

Growing Local Philanthropy
The Role and Reach of Community Foundations

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SURVEY FINDINGS REPORT

A Community Foundation Field Survey

Conducted by:

Community Strategies Group

The Aspen Institute

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This report presents the findings from a landmark survey of community foundations in the United States, designed and conducted during the summer of 2004 by the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group (CSG). Among its initiatives, the Community Strategies Group manages the Rural Development Philanthropy (RDP) Learning Network, a diverse group of community foundations and philanthropic and development organizations committed to strengthening and sustaining rural communities. As part of this RDP work, the survey sought information about the state of local philanthropy in rural areas, focusing on the incidence and growth of geographic component funds (GCFs).¹

SURVEY OBJECTIVES

In recent years, observers have noticed what appear to be two growing trends among community foundations. The first is the apparent growth of community foundations and community foundation endowments that are focused on rural areas and issues. The second is the emergence of geographic component funds, or GCFs—that is, funds within “lead” community foundations that are dedicated to serving specific geographic areas or communities, and that typically include local decision making and/or operating structures.

At present, scant reliable nationwide data exists about these geographically targeted funds, and certainly no “roadmap” shows how to establish, organize and sustain them. No documentation exists to answer even the most basic questions, such as:

- How many GCFs currently exist?
- What types of community foundations house them?
- How many are contemplated for the future?
- How and why do lead foundations decide to establish geographic component funds?
- How are GCFs staffed?
- How does their coverage of rural and metropolitan areas compare?
- How are GCFs organized?
- What is their overall and average asset value?

CSG’s *Growing Local Philanthropy* survey research is intended as a first step in addressing these questions, documenting current status and trends related to GCFs and, more broadly, assessing how these funds affect the culture of philanthropy in their communities.

¹ A preliminary draft of partial summary findings was initially distributed at the October 2004 Fall Conference for Community Foundations in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This report covers additional topics not included in the October summary, updates portions of the data, and contains more complete analytic detail.

KEY DEFINITIONS

To help participants think past the many terms being used in the field, CSG felt it important to devise a generic term for the phenomenon of community-focused and/or community-controlled funds that this survey addresses. We therefore coined the term **geographic component fund (GCF)**, which we defined as follows:

“‘Geographic component fund’ is our universal term for a fund (or collection of funds) established under the umbrella of a lead community foundation that is specified to a geographic area and ‘governed’ in some way by people from that area. In other words, ‘geographic component fund’ is simply our term for a common phenomenon that goes by many names. Some call them affiliates. Others call them area funds. Still others call them divisions.”

Throughout this report we refer to the central community foundation that holds any geographic component funds as the **lead foundation**.

Finally, the concept **rural** has no clear definition; even the federal government defines it in many different ways. For the purposes of this survey, we asked respondents to exercise their good judgment about what was rural, based on the following criterion:

“It is often said that you know rural when you see it. On this survey, “rural” means those places that are outside a metropolitan area—meaning places that lie beyond an urban city center and its surrounding ring of suburbs. Now that we’ve told you what’s not rural, we’ll leave the deciding about what is up to you.”

SURVEY METHODS AND PROCEDURES

In late 2004, Aspen CSG conducted an internet-based survey of community foundations in the United States to obtain information on community-focused endowments and the characteristics of geographic component funds—both factual “hard data” and experience-based perceptions and opinions.² To produce as high a level of response as possible, CSG engaged in a series of reinforcing contacts with the entire universe of identified community foundations, which numbered 668 at the time of the survey.³

² The survey was conducted from August 11 to September 17, 2004. See the complete survey questionnaire at www.aspenecsg.org/rdp/survey2.pdf.

³ CSG used the best available data from the Council on Foundations and Columbus Foundation annual survey of community foundations as its base to construct this list, augmenting it with any additional or updated contact information available through CSG’s management of the Rural Development Philanthropy Learning Network.

- CSG first sent an e-mail letter with a link to the survey’s URL to all foundation CEOs with e-mail addresses. (If the research team knew of someone else in the foundation better situated to be the designated respondent in the survey, the contact was made with that person instead of the CEO.)
- CSG next sent a letter by regular U.S. post to the same contact at each of the foundations — and to any contacts on the complete list who lacked e-mail addresses — requesting participation in the web-based survey if they had not yet completed it.
- In the closing weeks, as time permitted, CSG contacted a targeted list of remaining nonresponding foundations by telephone and/or e-mail to encourage cooperation and increase the survey completion rate.

