

**The Community Capacity Fund:  
Understanding its Role in Strengthening the  
Washington, D.C. Region After 9/11**  
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**Report I — Creation, Implementation, and Lessons Learned**

**Preface**

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, left thousands of families shattered and grieving. The sudden loss of so many people had, and will continue to have, an immeasurable impact on our communities. Large relief funds, like the September 11<sup>th</sup> Fund (New York) and the Survivors' Fund (Washington, D.C.), quickly formed post-September 11 to help survivors and families of these direct victims with both immediate and long-term needs. But the devastation of September 11 also extended to a secondary group—workers in the hotel and tourism industries who lost their jobs because of the sudden decrease in visitors to the New York and Washington, D.C., regions. These displaced workers, many of whom were new immigrants, were not beneficiaries of the victim relief funds.

It was in this context that the Community Capacity Fund (CCF) was launched in October 2001, spurred by a major investment from the Ford Foundation in the capital region. The CCF was created to strengthen the region's capacity to not only advocate for and reemploy the dislocated workers, but also to strengthen cross-jurisdictional efforts to prepare for and respond to any future disasters. With additional funding from several sources, including the New York Times Foundation, America Online, and the Japan Relief Fund, the CCF has granted nearly \$1.5 million to organizations in the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland. And now, nearly a year after the attacks, the CCF steering committee and staff are beginning to look back at their hard work and assess the impact of their philanthropy on area communities.

This is the first of two reports documenting the implementation of the Community Capacity Fund, a project of Washington Grantmakers. Based on an analysis of interviews of key steering committee members and staff of the Community Capacity Fund, as well as a review of various Fund documents, including meeting notes, staff reports, and grant proposals, **Report I** examines the design of and lessons learned from the grantmaking process. **Report II**, scheduled for completion in September 2003, will focus on the community capacity building achieved through the Fund's grantmaking in advocacy, skills training, and disaster preparedness.

## **The Community Capacity Fund — Creation, Implementation, and Lessons Learned**

### **Executive Summary**

The Community Capacity Fund (CCF), a program of Washington Grantmakers, is acknowledged as a new model of national funding for local, collaborative grantmaking. In the face of serious community needs and concerns post–September 11, 2001, as well as many potential ways to address those needs, the Fund developed a framework for strengthening the ability of nonprofits to respond to the terrorist attacks. An investment by the Ford Foundation (and, ultimately, several other funders) in the Washington, D.C., region’s recovery enabled a large group of experienced local grantmakers and nonprofit leaders to jointly translate that framework into action. Within less than a year, CCF awarded \$1,400,055 in grants to organizations advocating for and reemploying workers dislocated by September 11, as well as to organizations developing cross-jurisdictional efforts to respond to future disasters.

Many useful lessons arise from the implementation of this unique effort—for local grantmakers interested in developing a similar initiative, and for national funders considering new ways to address local concerns.

### **What made the Community Capacity Fund possible?**

1. The Ford Foundation’s desire to help the Washington, D.C., community and its vision of a locally designed response to the September 11 crisis.
2. The quick but thoughtful development by local philanthropy leaders and Washington Grantmakers of a fund that would build the region’s capacity to both help those laid off in the aftermath of September 11 and prepare for and respond to any future disasters.

### **What made the Community Capacity Fund’s implementation successful?**

1. The “pure emotional impact of September 11” events and a sense of urgency to help in the region’s recovery led leaders to act.
2. The Ford Foundation’s willingness to make the grant and then step back, allowing the steering committee to determine the best ways to build the capacity of local organizations.
3. The steering committee and staff operated strategically and decisively—
  - The committee chair was strong but inclusive in her guidance of the group through the process.
  - Staff administered the Fund knowledgeably, efficiently, and with inspiration.
  - All participants were totally engaged with and committed to the Fund’s mission and process.
  - Committee members had a wide range of knowledge, experience, perspectives, and personal relationships.
  - All participants were open to taking some risks.
  - Committee members were willing to admit what they did not know and bring in experts with appropriate knowledge.
  - Committee members were willing to put aside individual grantmaking agendas and create a new one together.

4. The Community Capacity Fund's approach was swift but thoughtful—

- Committee members felt more willing to commit to such an intensive process because there was an explicit end date for the Fund.
- Significant time was devoted at the outset to establishing the Fund's mission, goals, and values.
- The staff and committee always returned to mission objectives when making grant decisions.
- Significant time was also given to developing and translating into action a broad definition of *capacity building*.
- The committee used a combination of grantmaking approaches—requests for proposals (RFPs) and invited proposals—that were tailored to the issue areas.

