer - provided grants to five projects. More importantly it brought complementary experience in the North and knowledge in developing goals and strategies for allocating resources, allowing for strong grantmaking. The NHFI along with its Regional Partners has deep knowledge of the region and the communities, and saw tremendous benefit in joining forces with Heifer. The partnership meant that the two organizations, with the help of the Northern Advisors would be responsible to co-ordinate intake, administration, and reporting, making the process as streamlined as possible for the fund. A total of five advisors of various demographics who have worked and lived in the North joined the network. Additionally, a community of primarily northern volunteers joined the multiparty collaboration, and was responsible for reviewing grant applications. There are approximately 20 volunteers involved in the initiative.

The pilot year more closely reflected a seed-money approach, with initial start-up capital provided by the two organizations Heifer Canada and NHFI, with the intention to expand the following year. The pilot year ended with much excitement over the range of skills and insights from the various stakeholders, and the group began to enlarge the network of partners to leverage additional resources, skills and knowledge.

³ Heifer International Canada closed its Canadian offices in 2013.

In 2014, with the closing of Heifer's doors, Tides Canada, a national leader in social change philanthropy that has deep experience in connecting a wide range of organizations and granting initiatives across the country, took over as the host organization. It must be noted that the Senior Field Coordinator, was invited by Tides, and accepted to take on the position as the Project Lead for the NMFCC Collaborative. Funding from the NHFI was renewed, and a newly established network of seven funders increased the breadth of the contributions to \$212,000. In this first official year, 13 projects focusing on horticultural initiatives involving local youth, training community members in raising poultry and livestock, and organic honey production were funded. Other projects centred on the harvesting of country foods, such as moose meat and fish, and reconnecting indigenous youth with traditional indigenous skills.

By 2015, two new funders had joined and more Northern advisors were invited on board. New network initiatives included exploring private partnerships with businesses serving Northern communities, an



evaluation of the funding model by an external organization, and the development of a website and digital media. By the end of the year, 19 projects had received funding and a new call for inquires and applications were circulated.

Figure 1 NMFCC Collaborative Timeline

The efforts achieved by the network have provided communities in northern Manitoba with a number of community development

opportunities. To date, the NMFCC Collaborative has had preliminary successes in over 25 communities, below are examples of the diversity in their grantmaking:

- . *Opaskwayak Cree Nation Mino Pimatciwin Project* – To promote healing, inter-generational teaching, eating and learning about new foods.
- . *Leaf Rapids Horticulture and Youth Program* - To honour inter-generational transmission of knowledge through traditional foods teachings, connect students to their cultural roots to help foster positive identities, and promote health and physical activity out on the land.
- . *Sherridon Poultry Project* – To raise chickens to provide meat for Elders and community families
- . *Garden Hill First Nation Wabung Fisheries Producers Coop* – To develop infrastructure, and to sell local fish at affordable prices to increase revenue to fishers, and food security.⁴

⁴ See NMFCC Collaborative website for all 2014-2015 project profiles, <http://nmfccf.weebly.com/stories.html>

With these successes has come a natural expansion and increased demand for the Fund. Each year it receives more than double the number of applications than it can support.

The first three years of the Fund has emphasized how foundations became involved in a network with the same goal, actively worked to identify with the mission and vision of the Fund, and brought in other funding partners. Besides frequent informal communications, the network meets formally in person each year at a two-day Business Meeting & Open House to share information and learn more about how the grantees are doing, in addition to cross-country conference calls during the application in-take and review processes, and the optional Learning Trips.

II. Advancing the Cause

The Fund has been creative in the way it forms and makes use of its network. NMFCC funders have been important for tapping into their respective networks to recruit and fundraise for the Fund. Focusing on strategies that advance the mission, such as expanding the network, even when they do not initiate direct benefits for a partner organization are another means to achieving social impact (Wei-Skillern & Grant, 2008).

The Winnipeg Foundation became interested in the NMFCC Collaborative in its second year because of its alignment with their Nourishing Potential Fund, a nutrition program for children in Winnipeg, but more so because of its connections to the Thomas Sill Foundation. Executives from Thomas Sill Foundation and the Winnipeg Foundation met to discuss a single grant to the Fund that expanded to a commitment to join the network and a larger investment of over three years.