As a result of these pull efforts, of the 668 community foundations invited to participate, 241 responded — a completion rate of 36%.⁴

Since a main objective of this research was to spotlight the spread and characteristics of geographic component funds, the foundations reporting that they do not have GCFs or do not have one yet (87 of the 241, or 36% of them) were asked a shorter set of questions.⁵ As a result, much of the report is based on the subsample of responding foundations that *have* geographic component funds (n=154).

The data presented in this report are not weighted. Adjusting via weighting was considered but rejected because the research is regarded as exploratory, and because either it was unclear which available variables would be the best basis for weighting *or* the relevant variable information simply did not exist. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions (noted in the *Profile of Responding Community Foundations* section), the data are believed to be reasonably representative of community foundations in the United States.

⁴ Readers are urged to be mindful of the limitations of survey research methods and of “sampling error,” which is the range of expected variation in results due to interviewing a random sample rather than an entire population. In this survey, questions answered by the full sample of 241 community foundations are subject to a margin of error of plus or minus approximately 5 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. When the answers of subgroups are reported, the margin of error is higher. Because of other sources of possible error inherent in all surveys, the sampling variance alone is apt to understate the actual extent to which survey results differ from true population values. While every effort was made to identify such errors, they are often difficult or impossible to identify and quantify.

⁵ In most instances, it should be clear from the text which foundations a particular statistic is based upon (for example, all foundations in the sample, those with GCFs, those without GCFs, or subsets of these primary segments). Whenever there might be any ambiguity, the sample base is specified.

1. LEAD FINDINGS

INCIDENCE AND GROWTH OF GEOGRAPHIC COMPONENT FUNDS

- **GEOGRAPHIC COMPONENT FUNDS (GCFs) ARE A WIDESPREAD PHENOMENON.** Of the community foundations responding to the survey, almost two of every three (64%) currently have at least one geographic component fund.
- **GCFs ARE PLENTIFUL.** Overall, the 241 responding community foundations reported having a total of 1,079 GCFs in mid-2004. Since the sample of foundations that answered the survey (36% of the field) is roughly representative of the total community foundation population, this means that the total number of GCFs affiliated with U.S. community foundations quite likely exceeds 2,000 and could be as high as 3,000.
- **GCFs HAVE EXPLODED IN NUMBER OVER THE LAST DECADE.** These same 241 foundations reported having a total of 464 GCFs at the end of 1998. Thus, the total of 1,079 GCFs in mid-2004 represents *an increase of 132% in the number of GCFs in less than six years.*
- **GCFs ARE A RECENT PHENOMENON.** Most of the community foundations in the sample (82%) report establishing their first GCF in the 1990s or later. Over half of the foundations with GCFs established their first one after 1995.
- **THE GCF GROWTH TREND IS STILL ON THE RISE.** Two-thirds of the responding community foundations report plans to add or start new GCFs. Of those that currently have GCFs, 70% are planning to add new ones; of those that currently do *not* have GCFs, 59% are planning to start their first one.
- **THE INCIDENCE OF GCFs IS BOTH BROAD AND CONCENTRATED.** Eighty percent of the foundations with geographic component funds have more than one GCF. About one-third (34%) have either two or three. About one in every seven community foundations (14%) reports having ten or more, and six foundations report 30 or more. The 20 foundations in the sample having ten or more GCFs have a total of 649 of them, which means that 60% of all GCFs reside in roughly 14% of the foundations that have component funds.
- **THE GROWTH IN GCFs REPRESENTS SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN RURAL PHILANTHROPY.** Three-quarters of all GCFs represented in the sample cover primarily rural communities or places. Moreover, community foundations that actively serve at least *some* rural area in their territory, compared to those that do not, are more likely to have GCFs.

- **GCFs LOOM LARGER IN NEWER AND/OR SMALLER FOUNDATIONS.** Compared to their counterparts, foundations that are older and larger are more likely to have established GCFs. However, newer and/or smaller foundations tend to hold a larger percentage of their total assets in GCFs than do larger and older community foundations.