#### **What are the lessons for collaborative grantmaking that is regionally focused?**

1. Include a government representative on the steering committee if grants are made in areas, like disaster preparedness, with government funding overlap.
2. Invite experts who are not funders to join the steering committee once grantmaking areas are determined.
3. Recognize the significant regional differences in government resources, numbers and capacities of nonprofit organizations, and levels of communication between the public and private sectors.
4. Recognize the interdependence of the three sectors—nonprofits, government, and business—and build relationships that take advantage of each sector's resources.
5. Explore collaborative grantmaking as a responsive and strategic way to address community issues with national funds.

#### **Community Capacity Fund Milestones**

- ❖ **October 5, 2001:** Washington Grantmakers delivers a proposal to the Ford Foundation to 1) create a capacity-building grant fund and 2) to document/coordinate the philanthropic response to September 11.
- ❖ **October 18:** The Ford Foundation gives \$1.2 million to launch this regional effort.
- ❖ **By November 5:** Steering committee of 17 regional grantmakers and nonprofit leaders forms, staff comes on board, and a scan of area needs is conducted.
- ❖ **November 8:** The Community Capacity Fund is launched at a press briefing.
- ❖ **November 30:** Committee and staff discuss mission and goals, and hear presentations from area organizations on the region's current needs and existing safety net.
- ❖ **December 14:** Committee adopts a mission and approves three grantmaking categories and its first disaster preparedness grants. Advocacy and skills training subgroups form.
- ❖ **January 23, 2002:** Subgroups define advocacy and skills training grantmaking strategies.
- ❖ **February 4:** CCF honored as the featured charity at the *Washington Business Journal's* "Book of Lists" party.
- ❖ **March 18:** Committee approves nearly \$600,000 in grants to area skills training and educational programs designed to help reemploy displaced workers.
- ❖ **April 18:** Assessment of information and referral system (211) in region completed.
- ❖ **May 16:** Committee approves disaster preparedness grantmaking guidelines.
- ❖ **July 17:** Committee allocates remaining funds and discusses lessons learned at the final business meeting.

## **The Community Capacity Fund —Creation, Implementation, and Lessons Learned**

*“The test was not that day. The test was in the days afterward.”*

Lucille Clifton, American poet

### **The Idea**

In the weeks following the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., a small group of local funders and philanthropy leaders began meeting on a regular basis. Trying to make sense of how the region’s grantmakers could respond to the crisis, their discussions centered on evaluating and addressing the community’s new needs in the aftermath of the attacks.

The group’s discussions became significantly more focused when the Ford Foundation contacted members of the group and expressed an interest in seeding a small fund, residing at Washington Grantmakers, that would serve the post-September 11 needs of the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The impromptu grantmaker “support” group deliberated about a potential niche for such a fund and determined that, in light of the outpouring of individual, corporate, and foundation donations to direct victims of the attacks, a vehicle was needed to address the growing crisis for area workers laid off after September 11 and the nonprofit organizations trying to support this vulnerable population. There was interest in advocacy and workforce development issues, in addition to disaster preparedness. The group also acknowledged, both to themselves and to Ford, the importance of making grants to build the capacity of these organizations rather than to simply establish new projects.

### **Obtaining the Grant**

“There was a fascinating clarity of thought coming out of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks,” noted a local funder involved in this effort. Washington Grantmakers, the regional association of grantmakers in the D.C. metropolitan area, quickly developed a proposal based on these principles for consideration by the Ford Foundation. The proposal requested a two-part, \$1.2 million grant to (1) establish a “Capacity- Building Grant Fund” that would be used to “strengthen the immediate and near-term capacity needs” of nonprofit organizations responding to the outcomes of the terrorist attacks, and (2) document, coordinate, and communicate the “near-term philanthropic response to September 11<sup>th</sup> in the Washington, D.C., region.” The grant’s term would be one year, with the hope that, at its completion, the region would be more prepared, more resilient, and more stable than it was on September 12, 2001.

Within two weeks of submitting the proposal, Washington Grantmakers announced the grant award at an October 18 media event attended by Susan Berresford, president of the Ford Foundation, and local business and philanthropy leaders. Hailing the grant as an important and generous investment in the Washington area by the Ford Foundation, Washington Grantmakers stated that the grant would primarily establish a fund to strengthen the ability of local nonprofits to provide services related to relief and recovery efforts and to respond to any future disasters.