USC Canada, in alliance with the Silver Dollar Foundation, also joined the Fund in 2015, after being invited by Tides Canada to participate as an observer in a field visit to northern Manitoba. USC Canada, with headquarters in Ottawa, is a food sovereignty organization supporting horticultural projects around the globe. Since 2013, the NGO has been working with Canadian farming communities to build a more secure and diverse local seed supply. USC was interested in the work of the NMFCC Collaborative because of its focus on improving marginal growing areas in indigenous communities in the North. The Silver Dollar Foundation is a small-scale family foundation that provides monetary support for project development. USC Canada and the Silver Dollar Foundation came together to provide in-kind support in the form of a representative to join the network and a three-year financial commitment.

Funding partners have been instrumental in helping the Fund evolve through close collaboration with each other, and the recruitment of additional peer foundations and stakeholders to enlarge the pool of available resources. Most recently, increases to the 2016 budget can be attributed to contributions by two private funders (\$5,000), the Aboriginal Secretariat for country foods (\$25,000) and additional granting by Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (\$86,000).

NMFCC Collaborative's Annual Budgets

2014 - \$310,000 (granting, administration, program supports)

2015 - \$378,000 (granting, administration, program supports)

2016 - \$566,500 (granting, administration, peer-to-peer learning events, northern staff person)

The Fund's approach to fostering partnership has provided it with additional funding and credibility. Network partners have gone to lengths to bring additional private funders and organizations into the network or to simply contribute. Echoing Wei-Skillern & Marciano's (2008) perspective, the NMFCC Collaborative is an example of a network of organizations that are challenging themselves to focus

outward, in other words prioritize the needs of the network, rather than concentrating inward on what benefits the network can provide to their own organization.

III. Creating Significant Experiences

A crucial component to the Fund’s model is the shared field experiences in the North. Successful organizations go beyond communicating their work to providing outsiders an opportunity to experience what they do (Crutchfield & Grant, 2006). Annual immersive “Learning Trips” involve creating interactive experiences in grantee communities that are offered to funders, northern advisors and potential donors to take part in. During each three to four days trip, community members welcome participants into their homes and community centres to share stories and learn first-hand about northern cultures and issues affecting social, economic and environmental health.

NMFCC funders conveyed that Learning Trips have been experiential and emotional events that have allowed them to create and make sense of their own lived experience:

“I loved meeting community members and gaining some better understanding of challenges, opportunities and realities that people are facing. These encounters forced a lot of mixed emotions and stirred up many questions for me. Working through these emotions and questions was a very valuable thing for me.” (quote from participant on Garden Hill learning trip, 2015)

“Being able to really understand the impact of this work and our contribution to it – but it’s also just to understand the issues and what the challenges are. You need to actually meet people in person to actually get a sense of that.” (personal communication regarding the 2014 learning trip, Jan. 9, 2016)

Annual trips to communities have helped network funders to better understand their grantmaking to communities, feel more connected to the Fund’s values, and provide an opportunity for participants to witness the Fund’s work firsthand.

IV. Developing a Theory of Social Change

“I do firmly believe that we cannot begin without first sitting down with community members and trying to understand and learn from each other. We cannot become good partners without investing the time to know each other.” (quote from participant on Garden Hill learning trip, 2015)

The challenging work of supporting remote communities in developing capacity, access, and the means to work towards transforming their current situations requires a high level of collaboration and resources. Within the philanthropic sector it is widely believed that the development of a Theory of Change is the

NMFCC Collaborative Learning Trips

Town of Leaf Rapids & South Indian Lake/O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, 2014

Participants included five network funders, two northern advisors and two guests travelled to Leaf Rapids to visit the Regional Gardening Program developed by Frontier School Division, and to South Indian Lake/O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation to visit the country foods and youth re-skilling programs.

Garden Hill First Nation, 2015

This group comprising six funders, two northern advisors and one guest visited the NMFCC-funded Wabung Fishers project, a cooperative of fishers who working together to revitalize their local fishery, and Meechim Inc., a social enterprise that does not receive NMFCC funding, but consists of a weekly fresh foods market, and a 10-acre farm that produces poultry, a fruit orchard, and other horticultural products in Garden Hill First Nation.

first step in strategic philanthropy for foundations and NGOs alike (INSP, 2005). From the outset, NMFCC funding partners have been developing their Theory of Change as an expression of the underlying beliefs and assumptions that guide their work in community development in Northern Manitoba. The Fund's Theory of Change includes six core values in which:

- “slow but steady pacing” will allow change to occur sustainably;
- communities shall receive “support in a dependable and steadfast way”;
- “we are stronger and have more potential when we work together”;
- “we all have wisdom to give”;
- “participants reciprocate to each other's efforts”;
- relationships are “developed through conversations, personal visits, story sharing, and personal exchange”.