ASSET DEVELOPMENT IN GCFs

- **GCFs HOLD SIGNIFICANT ASSETS FOR COMMUNITY-FOCUSED PHILANTHROPY.** An estimated total of \$1.12 billion in endowed funds is being held in geographic component funds by the 241 community foundations that answered the survey — a total that equates to about 14% of their total endowed assets. Projecting to the total community foundation population in the United States, it is likely that GCF-endowed assets currently total somewhere between \$2 billion and \$3 billion.
- **GCFs ARE A SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF “UNRESTRICTED” ENDOWMENT.** Almost one-quarter of the community foundations with GCFs organize them as a single unrestricted area fund (with multiple donors) that covers the entire local service area — essentially an unrestricted fund, except for geography. Another quarter of the foundations hold GCFs as a family of funds or dedicated subaccounts. Most remaining community foundations organize and hold their funds both ways. This suggests that GCFs represent a larger source of unrestricted endowment than do many other funds.
- **MATCHES HELP START AND GROW GCFs.** Half of the foundations with GCFs use or have used at some point a financial match incentive to help establish or grow some of their GCFs.
- **MATCHES HAVE MANY SOURCES.** The most common incentive source for matches, when used, is the lead foundation’s own unrestricted funds (50%). Other sources include individual donor funds (34%); foundations outside the local area (31%); local private, family or corporate foundations (28%); and government funds (12%). *(Totals add to more than 100%, since the survey asked respondents to check every source they have ever used.)*
- **MATCH RATIOS VARY.** Sixty-five percent of these matching programs have provided a 1:1 match up to a certain amount; another 30% have matched at a ratio of 1:2; 7% have matched new funds at 1:3; and 30% report other (or multiple) ratios.
- **GCFs BUILD MORE ENDOWED THAN NONENDOWED ASSETS.** Half of the GCFs accept and utilize nonendowed dollars. More than two-thirds of the foundations (68%) say their GCFs consist of more endowed assets, 20% say they consist of more nonendowed assets, and 12% say they have about the same amount of endowed and nonendowed assets.

ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE OF GCFs WITHIN LEAD FOUNDATIONS

- **GCFs ARE HELD IN A VARIETY OF WAYS.** Most community foundations with GCFs (71%) report holding GCFs as advised funds, with the community advisory board typically serving as “advisor.” More than one-quarter (27%) hold GCFs as agency funds, 15% hold them as supporting organizations, 9% hold them as field-of-interest funds, and 5% as designated funds. *(Totals add to more than 100%, since the survey asked respondents to check every form they have ever used.)*
- **MANY GCFs HAVE NONPROFIT STATUS.** Of the 1,079 GCFs reported in the survey, 217 (20%) are independent 501(c)(3) organizations.
- **GCFs ARE EMERGING FROM THE GROUND UP.** Lead foundations develop GCFs more often *in response* to an approach from local leaders than they do by beating the bushes themselves. More than half of the community foundations with GCFs (53%) say they develop their funds when communities or groups approach them. Only about one-quarter (27%) say they develop GCFs using an intentional program. One-fifth gave “other” responses, which included using both of the above-mentioned processes.
- **LEAD FOUNDATIONS ARE DEVELOPING GCF CRITERIA AND POLICIES.** Slightly more than half of the community foundations with GCFs (54%) report that they have some criteria, formal or informal, for establishing GCFs. The most important of these criteria are 1) the quality and commitment of the local leadership, mentioned by almost *all* the respondents; and 2) local philanthropic potential and financial commitment, mentioned by 88% of the respondents. Twenty-nine percent of the foundations with GCFs report having a formalized policy or procedure for GCFs wishing to disaffiliate.
- **BOARDS ARE BEGINNING TO GET INTO THE GCF ACT.** Thirty-four percent of the lead community foundations with GCFs have a lead foundation board subcommittee *or* a special committee composed of selected GCF board members that advises the lead foundation on its overall GCF efforts. Over half (58%) of the lead community foundations do *not* have such an advisory group—but ten years ago, this was likely a much larger percentage.

STAFFING OF GCFs

- **GCFs ARE BEGINNING TO STAFF LOCALLY.** Twenty-six percent of the community foundations with GCFs report that some of their component funds employ their own staff.

- **THE LEAD FOUNDATION'S CEO IS MOST OFTEN INVOLVED.** Of the lead foundation staff members who play a role in developing and administering GCFs, the CEO is mentioned most often (72% of the responding foundations with GCFs). About one-third of the foundations (34%) mention development staff, 32% mention program staff, and 25% mention finance staff. *(Totals add to more than 100%, since survey asked respondents to check every staffer who works with GCFs.)*
- **ASSET DEVELOPMENT RESPONSIBILITY IS SHARED AMONG LEAD FOUNDATION AND GCF.** Fifty-six percent of the lead foundations say the GCF's board or staff has primary responsibility for GCF asset development. Another 29% say the primary responsibility for GCF asset development rests with the lead foundation's staff.
- **GCFs ARE NOT A CORE ACTIVITY FOR MOST LEAD FOUNDATIONS.** Among community foundations with GCFs, 79% estimate that they spend 20% or less of their core staff time on the development or administration of those funds. Only 9% say they spend more than 40% of their core time on GCFs, while 8% admit they have no idea how much time they spend.