### **Gathering the Leadership**

Soon after the grant was awarded, Washington Grantmakers and key foundation leaders who were part of the original funder “support” group—including Terri Freeman of the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region, Julie Rogers of the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, and Margaret O’Byron of the Consumer Health Foundation—set about forming a steering committee of local grantmakers and nonprofit leaders with the right experience to guide the implementation of the new Community Capacity Fund (CCF). Hope Gleicher, executive director of the Trellis Fund, was asked to chair the steering committee. Gleicher, who had been part of the original funder discussion group, was intensely committed to the resulting initiative and well connected with other area grantmakers. In describing how critical Gleicher’s leadership was to the success of the Fund, a committee member portrayed her as “a strong and inclusive chair. People don’t feel managed but she’s a good manager.”

Gleicher and O’Byron began to approach their philanthropic colleagues and within three weeks of receiving the grant, a steering committee of 17 local funders and nonprofit leaders convened to launch CCF.

***Composition of the Committee.*** The steering committee included grantmakers with a wide range of knowledge, experience, perspectives, and personal relationships. Committee members suggested that “it came pretty close to being the perfect mix,” with representation from small and large foundations, from corporate, community, and private foundations, and from local and national foundations. The committee comprised relatively new grantmakers and those “who have been in the field forever,” and included grantmakers with a broad knowledge of the community and those with specific areas of interest. Finally, and perhaps most important to the task at hand, the steering committee included three non-funders: Janet Shenk of the AFL-CIO, Alan Abramson of the Nonprofit Sector and Philanthropy Program, and Susan Gross of the Management Assistance Group. These individuals contributed different but critical perspectives on community needs, as well as specialized experience in workforce development and skills training, nonprofit capacity building, and advocacy organizations.

Though the racial and gender diversity of the committee was representative of philanthropy in this region, its composition highlighted the fact that grantmakers do not accurately represent the racial makeup of the region. “Diversity within the funding community is not great, in terms of both race and gender,” explained a steering committee member, adding, “the reality is that the pool is skinny.” Some members also felt that it would have been helpful to have included on the committee representatives from the communities being served, although members stressed that this did not mean that the steering committee was not in touch with community needs.

CCF committee members and staff repeatedly emphasized that the most important factor at meetings was the group’s total engagement with the mission and process fueled by its desire to serve the nation in a time of crisis. As one member described it: “The work was colored by the reason for gathering. Everyone just came with the right feeling and

attitude, which lead to not getting mired in politics.” CCF’s grantmaking process required a significant amount of work by the committee, and many members report that such an intense time commitment would have been difficult absent the urgency of their cause and the one-year time limit. Committee members’ proximity to each other also helped. “It seems like a small thing,” noted one steering committee member, “but the fact that everyone is in the same town helps incredibly.”

**Staffing.** Simultaneous with the formation of the steering committee, Washington Grantmakers hired Chuck Bean as program officer for the Fund, with Eduardo Romero joining as program coordinator shortly thereafter. Though Bean had previously strategized with Hope Gleicher and Kae Dakin, president of Washington Grantmakers, about implementing the Fund, the new program officer’s first day on staff coincided with the first meeting of the steering committee. Many of those who were important to CCF’s success, therefore, jumped into the process at the same time. Looking back, Washington Grantmakers has emphasized how lucky they were to have been able to hire such competent staff so quickly. Administering the Fund was the sole responsibility of the staff, noted Dakin, which is a “luxury in the regular world of philanthropy.” According to nearly everyone involved with the Community Capacity Fund, the staff’s leadership was critical to the success of the effort. Bean and Romero were always prepared, knowledgeable about the issues, strategic in their communications, and confident that the steering committee would be able to reach consensus on key decisions.

**Role of the Regional Association.** While Washington Grantmakers was instrumental in raising the grant that established the Community Capacity Fund and supervised its administration, the association played a lesser role in making specific decisions about grantmaking strategies and disbursing the funds. Reflecting on this role, a steering committee member felt strongly that “the regional association should be an association, not a grantmaking body,” so its decision to administer the Fund through a steering committee was very responsible.

**An Important Early Decision.** Gleicher and Dakin had, at the outset, decided that it was not feasible to actively seek additional support for the Fund, and the steering committee generally agreed with this decision. Many expressed a desire to focus on disbursing the Ford grant as quickly and strategically as possible. Some mentioned that they felt at that time, more than ever, that they wanted to have plenty of time outside of work to spend with their families. Others were concerned about competing with area funds serving direct victims of the attacks. Looking back, one steering committee member suggested that this decision not to seek additional funds was “wise because we didn’t have a product, with a track record, to sell to national funders.”