By conceptualizing and operationalizing the Fund's values through the development of a theory of Change, it has empowered partners to recognize the assumptions and expectations that guide their decisions, actions, and resulting accomplishments. The Fund is engaged in a set of activities that extend far beyond their pooling of resources to comprise:

- novel forms of grantee evaluations;
- a peer review process led by volunteers from northern Manitoba;
- consensus decision-making by all funder partners regardless of the size of their fund contribution;
- field-site visits and activities for funders and grantees.

Funders agree that by nurturing these values, social change is the end goal, however a comment that was repeatedly acknowledged is that this requires working ‘slowly and intentionally’ in this underserved region,

“It took years to get the communities in the place that they are, and it's going to take years to correct what's been done - I'm talking about colonisation, the residential school system, and food security - are just one small piece of a very large problem” (personal communication, Dec. 16, 2015)

“Some of the challenges are a lot more systemic than any one grant can [fix] – it's great that someone can start a community garden, but there's not a grocery store in the community” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2015).

There is consensus among partners that in the grand scheme there are many challenges in northern Manitoba that will take time to heal before the desired outcomes can be achieved.

V. The Art of Adaptation

The NMFCC Collaborative's program and model are constantly being re-invented. In some cases, communities have re-developed projects as issues within communities have changed. Alternatively, communities have seen the beginnings of success and have re-applied for additional funding to grow their initiatives. For example, in 2014 Matheson Island, a fishing community along Lake Winnipeg received funding to provide locally grown, harvested foods to residents struggling with high rates of diabetes and heart disease. With the success of their first project the community applied for additional funding in 2015 to begin construction of a fish-composting site for community members. The following illustrates the Fund's active involvement in project granting over multiple years:

In a similar vein, Anheier & Leat (2006) articulated that creativity can be understood by the lack of tight limitations within a program thereby allowing for new possibilities to emerge. The Lake Winnipeg Foundation (LWF), a small environmental non-profit organization, was interested in becoming a part of the Fund. However, with a clear mandate to restore and protect Lake Winnipeg and the communities on the lake, it was restricted from pooling funds for the entire northern Manitoba region. Consequently, the network partners agreed that the LWF would be an equal partner ‘around the table’, despite their funds being limited to grantee communities along Lake Winnipeg, including Berrens River, Matheson Island and Dauphin River. As the Project Lead said: “Flexibility is a part of our approach.”

Grantee Community	2013	2014	2015	2016
Barrows Community Greenhouse		✓	✓	✓
Bayline Regional Roundtable Food Cooperative			✓	✓
Garden Hill Wabung Fisheries Producers Co-op		✓	✓	✓
Northern Bee Keeping Project	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Fish Composting Station			✓	✓
Opaskwayak Cree Nation		✓	✓	✓
OPCN: Ithinto Mechisowin Program	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peguis Community Garden		✓	✓	✓
Sayisi Traditional Foods			✓	
Sherridon		✓	✓	✓
Wasagamack Wasake Fishers			✓	✓
Brochet Youth Gardening Project		✓	✓	✓
God’s Lake Horticulture			✓	✓
Mosakahiken Community Foods Project			✓	

This also extends to the innovative ways in which partners have structured their grant to the Fund. Most partners pool their grant monies for projects, but some have chosen to provide financial resources for the administration of the Fund, while others are providing in-kind resources such as materials for projects or planning and evaluation support. One funder explained their particular arrangement with the Fund,

“I made the argument to my peers and supervisor here, that I’m going to suggest that the other funders money go right into the granting, which is better for them ... because I can argue that the administration and evaluation costs are reasonable and it’s an efficient grant for us, and I get a voice at the table. So it’s as if our money is in the pool, but it isn’t, but I get the same voice as everybody else – and I like that.” (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2015)

The Fund is aware of the need to be flexible and adaptable to the larger environment. In an effort to expand the Funds accessibility, the 2016 round of granting has extended to include two new granting streams – in addition to the regular project grants from \$5,000 to \$25,000, there are small grants from \$1,000 to \$5,000 available and planning grants from \$1,000 to \$10,000. The third year of the Fund continues to show innovation on the part of the funders in scaling and initiating new granting streams, and remains accommodating in its strategies.