2. PROFILE OF RESPONDING COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

This section presents some key characteristics of the sample of foundations that participated in the survey study.

Profile Summary: We advise readers to remain cognizant of the foundations participating in this study while reviewing the results: More than one-third of all community foundations are represented, and that sample encompasses considerable size, age and geographic diversity. When compared to the distribution of all community foundations, however, the foundations that responded tend to be larger than average (in terms of assets), and slightly less likely to be based in the Midwest and more likely to be in the South.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Figure 1 highlights the states in each of the U.S. Census regions referred to in this report and shows the proportion of the responding sample from each one. Among the responding foundations, 16% are located in the Northeast, 37% in the Midwest, 29% in the South, 18% in the West, and one in a U.S. Territory.

The responding community foundations are fairly representative, in their regional distribution, of the entire population of community foundations. There was, however, a

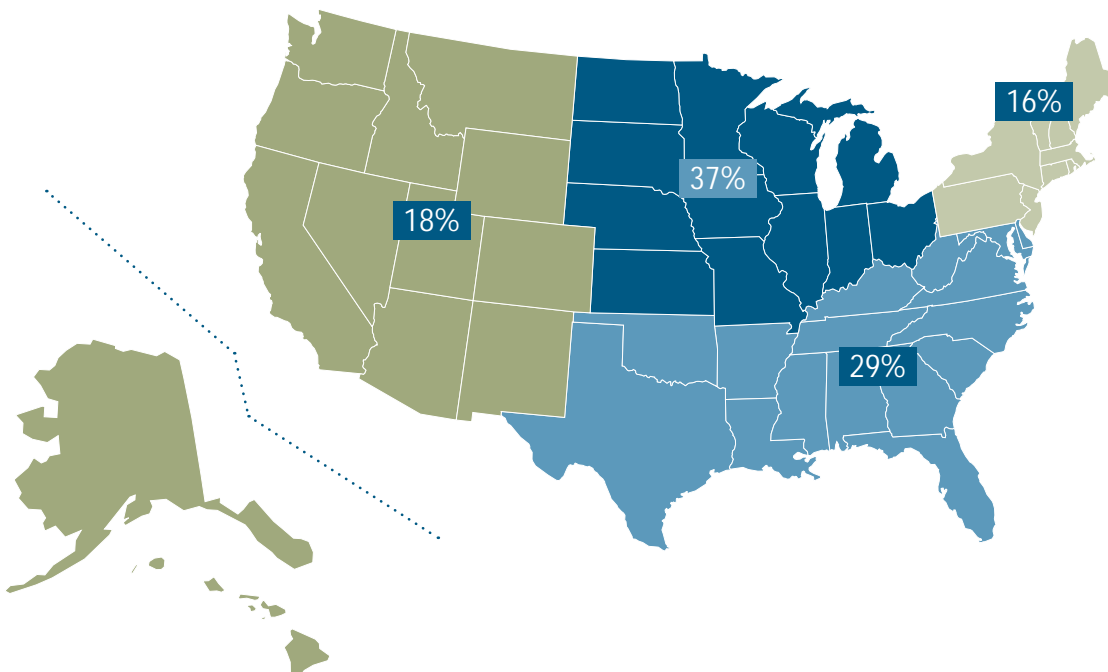
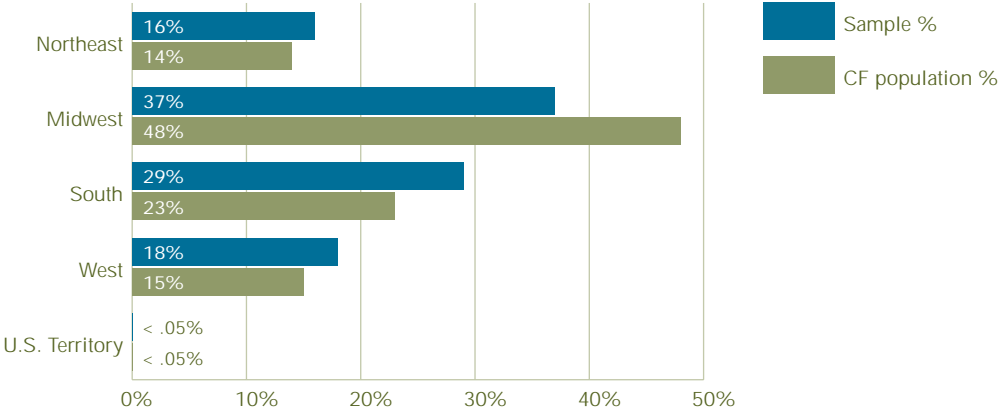


FIGURE 1
Regional
distribution
of sample

slight overrepresentation of community foundations in the South and underrepresentation of the Midwest among responding foundations, compared to the total population of foundations. See Figure 2.