A small minority of the committee argued for raising additional funds, suggesting that there was an abundance of money being donated for September 11 causes—“both then and now”—and overwhelming needs in the community that the original Ford grant could not alleviate.

Though the committee and staff did not directly seek funds, they did “work their networks” and garnered an additional \$615,000 in contributions from America Online, the New York Times Foundation, the Japanese Relief Fund, and donors resulting from the *Washington Business Journal*’s “Book of Lists” party.

### **Developing the Mission and Goals**

Recognizing that the committee would need an introduction to the post–September 11 environment to determine CCF’s focus, the leadership had, on receiving the Ford grant, contracted with a researcher to “identify other relief and recovery funds and to obtain feedback from the nonprofit community about their needs.” This scan of the region’s resources and needs was presented at the steering committee’s first meeting on November 5, 2001. Committee members also received updates on the activities of other victim relief funds, the Survivors’ Fund at the Community Foundation of the National Capital Region, and the United Way’s September 11<sup>th</sup> Fund. Janet Shenk, a committee member who works at the AFL-CIO, also shared data about layoffs in the capital area’s hospitality industry, noting that half of the 4,000 members of the local Hotel Workers Union had been laid off in the previous several weeks. Feedback from area nonprofits confirmed that the “ripple effects [of the terrorist attacks were] being felt hardest in low-income and immigrant communities, where scores of airport workers, taxi drivers, hotel, restaurant and other self-employed persons live.”

Based on these reports and subsequent discussion, the steering committee initially determined it would be important for the Fund to address the capacity of nonprofit organizations to serve these vulnerable individuals, many of whom are undocumented residents and ineligible for unemployment benefits. The committee raised other critical issues as well, such as ways to enhance coordination among charities and other organizations active after a disaster, and link the CCF’s grantmaking decisions with the plans of local government.

Another important discussion centered on the Fund’s definition of “capacity building,” which had been strongly emphasized in the original grant proposal to the Ford Foundation. One committee member recalled feeling uneasy about the vagueness of this issue at the outset, considering that “strengthening the capacity” of organizations was supposed to guide the group’s decisions about disbursing the grants. This member was ultimately impressed with the staff’s ability to “take the committee’s ideas and turn them into a grantmaking strategy.” Another committee member reported that “the open-endedness of ways to achieve capacity building made it more exciting.”

Nevertheless, over the course of two more steering committee meetings, the group refined their conception of capacity building in the context of advocating for social services for and reemploying community residents and of preparing the region for future disasters. The committee also made an important distinction when it explicitly decided to fund *organizations* serving the “vulnerable population,” not the individuals themselves.

Before settling on a mission and preliminary goals, the CCF steering committee requested several more presentations on the status of area disaster plans and the public

sector safety net, and asked themselves such questions as, “What do we see in place when all the money is spent...building organizations or collaborative groups to do what?” These activities not only facilitated a clear definition of capacity building, but also helped committee members “filter the proposals later on.” On December 14, less than two months after the grant check was delivered to Washington Grantmakers, the steering committee adopted the following statement of goals:

- The Community Capacity Fund was created to strengthen the ability of organizations to respond to the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the Washington region and to build the region’s capability to respond to possible future disasters. As initial goals, the Community Capacity Fund will strengthen:*
- 1. Advocacy capacity of organizations striving to expand the public sector safety net for dislocated workers in affected industries.*
  - 2. Skills training and other programs to reemploy dislocated workers in affected industries.*
  - 3. Collaborative efforts to prepare for, and respond to, disasters in the region.*

### **Defining the Grantmaking Categories**

With the Fund’s mission and grantmaking categories approved, the CCF staff and committee immediately (at the same December 14 meeting) began addressing how to develop the definitions of and strategies associated with the three grantmaking categories—advocacy capacity, skills training, and disaster preparedness. Because of this discussion, two subcommittees formed to work in the areas of advocacy and skills training.

This process of breaking into small groups was relatively informal, volunteer-based for the most part, and “more organic than planned,” as one committee member explained. Most people felt that this structure worked well in the context of the work that needed to be accomplished in a short time. “The use of subcommittees was a good way to get people engaged and get the work done,” reported another committee member. While one individual expressed concern about the care taken in forming these subcommittees, particularly since “so much of the work happened in these...groups,” the majority of the steering committee felt that the structure evolved out of necessity and that the freedom from traditional processes energized the participants. “Inspiration, in any domain, has a haphazard feel about it,” commented one member. “Most of us don’t do grantmaking this way,” mentioned another, “but we were faced with an urgent mission and a quick turn-around of a large fund.” Furthermore, many committee members reported that no one was excluded from any of the meetings; anyone present was on the subcommittee.

