HOT TOPIC
The Strategy Behind Strategic Planning

I recently returned from a strategic planning Board session for Alabama Giving—a statewide organization of grantmakers. (Yes—-we do strategic plans too.) Eleven CEO’s from foundations met for seven hours. We represented family, community, corporate and private foundations. We came from small rural communities, from the big cities of Birmingham and Montgomery, and everything in between. Our asset sizes ranged from $1 million to $125 million. Some participants were lifelong nonprofit leaders, a few were relatively new, and the rest were somewhere in between. Some of our organizations fund within a deep, narrow scope of work (like the Eyesight Foundation) and some fund broadly (like the Daniel Foundation.) On the surface, we seemed to have little in common.

What was strangely striking about the day was this. It was Feb. 26th. The markets were going crazy, and every portfolio represented in that room was losing money—a lot of money. And while we checked with our advisors and/or our Boards throughout the day, everyone showed up, everyone stayed for the whole session, and no one mentioned money or markets or stocks or finances all day long. Even on that particularly nerve-racking day, we, like each of you, realized our job was to focus on those things we could affect positively: investing in better education for Alabama’s children, teens, and adults; improving the health of Alabamians, particularly of those in poverty; seeking ways to address the challenges of the homeless, mentally ill, underprepared parents, and abandoned senior citizens in our communities. And we talked about a collaborative process to identify an initiative that each of us—as different as we are from one another—could support and push forward for the betterment of our state. As the markets rode the rollercoaster, we preached to ourselves the same things that you say to yourselves everyday: stay focused on the positive, work collaboratively, share our strengths. At the end of the day it does not matter which side of the grant we are on…strategic planning rocks!

2020 GRANT AWARD Year

Although our open grant cycle for 2020 has just begun, WF already is committed to investing over $6 million dollars for education, health, and quality of life this year. Some of this is directed at support for WF programs: Bright Key, CapCONNECT, the Arts Initiative, Wiregrass Public Safety Center, a Summer Feeding Program partnership with Dothan City Schools, and a few other initiatives on which we have begun work. And we will be reviewing requests for approx. $2 million dollars in project applications during our April Board meeting.

However, despite the volume of requests (and the quirks of the financial markets) WF remains committed to our open grant solicitation process. If you are planning to apply for a program, capital, or Micro-Grant this year, please keep our deadlines in mind: May 1 (for our June Meeting); July 1 (for Aug.); and Sept 1 (for Oct.). For technical issues with the grant application—call Tina. Questions about an existing grant program—call Cindy. Ideas for new projects—call Barbara or Troy. Or just come by for coffee with all of us, anytime.

CapCONNECT Is BACK!

Although it never really left. CapCONNECT simply entered a phase of focused, individual organizational coaching that (hopefully) was useful to members, but did not bring them together. And it is that coming together and sharing of insights that many participants found to be so valuable. So the Development Team heard your input and, as you read in my email to you on 2/28, the next cycle of CapCONNECT will include both workshops with stellar presenters and national reputations and the opportunity for organizations to receive technical assistance tailored to individual goals and projects. The door also will swing open to include some area nonprofits who were not able to join CapCONNECT at the start, but who have indicated they are ready and eager to join us.

So be on the lookout for announcements of the first large group workshop in mid-May and an exciting series of programs and coaching for 2020-21.

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Vol 22 www.wiregrassfoundation.org Mar. 2020