VI. Constant Learning for Change

The Fund sees knowledge as the key to initiating social change, and that it has a role in creating that knowledge for change. Beyond the direct effects of its grants, building capacity is central to the Fund’s philosophy. During the Open House event in June 2015, a funder provided insight into the tangible benefits of being part of the funding collaborative,

“Access to a broader network of stakeholders and the increased access to funding that comes with such extension; the ability to tap into a diverse array of the talent that forms the collaborative; the mobilization of the entire food security continuum (government, private and non-profit organizations) toward a singular goal; and the critical component of community involvement to engage in reciprocal learning so that funders and communities alike can learn from one another.” (<http://nmfccf.weebly.com/blog>)

In addition to the stated benefits of the NMFCC Collaborative, funders also indicated that the collaborative model has enabled them to expand their reach and impact across cultures and geographies, as well as the scale of their granting:

“We’re a larger funder and it takes the same amount of time to manage a large, as it does small grant. So this is a situation where we can. And we’re also not on the ground. So when it involves decisions where you really need to be in contact with the communities, and advisors - we’re nowhere near northern Manitoba. So this allows us to support a kind of work that we otherwise just normally wouldn’t be able to support; because there is that coordination role being played by somebody closer to the ground. So that’s one big advantage to us. (personal communication, Jan.9, 2016)

“The strength of it is that it allows donor reach. I would not be able to go to Berrens, I wouldn’t have a contact in Berrens, I wouldn’t fly up there with the possibility of maybe finding something. So this is a way for me to expand the donor reach in a very efficient way.” (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2015)

Funders expressed that building relationships and an understanding with the various stakeholders was positive for all involved. When speaking about the value of the Fund, funders frequently cited the learning’s from partnering with foundations for their different skill sets, approaches to reviewing applications, and experiences. Moreover, funders described the value of ‘sitting around the table’ as a group, to improve the granting processes for recipients,

“I can see real potential in funders working together to make life easier for grantees. So this [model] was one way to test that out. And you can see that it’s challenging, because every funder has their own criteria, their own application process, deadlines and timelines, and trying to fit that together ... you can certainly see the challenges – but that’s a learning. And to me that’s a good thing of being part of the collaborative.” (personal communication, Dec. 18, 2015)

Despite the administrative challenges of working with partners who have different procedural norms, the expertise and diversity among members has been a great advantage to the Fund.

In a similar vein, the Fund’s commitment to fostering an indigenous worldview has led to a distinctive approach to learning through the evaluation process. Evaluation, for the Collaborative, is not about measuring the performance of grantees. Instead it is about creating learning opportunities to empower grantees to make changes and solve the problems they face. Consequently, grantees are made responsible to share stories, pictures and a description of what was important to the community about the project, what worked well, and what could have been improved. For their part, grantees are asked to share the knowledge, skills, and resources acquired through the grant by participating in conference calls to share stories with other communities who received grants.

Likewise, funders cited the additional skills and understandings that emerged from “on the ground” cultural learning opportunities that the network has afforded them. One funder reflected on the experience of being in a northern community and its impact on her grantmaking,

“They don’t have consistent technology or Internet - lots don’t have running water! So those kinds of information we learn from them. What it’s like to live in the community. What Southerners have done to them. I had no idea. And that helps me in all my grantmaking. Making sure that I really know what’s happening on the ground, not just that somebody has a great idea, does everybody [in the community] think this is a great idea. (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2015)

Engaging with community members on Learning Trips and during the annual Open House event have led to new themes being raised and new strategies for the network. An implication of the 2015 Learning Trip was the recognition that there is a need for slow, steady pacing so that the network’s core values of reciprocity and shared learning continue to guide the Fund’s actions. Another important learning was the Fund’s ability to invest across the spectrum in terms of both funding proven projects for large amounts or multiple years, and having the ability to fund projects for small amounts as a ‘get to know each other’ tool. A further strategy that arose has been the community-to-community learning exchanges to build mutual support and understanding among northern communities; funding for this was secured after a program manager from the Aboriginal Secretariat took part in the 2015 Learning Trip.