**Advocacy.** At the December 14 meeting, the advocacy subcommittee, led by Albert Ruesga of the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, was charged with developing a grantmaking strategy and possible grant recommendations in time for the next committee meeting. Its recommendations, based on interviews with several relevant organizations in the region and in consultation with CCF staff, were presented at a meeting in late January 2002. The general recommendations, which were approved by the committee with some minor revisions, included:

1. Maintain the Fund's regional focus.
2. Tailor the grantmaking to the needs and opportunities within each jurisdiction, but follow a set of general principles.
3. Seek to make "investment-worthy" grants that are the "start of something good."
4. Build "collaborative capacity when possible."

The advocacy subcommittee also presented a set of jurisdiction-specific (District of Columbia, northern Virginia, and suburban Maryland) recommendations to the full committee, with descriptions of potential grantees in each area.

Once the committee endorsed this grantmaking strategy, staff was charged with implementing the recommendations through outreach to prospective grantees. The decision was made to seek out grants rather than release a Request for Proposals (RFP) in this category, primarily because the advocacy community serving dislocated workers was small.

Every steering committee member interviewed for this study reported being "thrilled" that the group had so quickly reached consensus on funding capacity building for advocacy organizations. The Fund's focus on advocacy was described as "monumental" by committee members, given grantmakers' traditional hesitancy about supporting this kind of work. However, they were also quick to point out that "lots of funders love advocacy but their boards don't." The fact that the steering committee was the "end of the line" in making grant decisions was key to their unanimous support of advocacy. In other words, the Community Capacity Fund was unique as it provided an opportunity for the group to take risks freely—to "come out of the closet and learn about and fund advocacy" because members "didn't have to take the grants to their boards." Indeed, noting that many foundation boards avoid advocacy because its outcomes are so hard to measure, a committee member related how important it was—and how critical to moving the agenda forward—that the group could "let go of the need to be able to predict exactly a product or impact of the grant."

***Skills Training.*** Aware that the pool of prospective grantees—organizations that were providing skills training and other educational programs designed to help reemploy workers dislocated by the September 11 attacks—was much larger than that for the advocacy category, the steering committee and staff assumed from the outset that funds would be distributed through an RFP. Also aware that the RFP process would require at least a month to generate proposals once it was in the field, the skills training subcommittee, led by Tracy Gray of the Morino Institute, developed a grant distribution strategy and draft RFP quickly, bringing them before the full steering committee on January 23, 2002.

With some revisions, the committee approved a grantmaking strategy that would focus on "on-the-job or vocational training," as well as instructional programs that increase the employability of dislocated workers, such as English as a Second Language. Moreover, the committee stipulated that grants should go to nonprofit organizations:

1. with “track records of managing quality training programs with demonstrated results,”
2. that have “documented an increased demand for training following September 11 and which plan to enroll or involve dislocated workers from industries affected by the terrorist attacks,” and
3. with “sound plans to quickly and effectively expand their skills training and other programs to respond to increased demand and to build a strong and sustainable organization beyond the grant period.”

The Community Capacity Fund released the final RFP on January 31, 2002, with a deadline of March 1 for proposals. The staff’s explicit goal was to develop a succinct but effective RFP that was distributed as widely as possible. Bean reported anecdotal success to the steering committee in achieving this goal; several people commented that they had “received the RFP three times and had observed it posted on two different listservs.”

As planned by the skills training subcommittee, proposals received by the deadline were divided randomly among four review teams composed of steering committee members and designed by staff and the committee chair. These review teams then forwarded 12 proposals to the full committee for their review on March 18. Of these, six grants were approved and three were “held,” pending further investigation by staff. The committee eventually approved the three deferred proposals as well.

***Disaster Preparedness.*** The steering committee agreed in late November 2001 that it was important to define goals for and strategize around grantmaking for disaster preparedness as soon as possible. However, a subcommittee charged with working in this area (ultimately led by Patricia Matthews of Kaiser Permanente) did not form until mid-May. Interviews with steering committee members suggest that this delay may have been due to the committee’s relative unfamiliarity with this issue area and a desire to inform their grantmaking with as much research as possible. “The subcommittee started a bit late, but we didn’t know what we needed earlier in the process,” noted a participant. From the outset and throughout the process, the committee invited presentations from relevant agencies on the need for a regional disaster preparedness plan, and CCF staff attended meetings of organizations active in disaster response. The region’s lack of a recognized, central coordinator for the development of a cross-jurisdictional emergency response plan was also problematic.