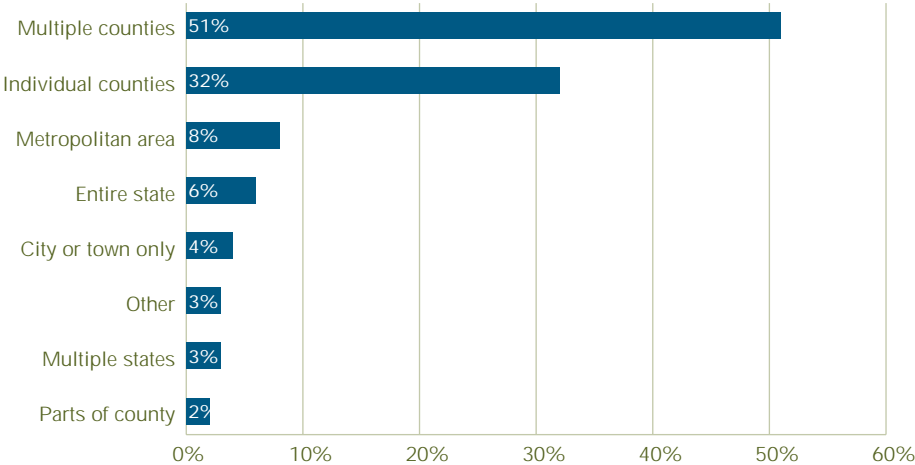
FIGURE 2
Regional distribution of sample compared to total community foundation population



SERVICE AREA

About half of the sample (51%) report that they serve multiple counties, about one-third (32%) cover individual counties, 8% serve a metropolitan area, 6% serve an entire state, 4% serve a single city or town, 3% serve multiple states (generally meaning only parts of more than one state), and 2% serve only parts of individual counties. See Figure 3. (“Other” responses, such as rural or specific names of places, were given by 3% of the respondents.)⁶ There are no similar data on all community foundations that permit comparisons on this dimension.

FIGURE 3
Type of area the foundation serves⁶



⁶ Respondents could give more than one response, so percents add up to more than 100.

TOTAL ASSETS

As measured by total foundation assets, the sample overrepresents larger foundations and underrepresents smaller ones, especially those in the smallest asset category of below \$2.5 million. See Figure 4.

The average (mean) asset size of responding community foundations at the end of 2003 was \$87 million and the median was \$19 million. Almost one-quarter (23%) of the community foundations report assets of less than \$5 million, and more than one-quarter (29%) report assets of \$50 million or more. These figures exceed the mean and median asset sizes of \$46 million and \$7 million, respectively, reported for all community foundations in the 2002 Columbus Foundation Survey. *Because the comparison numbers are older than the survey data, the disparities shown here might be overstated somewhat, since most foundations grew in asset size in 2003.*

