

Local Giving

An Effective Vehicle for
Securing Philanthropic
Resources for
Local Communities

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A century ago, community chests were the beating heart of philanthropy in towns across America. They would collect private support for local projects, while uniting the people and businesses in a community and creating the built infrastructure—from town squares to playgrounds—that gave towns their character and vibrancy.

Today's giving is of another sort. It is increasingly online, instant, and international. The number of nonprofits or projects one can support are infinite. From the comfort of our couches, we can text a donation to an individual selling crafts on a street corner in Peru. Or we can hop online to donate to relief efforts for a natural disaster as it happens half a world away.

This expansion in philanthropy coincides with a boom in its volume, with Americans giving more than \$400 billion to worthy causes in 2017 alone.

I raised my family here and built my business here—I want to give back

Despite the ways in which philanthropy is expanding and growing, the fundamental motivation to give remains the same: to make things better. And for many Americans, that still leads them home. Out of duty, pride, sentimentality, or a combination thereof, we still give most of our philanthropic dollars within our own communities.

Take the example of Genevieve Via Cava, a special education teacher in the Dumont school district. After decades of clipping coupons, Via Cava had saved what she needed to make a \$1 million gift to the district to support scholarships for special education students. The gift was a complete surprise, yet

transformed a key aspect of the school district.

From our view at the Community Foundation of New Jersey, we know that there are remarkably generous people like Genevieve Via Cava up and down our state. Unfortunately, their intended philanthropy often slips through the cracks or is weighed down by bureaucratic wrangling and delays.

Municipalities and school districts are rarely the recipient or central coordinator of philanthropy largely due to the growth in outside nonprofit organizations, but also because of donors' disinterest or distaste for the changing leadership and uneven politics of local government.

Facilitating philanthropy to towns & schools

The Community Foundation of New Jersey, founded in 1979 in the spirit of the original community chest, provides a solution to facilitate more private philanthropy to municipalities and school districts.

For nearly 40 years, the Community Foundation has stewarded giving in line with donors' intent. Through more than 1,000 donor advised funds and legacy funds (better known as bequests), the Community Foundation fosters philanthropy that is more sustained and impactful, concentrating on achieving meaningful, long-term change.

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The Community Foundation is “issue ecumenical” in that it implements philanthropic legacies of all stripes. Its north star is the donor’s intent and it serves as a critical bulwark against the politics of the day. Through the Community Foundation, donors can ensure their philanthropic legacies will last for generations. These attributes provide much-needed comfort and assurance to prospective donors who are motivated to give to their communities but rightfully insistent that the dollars be used wisely.

Avoiding bureaucratic delays

One does not have to be the child of a dictator or a pioneer on Wall Street (see box) to effectively partner with the Community Foundation and establish a local philanthropic legacy. Every town has those who express a devotion to their community, but who are reluctant to bequeath their estate directly to that community. The Community Foundation of New Jersey does most of its work with these everyday New Jerseyans,

Growing Legacies

Hope for a long-term legacy of giving has inspired a wide variety of givers, including Svetlana Stalin—yes, that Stalin—to create funds at the Community Foundation of New Jersey. The daughter of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, Svetlana defected to the United States in 1967, denounced her father’s brutal legacy, and ultimately settled in Princeton. Along the way, she developed a deep and personal concern for new immigrants to the United States, especially those in New Jersey.

Her fund at the Community Foundation is active to this day and focuses squarely on easing immigrants’ transition to a new life. Svetlana Stalin could hardly predict the twists and turns of America’s immigration debate over the decades (which, of course, plays out in towns across our state), but the Community Foundation has faithfully honored her philanthropic intent throughout, using the fund to provide English language education and even expand STEM education for new immigrants.

Similarly motivated was Austin Hooey, a longtime Chatham resident and one of the first female financial analysts on Wall Street. As part of her will, Hooey left \$1.2 million to the Community Foundation for a permanent scholarship endowment for Chatham High School students. The endowment is one of the few in the state dedicated to students of a public school.

helping them turn their philanthropic ideas into reality and thereby unlocking philanthropy that would otherwise be lost. This work has run the gamut from a pedestrian safety program in

Little Falls to an all-access playground in Parsippany.

What each of these projects has in ingenuity and impact they also share in longevity, thanks to the Community

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Foundation ensuring their continued fidelity to the donors' wishes.

This fidelity in fact helps donors and recipients alike avoid the bureaucratic and legal wrangling that can plague even the most well-intentioned gifts.

Take the example of one northern New Jersey town where a resident's last will and testament gifted a large sum to its Recreation Commission. Unfortunately, that town no longer had a Recreation Commission. While all parties knew that the individual's intent was to support recreation programming, the town's attorney had to spend valuable time taking the matter to court to redirect the funds.

“Every town has those who express a devotion to their community, but who are reluctant to bequeath their estate directly to that community.”

Municipalities would be well-served by better understanding the role of the Community Foundation of New Jersey and how it can not only safeguard, but also increase the flow of future philanthropy for our communities' parks, playgrounds, and social services. 📍

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