Despite the absence of a formal grantmaking strategy and probably because of the immediate need for infrastructure in this area, CCF staff brought two grant recommendations before the committee at the December 14 meeting. These grants were both approved, although there was some disagreement about funding what is traditionally viewed as a government responsibility. In discussing the Fund’s first grant—to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) to create an emergency response plan and to build its capacity to seek federal funds—a committee member who identifies himself as “leading the opposition” to the grant related that he did not think the “private sector is the appropriate source for government functions.” He continued, “If government resources are not being spent on emergency preparedness, what should they

be spent on?” Another group member also opposed to the COG grant noted that it did not feel like a “good first step out of the gate” for the Community Capacity Fund, and he wondered what kind of “signal it sent” about the Fund’s purpose.

Many other committee members expressed support for this early grant for disaster preparedness, acknowledging that coordination of emergency response is a government function, but observing the reality that there simply was not money available for the COG’s critical coordinating function at the time. “The COG was trying to get organized to respond to the community’s needs,” said one committee member, “and this was appropriate capacity building...in the space between government money, the funds were like glue.” Several other members agreed, pointing out that the grant was explicitly intended to be catalytic, in both enabling the organization to seek government funds and in pushing forward a systematic coordination of disaster response and recovery for the region. One committee member stated that the Fund’s hope was to fill a gap initially and then “set government wheels in motion.” Ultimately, the COG returned half of the grant when federal resources came through to support its work in linking emergency response plans across jurisdictions.

But CCF served as a catalyst beyond its grantmaking to the COG and the area Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs). Bean recognized that, although the COG identified nonprofit organizations as playing a critical role in planning for and responding to regional emergencies, it was having trouble actually connecting with those nonprofits. Bean brought the VOADs from the three jurisdictions together, along with the COG, to ensure that the private sector and public agencies would be “in alignment.” “This was an important, value-added function of CCF beyond our grantmaking,” noted a staff member.

The disaster preparedness subcommittee prepared a set of detailed grantmaking guidelines, which were approved by the full committee on May 16, 2002. The guidelines, which emphasized that CCF “should take great care in understanding the overall context of emergency response and preparedness in the region,” centered on the needs identified in the COG’s “Regional Emergency Response Coordination Plan” drafted in late April with the support of the CCF grant. The subcommittee had narrowed the COG’s list of 15 emergency support functions to 6 in which nonprofit and voluntary organizations played political roles, and then down to three functions that needed “significant input” from the nonprofit sector. In this context, the guidelines encouraged making grants that:

1. maintain a regional focus,
2. focus on building the capacity of key nonprofit and voluntary organizations active during disasters in the region,
3. help link the nonprofit sector with the public sector, as well as the private for-profit sector, in the development of unified response plans for the region, and
4. support strategic efforts to help nonprofit organizations develop their own “continuity” or internal emergency response plans.

As with the advocacy area, the group of organizations planning for and coordinating disaster response is small. For this reason, the steering committee determined that disaster

preparedness grant proposals should be sought out, facilitated by meetings with potential grantees and continued meetings with the COG and area VOADs.

***Information and Referral.*** As part of the disaster preparedness guidelines, the subcommittee explicitly recommended that CCF continue to explore ways to support the development of a regional infrastructure for “information and referral” systems—also called “211” systems—which connect people in need to social services. In February 2002, CCF had commissioned researchers at the George Washington University Institute of Public Policy to conduct a scan of 211 systems in both the region and nationwide, with special interest in multi-jurisdictional systems. Completed in April, the study showed that the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia were each pursuing their own 211 plans. Concerned about duplicate, uncoordinated systems that might fall short during a regionwide emergency, the steering committee discussed the “carrots and sticks” for collaboration among the jurisdictions’ 211 systems and potential organizations that could negotiate a collaborative process for these systems.

Based on subcommittee discussions, further consultation with the George Washington University researcher, and contact with the national Alliance for Information and Referral Services, the disaster preparedness subcommittee recommended that CCF take several steps, including grantmaking and convening, to facilitate collaboration among the region’s 211 systems. This will be an important legacy of the CCF.

### **The Grantmaking Process**

As soon as the Fund’s mission and goals were finalized in December 2001, CCF staff began recommending grants and the steering committee began approving them—even before the subcommittees began their intensive work. Some in the group felt that they had a “mandate to move this money” and all of them certainly felt a sense of urgency, wondering whether another attack was imminent and agreeing that “the pure emotional impact of September 11 made the process what it was.” Looking back at the pace of the Fund’s grantmaking, one steering committee member felt that it was not well thought out, particularly the first advocacy grants, and that CCF rushed to “do something” in the wake of scandals involving the American Red Cross.