VII. Shared Passion & Leadership with Locals

“... for a non-indigenous, southern person who wants to be in solidarity with indigenous and northern communities in food sovereignty, we need to be led. I don’t have the knowledge or capacity to know how to do that properly, so I need to be guided and I think the Collaborative provides a framework for that to happen.” (personal communication, Jan.14, 2016)

Funding partners cooperate as “equal nodes” among the network of actors and range of issues, rather than striving to become a “central hub” that shapes the agenda (Wei-Skillern & Grant, 2008). Funders recognize the shared passion of their group, the advisors, and the volunteers as crucial to the Fund’s achievements. Without working together to develop a shared passion for supporting indigenous communities, or without giving Northerners a voice in what they think are important in their community, or to have a strong understanding about what’s happening on the ground, the Fund could not have achieved the successes or taken the risks it has.

“There is a personal commitment of the persons around the table that I think makes it unique. We’re [each] personally invested in a different way so that needs to be sustained. I think if there are transgressions, in terms of impositions on the communities, or not following Northern leadership, that that power dynamic issue is not properly tended to - that’s a threat. Because that’s what is precious about this work, if somehow we’re causing harm, or we don’t learn from our mistakes, I think that’s a threat. That’s when grantmaking can do more harm than good. Putting money in a pot doesn’t necessarily mean that you do great things. (personal communication, Jan. 14, 2016)

To date, the Fund does not appear to lack any measure of passion, and there remains great enthusiasm around its work.

As Crutchfield & Grant (2008) articulate, another area in which great organizations can build the strength of their network is through “developing and sharing their most valuable asset: people”. The Fund goes beyond investing in its inner circle to include investments in its grantees, through a recent innovation - the community-to-community learning exchanges. As previously indicated, the NMFCC Collaborative has secured capital for community-to-community learning exchanges in the 2016 year. The aim of the exchanges is to develop talent and leadership among grant recipients, as a tool to create meaningful and sustainable improvements in the capacity of Northern communities. The Fund is interested in helping

communities to not only build capacity, but also to develop leadership and increase their influence over the larger system by working side by side with other northern communities.

VIII. Inspired & Active Communication & Dissemination

Anheier & Leat (2006) describe how foundations engaged in “strategic philanthropy” ought to take advantage of their privileged position and be “creative” in their problem-solving and implementation, and then disseminate those results. In line with this thinking the Fund has engaged in two evaluation reports conducted by a local planning and evaluation organization, which highlight the power of the network funders to leverage greater collective impact. The *NMFCC Collaborative - Evaluating the Collaborative Model 2015 Report* describes the Fund’s strengths as:

- convening partners and supporting grassroots projects;
- supporting effective and efficient grantmaking;
- identifying best practices, challenges and lessons learned;
- and to appreciate and employ the differences across organizations (Health in Common, Evaluation Report 2015).

Garnering support and being able to “appeal to people’s emotions at an almost unconscious level” through a clear and compelling expression of an organizations purpose, goals and values is another key component to the work of the Fund (Crutchfield & Grant, 2008, p.107). In this case, the role of the Project Lead in communicating with stakeholders and the general public is key. The Project Lead has been a strong voice in articulating the Fund’s approach to its partners and supporters alike, and consequently inspiring them to act on its vision: *the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture & Community Fund is an innovative and collaborative effort with northern community people and multiple funding agencies working together to examine and create community-driven solutions to food insecurity, community health, community economic development, and environmental degradation* (<http://nmfccf.weebly.com>).

This role also consists of being visible in Northern communities, fostering relationships with grantees, attending Northern events, and providing good online materials for potential donors and grantees alike. To maintain relations with communities and attract potential donors, the Project Lead curates a regular Blog and photos of projects, as well as interviews with network partners and communities.⁵

From the start, the NMFCC Collaborative has used compelling impact stories from communities as a communication tool to share its values. The stories, which include inspiring quotations from funders, advisors and community members are available on the NMFCCF Collaborative website, and the Tides Canada website. Both Anheier & Leat (2006) and Crutchfield & Grant (2012) stress that communicating stories to donors and supporters in a way that enables them to see, feel, and experience the work means engaging them in a manner that makes them want to cultivate relations and join the cause. Time and again, funders expressed their positive sentiment towards the communication materials developed for the NMFCC Collaborative,

“... the video by Build Films, it’s on three of our communities. It’s a beautiful film, 13mins long, and it’s on our website. I showed that to my colleagues. I show that to anyone that comes to my home. When we start talking about Manitoba – I say you have to watch this film. I think that it helps people

