

Getting Started: Designing Rural Community and Economic Development Programs and Grantmaking

Thursday, 4:00–6:00 p.m. Doyle Ballroom

Session Facilitator

- **Janet Topolsky**, *Associate Director, Community Strategies Group, The Aspen Institute; Director, Rural Development Philanthropy Learning Network*

Peer Leaders

- **Terry Holley**, *Vice President for Programs and Rural Development, East Tennessee Foundation*
- **Pat Vasbinder**, *Consultant; Former Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation*

Session Topic

This session will use the RDP Design Circle to explore ways in which community foundations have started and adjusted the design of a new program of grantmaking effort focused on improving rural community and economic development, especially focused on low-income rural families and communities.

Strategic/Implementation Issue Session Flow

The session will flow something like this:

Janet	Intro, Context, Introductions	5 mins
Terry	ETF Story and Lessons	25 mins
Janet	Clarifying questions for Terry	5 mins
Pat	NHCF Story and Lessons	25 mins
Janet	Clarifying questions for Pat	5 mins
Janet	Instant Advice	Remaining time

Clarifying Questions for each presenter will relate to their presentations and be asking for clarification or more detail about the individual stories, what each community foundation did, and what was learned from it.

Instant Advice provides a time for participants to present their own situation related to getting started and adjusting a program design. We are aiming for practical rather than theoretical exchanges here. We will suggest that you ask questions or draw inferences *from your experience* – by first taking a minute or two to give us some background/context and then ask for advice or offer an idea for the rest of the group.

Presentation Outline

Here are the questions we asked Terry and Pat to focus on during their initial *Getting Started: Designing Rural Community and Economic Development Programs and Grantmaking* presentation.

1. **Choose a design story to tell.** Select one specific program or grantmaking design story – one that is related to rural CED/anti-poverty work – from your foundation experience. Please choose one from when you didn't know as much as you know now. Because many workshop participants may be in gear-up mode, you might consider talking about a modest effort, one for which you had little resources (like if the Board said "Let's do some rural CED grantmaking this year with this \$10,000.") – or perhaps one in which a new resource provider came to the table and you had to act quickly. You could also talk about one that did not work at all – learning from failure, so to speak.
2. **Your Program.** Now just tell us the story by answering the questions in the RDP Program Design Circle. To help your listeners follow your tale, with your story focus in mind, start out by simply answering:
 - What was your *catalyst* for starting the rural CED program/grantmaking effort you are focusing on in your story?

Then, *in the order you think your foundation answered them* when designing the program, answer the questions below. Do note questions that you just never answered, or that got answered after you were underway, by default or belated decision:

- *Where:* What rural region or set of places did you target with your program/grantmaking effort?
- *For Whom:* What rural people or population did you target with your program/grantmaking effort?
- *What* rural development approach did you support with your program/grantmaking effort?
- *With whom:* What type of grantees did you target?
- *With whom:* What other partners did you work with to help with technical assistance, learning, or project management?
- *With whom:* What other resource partners (funders) did you work with?
- *How long:* For what period of time did you sustain the program?
- *Which and how much resources:* What resources did you commit to this program – staffing, board, operational and grant resources?

Wrap this section up by telling us *So What*:

- What specific short- and/or medium-term outcomes were you driving for:
 - For your grantees
 - For the rural community or rural families
 - Other?

Note: If you never detailed this, even informally, tell us that. If it was on the back of an envelope, tell us that. If there were two sets of hoped-for outcomes in two different noggins, tell us that.

- What was the process (if any) by which you planned to track and reflect on progress toward those outcomes?
3. **Other Design and Implementation Elements.** If you have not already covered it in answering Question 1, tell us any other key aspects of how you initiated and structured this effort. In general, this might include:
- The process by which this design was determined (and who was involved)
 - The process you used to find and select grantees/participants
 - The structure of the grant deal with the grantees/participants
 - The add-on requirements/assistance you included in the grant/participation deal (e.g., mandatory grantee gatherings)
 - The contact points that the foundation had with the grantees/participants over the course of the grant
 - The reporting that you required
4. **Impact.** Offer us *three* key summary statements related to your hoped-for outcomes about what happened (good or bad, significant or paltry) in and because of this effort.
5. **The Lessons:** Please finish up with these lessons. Related to your own story and experience, conclude with:
- What top *two or three things did you not know* about yourselves or your rural regions that you should have known before you started?
 - If you had it to do over again, what are top *three things* you would change about the design of this effort – and why?
 - What *one or two* things did the foundation change in its subsequent rural CED-focused program design because of this experience?
 - What are the top *three truest (positive or tough) lessons* your foundation learned in this particular grantmaking/program effort about how to design programs for rural community and economic development impact?
 - What *three lessons or pieces of advice* would you offer to community foundations that are in the process of beginning to design program or grantmaking to enhance economic security for rural families and communities?