The steering committee’s response to this concern has been somewhat contradictory. At the same time that many members expressed the sentiment that “the perfect becomes the enemy of the good and the instinct for due diligence is not realistic here,” they also agreed that “this was not a thoughtless process, not due to passionate pace.” The variety of areas being funded may explain this contradiction—emergency response is very different from advocacy groups working to reemploy workers—as well as the group members’ differing perspectives on necessary and appropriate process. “For some,” notes a committee member, “this [process] was due diligence; for others it was risk-taking.” In any case, everyone recalls having multiple opportunities to raise questions and ask for more information before making grant decisions.

Another clarification of the process comes from the fact that the staff and committee could characterize potential grants in three ways. According to a committee member,

CCF's grantmaking proceeded like picking fruit from a tree." The low-hanging fruit depicted the "no-brainer" proposals that everyone agreed should be funded. The middle fruit represented the proposals that took some work by staff and conversation with the potential grantees before they were approved. The high-hanging fruit, however, symbolized the hardest, riskiest grantmaking, "often deferred until the group felt more comfortable...or not done at all."

Despite these different perspectives on whether or not the pace of CCF grantmaking was appropriate, this issue of how quickly philanthropy can respond to immediate community needs is an important lesson about the kind of collaborative funding model that CCF represents. When the impact of CCF's grants are assessed, this is obviously a question for consideration.

Though CCF made some grants relatively early in its planning process, the group continually discussed grantmaking in the context of its original mission and, throughout the process, explored opportunities to inform funds disbursement. In addition to the study of multi-jurisdictional information and referral systems, the CCF staff asked Ed Lazere of the DC Fiscal Policy Institute for input on developing advocacy capacity in the region—resulting in a white paper—and made a grant to the National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy to review the capacity of local advocacy organizations.

Bean and Romero also enhanced the Fund's grantmaking efforts by bringing together a variety of groups—grantees, other funders, and relevant nonprofit organizations—on a regular basis to both support the grantees' work and to share what they were learning. Topical forums for Washington Grantmaker members, workshops for organizations interested in writing skills training proposals, and "get to know each other" meetings are just some examples of this convening function assumed by CCF staff.

### **Lessons Learned**

There is no question that the committee members came away from this one-year grantmaking experience with new perspectives, knowledge, and ideas about strengthening the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. For example, committee members have a much deeper understanding of previously unfamiliar issues—disaster preparedness and skills training in particular—as well as of regional differences in organizational capacity. In addition, they believe this new knowledge and level of understanding will inform their grantmaking in the future. "This process challenged our assumptions about the value of certain organizations to this community. [We] learned about how this community really works," said one committee member. Said another, "We came closer in this process to making the connection with the grantee than in any process I've been involved in."

Washington Grantmakers, which can translate funders' knowledge gaps into future educational programs and collaborative efforts, also gained much from the process. In addition to the three formal categories—advocacy, disaster preparedness, and skills training—the Fund's work informed the issues of collaborative grantmaking (particularly national-local), capacity building, and foundation-nonprofit working relationships. The

committee members agree that, with the help of a support organization like Washington Grantmakers, grantmaking agendas in these areas can and should go forward based on their experiences.

Members of the group now see themselves as part of a larger network that takes a regional approach to rebuilding the community post-September 11, and this is a network within which they might try to move forward the agenda started by the Community Capacity Fund. “We’re only as prepared for ‘next time’ as we are strong in relationships with grantees and other organizations,” suggested a member of the steering committee. Several other committee members have echoed this idea. “The region’s ability to respond boils down to the strength of personal relationships,” said a member of the group. And although they would not wish for a repeat of the September 11 attacks, their involvement in CCF showed this group of funders, philanthropy leaders, and researchers that “we have the ability to respond to a time-sensitive, regional issue in a manner laced with integrity.”

But the Community Capacity Fund is also a new model of national funding to address local concerns, and there is much to be learned from what can almost be considered a “pilot” project. As suggested by interviews with steering committee members and review of the CCF materials, many factors came together to create a smooth, efficient grantmaking process. Leadership by Gleicher, Dakin, and Bean was judged strong but inclusive. The steering committee had a good mix of both funders and non-funders, with a wide range of areas of expertise and connections to other organizations and people. The steering committee entered the process with a total commitment to the initiative and a willingness to leave their individual grantmaking agendas behind in order to jointly create a new one. They felt willing and able to put so much time and work into the process because the cause was urgent and they knew it would end in a year. The staff and committee were interested in taking some risks but understood when it was important to get more information before making grants.