⁵ Blog posts for the NMFCC Collaborative can be accessed on the Tides Canada website: <http://tidescanada.org/programs/northern-manitoba-food-culture-and-community-fund/>.

around debunking all the myths about northern living, northern stereotypes.”⁶ (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2015)

Communication is the glue that binds the collaboration together. Fund partners are committed to communicating on multiple levels and through different means. They work closely and actively with the northern advisors and grantees to learn more about the areas where they are less informed. Through a concerted effort to collect and disseminate the stories beyond their own backyard, partners collectively deepen their understanding of community challenges in the North, which has enabled them to create opportunities for youth, improve health, and strengthen local economies. Furthermore, through opportunities to come together to share stories, such as the learning trips, it has inspired partners, volunteers and grant recipients, to engage with the Fund to express their own values.

IX. Areas of Tension

Despite the many successes in its short history, the Fund could be facing some difficulties in terms of its sustainability; seeking out new partners and the ways it measures impact.

Committing to the Long-term

The issue of the Fund’s financial sustainability is taking up space in the minds of many of its funders. Despite the funders’ enthusiasm towards the model and the work of the Fund, the group expressed some divide in terms of extending their involvement into the long-term. Funders were clear that short-term funding, prevalent across the sector, is not an effective way to address the needs in the North. However, three of the private foundations also stated that renewing funding beyond their three years commitments would be a ‘difficult sell’ to their respective boards; one funder went as far as to say that the nature of philanthropy “can be a bit flakey, with people are chasing the shiny object”. In general, funders were quick to state that food security and community development grantmaking in the region ought to remain a priority into the future; however some of the private foundations recognized that the cultural practice associated with grantmaking is to support an initiative for two years and then move on.

At the same time, other funders had more flexible perspectives on maintaining the fund into the future. One funder suggested the connection between long-term commitments and the need for a fundraising strategy that enables funders to make multi-year financial contributions without contributing of their time,

“I think that the success of the Collaborative is going to rest in the idea of getting people to stay committed and interested, finding a way to get the appropriate contribution from each partner. So some people might just want to write a cheque, you know you can get tired if you have to put too much time in. For some people their engagement will grow the more they participate and for others they think ‘I’ve been doing this for 3 years now and I don’t want to do this anymore’ - and maybe they would just want to write a cheque. (personal communication, Jan. 14, 2016)

The current structure allows for one year donations from external funding bodies without engaging in the work of the Fund. Moreover, it may be that a recruitment strategy, in addition to a fundraising strategy, for longer-term growth is needed.

Besides financial survival, the Fund is committed to building a sustainable value system based on locally derived solutions, working relationally, and deep and intentional shared learning. However, a key challenge to this approach is the time it takes to develop local ownership, build trust and foster relations. Currently, it is the role of the Tides Canada Project Lead, to foster trusting relationships at all levels, from

⁶ The video “NA-TAS-KEK: Reconnecting with Mother Earth” by Build Films can be viewed on the NMFCC Collaborative website: <http://nmfccf.weebly.com/videos.html>

funders to community members. In most cases, this takes multiple years. In a recent report to the funders, the Project Lead reminded funders that they are in the business of “slow granting”, that funders cannot expect their social return on investment to be more than negligible at this point in time, because the issues facing communities will take a long time to turn around.

On a similar note, working with Northern communities takes time and skill. All funders echoed the need for additional support to the Project Lead, and that the investment required in the work of the Fund is different from conventional grantmaking.

“One of the things that I think that’s happening right now is that there’s too much work for Julie [Project Lead]. She needs some staff. It [the Fund] is really successful; the need is just so overwhelming. And I don’t just mean financial, the relationship that you need to build with the community - the travel! One of the things that Julie has done is that she travels to these communities; she doesn’t just have a phone relationship with them. She meets the people, she hills the potatoes, she catches the fish. (personal communication, Dec. 16, 2015)

The onus for building relationships and capacity has largely been left to the host organization. Becoming a higher impact organization requires investing additional resources such as time and effort, and thus it will be in the best interest of the Fund to also be creative around supporting the host arrangement into the future.

Partnering with Business

To achieve more social impact a key means is to “work with and through businesses” (Cruthfield & Grant, 2008). Since its establishment, the Fund has been interested in partnering with Northern businesses to influence market forces. As a starting point it has been seeking out corporate partnerships with companies in Northern Manitoba. The Project Lead has been in contact with a variety of Northern-based businesses to access donations, or create strategic alliances with relevant sponsors, but so far to no avail.