Indeed, some of the committee members wonder about the feasibility of a similar collaborative funding effort without most, if not all, of these factors present. Nevertheless, all think that reflecting on lessons learned from the Community Capacity Fund is an opportunity to engage national funders in addressing local issues. One committee member suggests that national grantmakers may be drawn to CCF’s development of “an extended meaning of community capacity building.” Another emphasizes that this model’s importance lies in its ability to “use national money to tackle community issues without a huge infrastructure.” Still another feels that this funding model can simply be considered a “new and accessible way to give meaning to wealth.” In the end, though, “it will take a bit of work because national funders need help understanding how to partner with local funders, as Ford did, rather than treat them as grantees,” as is the case in traditional models of national to local funding. Washington Grantmakers and the members of the steering committee will need to do some of this work—in addition to consistent follow-up on capacity-building needs identified by CCF—in order for this model of collaborative grantmaking to take hold.

Though not ultimately a measurable outcome, the experience was a strong reminder of what people can do if they are inspired and sufficiently organized. Concluded one steering committee member, “This experience reminded me that the desire to be helpful is so powerful that if mechanisms [for responding to needs of the community] are not there, people will make it happen. We’re not so unique and people are pretty incredible.”

## **Attachment 1**

### **Understanding the Role of the Community Capacity Fund in Strengthening the Region after September 11**

#### **Interview Guide—Key leaders**

*First, I want to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I realize that your time is valuable. As I mentioned previously, my name is Rachel Mosher-Williams and I am with the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy at The Urban Institute. I have been commissioned by the Community Capacity Fund Steering Committee to research and write a report documenting the structure and implementation of the Fund, as well as the lessons learned from the process.*

*The interview should take approximately one hour. I will be taking notes during our discussion, but will keep all information completely confidential. Your name will not be used in the report, but I may quote something you say and attribute it to someone with your position, such as “a steering committee member noted...?” If you would like to say something but do not want it to be directly quoted, please let me know. I appreciate your willingness to speak openly and honestly.*

1. How did you become involved with the Community Capacity Fund?
2. What were your previous experiences, if any, with the collaborative funding process?
3. Briefly describe the three or four factors that moved this fund along.

#### **CCF Design/Structure**

4. Do you think the development of CCF as a project of Washington Grantmakers (rather than as a separate entity) was beneficial?
5. Did the steering committee decide not to undertake active fundraising at the beginning of the process? Why? Did you agree with this decision?

#### **Steering Committee**

6. What do you think were the steering committee’s particular strengths during the grantmaking process?
7. What were its weaknesses?
8. Do you feel that the committee was sufficiently diverse? If not, what might have been done to make the group more diverse?
  - Prompt for ethnic diversity
  - Prompt: What about diversity of types and sizes of grantmaking organizations?
    - What kinds of organizations or grantmakers were not on the steering committee?
    - Were there non-funders who you feel would have contributed to the group?

#### **Subcommittees**

9. (For subcommittee leaders) How did you come to lead the \_\_\_\_\_ subcommittee?

10. In hindsight, is there anything you would change about the way they were formed or how they functioned in the decision-making process?

### **Mission**

11. How did the steering committee and staff develop the Fund's mission? Was there strong consensus?
12. What did you hope the Fund would achieve? What kind of near-term and long-term impacts did you foresee at the beginning of the process?

### **Grantmaking Process**

13. Please describe the decision-making process that culminated in the three categories?
14. Were other issues considered and eliminated? If so, please describe.
15. How well did the RFP process go in the area of skills training?
16. How well did the combination of selected proposals (for the other two categories) and RFP work?
17. How did you feel about the quality of most of the proposals?
18. Do you think that grantmaking decisions were made at an appropriate pace?
19. Can you describe the relationship between CCF's grants and available government money, particularly in the areas of skills training and emergency preparedness?
20. Did CCF coordinate the grantmaking in any way, or have discussions with or share your needs assessments with government agencies?

### **Community Capacity-Building/Effects on the Community**

21. What, briefly, do you think the Fund has achieved?
22. What is still left to do and how should this be accomplished?
23. How will your experience with the CCF carry over into your grantmaking at \_\_\_\_\_?
24. What useful products (written or otherwise) can you imagine coming from the CCF effort?
25. **Would you be willing to talk with me again in several months when I am collecting information for and writing the report on the CCF's impact on the community?**

*Thank you so much for your time.*