Measuring the Impact

Funders have different reporting requirements and interests in relation to performance measurements, which could pose a challenge for the Fund. While some funders value performance measures to identify best practices and expand usage, other funders are more concerned with enriching the work by communities,

“There’s a kind of language we’re hearing from the communities that’s a huge change from the first time we went to the communities, to the third time we went. They’re saying things like ‘we need to take care of our health’, whereas before they said ‘we need better food’ so they’re making that connection.” (personal communication, Dec. 11, 2015)

Contrary to a standard narrative report, the evaluation process for grantees “empowers and supports communities to ask the questions they feel are the most relevant to their work”. This approach to evaluation enables grantees to disclose their own outcomes, interests and priorities through story-telling, rather than data points prescribed by funders.

X. Section Conclusion

In conclusion, the Fund is having meaningful impacts on Northern communities, with successes attributed to an innovative grantmaking model built on shared learning and building interpersonal relationships among funders, and also between funders and grantees.

The granting work by the Fund has been highly effective in that funders focus on the external, rather than the internal organizational environment. By and large, in these first three years funders have committed remarkable time, energy and resources to see the mission of the NMFCC Collaborative succeed. A pooled funding approach has enabled the Fund to develop innovative ways to grant according to the needs of Northern Manitoba communities. The mobilization of sufficient financial resources has meant that each funder can focus their energy on their areas of expertise, also leading to a dynamic learning environment among network partners. With less pressure to continually seek resources, the network has been in the uncommon position to spend their energy on striving to achieve the fund's mission. Funders see themselves as partners of an interrelated and equal group, instead of the more conventional approach of exchanging resources and forming short-term partnerships to achieve a specific goal. Likewise, governance of the NMFCC Collaborative has been based on high levels of trust and a dedication to collaboration, instead of the need to exercise control.

The Fund is a network that intentionally, meaningfully and strategically coordinates strategies, goals, information, and responsibility. Through the use of technology to communicate and connect across the country, it has enabled funders inside and outside of the region to drive towards a similar set of outcomes and to collect similar types of information from communities in Northern Manitoba. It has been intentional in the way it engages funders in the grant application and review processes, creating a more systematic approach. Other key benefits of the collaborative effort have been cooperative agenda-setting, and the collective impact arising from funder cooperation. The Fund has developed events and opportunities to collectively solve problems and share knowledge with one another in a targeted, meaningful way that drives performance.

A network approach to collaboration requires ways of working with funders that are very different from what is involved in traditional philanthropic sector relationships. More and more philanthropic organizations are investing in partnerships and are increasingly focused upon them as vehicles for social change. This case has demonstrated that non-profits who embed partnership capabilities into the fabric of their organizational culture and the way they do grantmaking - will be a step above the rest.

6. LIMITATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

The literature on collaborative approaches to social change comprises a large body of various perspectives. Consequently, this study must be understood as a partial perspective, building on the researchers knowledge of the field and aspects that are relevant for developing an understanding of the approaches to creating social change in philanthropy. The purpose of the case study was to understand and explore the forms and outcomes of the model of collaboration employed by the NMFCC Collaborative according to alternate perspectives, and organize them according to an understanding of collaboration.

Looking to the future, a central question is how to best move toward the development of a comprehensive framework that integrates existing theory and produces a coherent and practical strategy for philanthropic organizations in Canada to affect social change through collaboration. One of the challenges is that much of the theorizing has been done in Canadian universities and disparate meetings or conferences. Hence the bridges to local, community-level, not to mention indigenous approaches are lacking. At the same time, there seems to be an increasing recognition for the need to work together for meaningful shared thinking on how to achieve social impact.

Bringing together funders that have been involved in multiparty collaborative approaches to gain consensus on a framework for collaboration could satisfy that need. Providing funders with the occasion

to share experiences about opportunities and challenges in practice could evolve into the beginnings of an integrative framework.

This report began by commenting on the opportunity that foundations have to nurture relationships that cultivate creative and innovative social change initiatives. Although the reasons for the persistence of these limited relations are explicable, this research suggests that now is the time to begin fostering them. The report offers some key perspectives to realizing social change. In particular, the perspectives emphasize the central importance of cultivating rich networks of organizations in the external organizational environment based on trust and shared values.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Northern Manitoba Healthy Foods Initiative Map