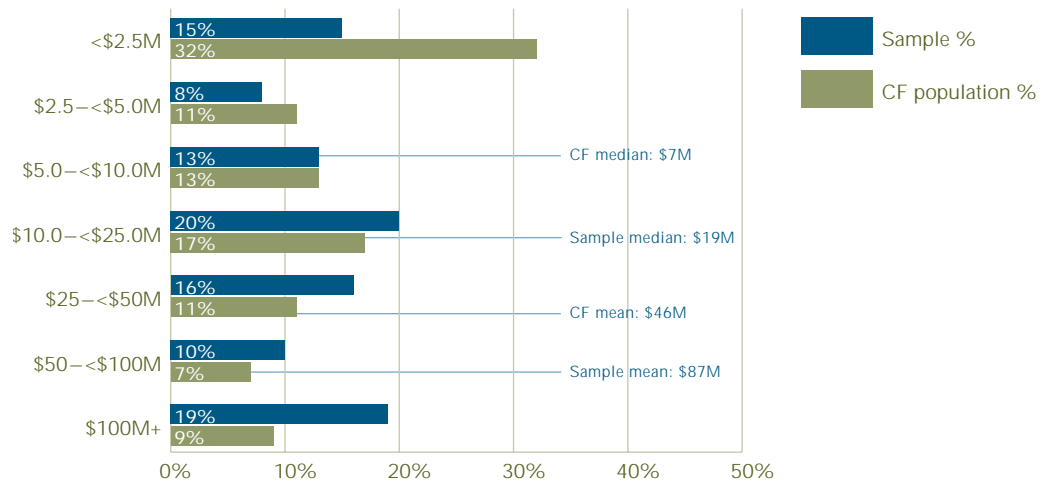


FIGURE 4
Asset size of sample compared to total community foundation population

ENDOWED ASSETS

The responding foundations represent a similarly wide range of endowment levels: 22% have endowed assets of less than \$2.5 million, 24% have at least \$2.5 million but less than \$10 million, 34% have at least \$10 million but less than \$25 million, 9% at least \$25 million but less than \$100 million, and 11% have endowments that exceed \$100 million. The average amount of endowed assets is \$44 million; the median is \$12 million. Endowed assets play a bigger role for most foundations than nonendowed: 60% of the respondents reported that at least three-quarters of their assets are endowed. Only 19% have less than half of their assets in endowed funds.

FOUNDATION AGE

Almost one-quarter (23%) of the foundations in the sample were established less than ten years ago, another 28% are 30 years or older, and the remainder—nearly half—fall in the middle at 10-29 years old. Another way to think about this: Most of the responding community foundations (79%) were established in the 1970s or later, with the typical age of the responding foundations being 18-19 years (founded in 1985 or 1986). We could find no comparable data on all community foundations.

RURAL COVERAGE

Nine in ten of the responding community foundations say their service area includes at least some rural area; of these, 90%—representing 81% of the *total* sample—say they actively serve at least some of their rural area. Foundations serving rural areas appear to be located more in the South and less in the Northeast and Midwest, and they tend to be smaller in size—particularly when using endowed assets as the size criterion.

Because a very large portion of the participants in this study are actively engaged in at least some rural effort, and the number of foundations *not* serving any rural area at all in this sample is quite small, we generally chose not to make many comparisons between those serving and those not serving rural areas. The reader should bear in mind, however, that some of the responding foundations that report serving rural areas may have a service area that is primarily urban or suburban with some rural pockets, while others might serve a totally rural area. It is beyond the scope of this survey to make that distinction; however, we did deem it worth noting that more than eight in ten of the responding foundations have *some* active presence in rural areas.

3. INCIDENCE AND GROWTH OF GEOGRAPHIC COMPONENT FUNDS

HOW MANY FOUNDATIONS HAVE GEOGRAPHIC COMPONENT FUNDS?

Almost two of every three community foundations (64%) have at least one geographic component fund (GCF). Community foundations that actively serve at least some rural area in their territory are more likely to have GCFs: 68% of community foundations actively serving rural areas report having one or more GCFs, compared to only 48% of those not actively serving rural areas. See Figure 5.

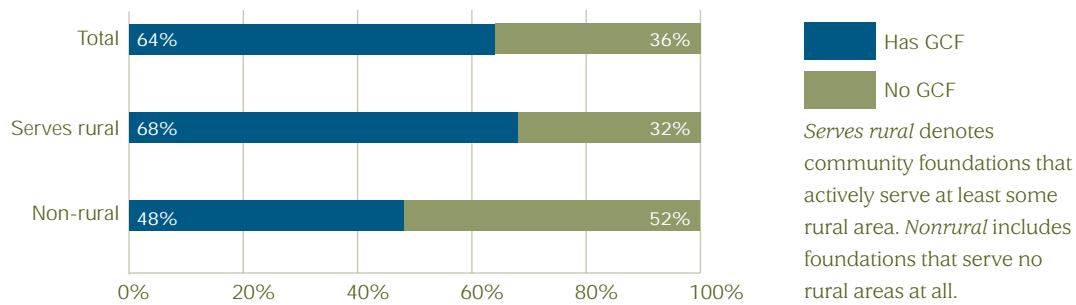


FIGURE 5
GCF incidence by geographic area served

HOW MANY GEOGRAPHIC COMPONENT FUNDS ARE THERE — AND ARE THEY INCREASING?

Overall, the 154 responding community foundations that reported having GCFs had a combined total of 464 such funds at the end of 1998. This number rose to 1,079 GCFs by mid-2004, which represents an increase of 132% in less than six years — obviously, a period of enormous growth in GCFs. See Figure 6.

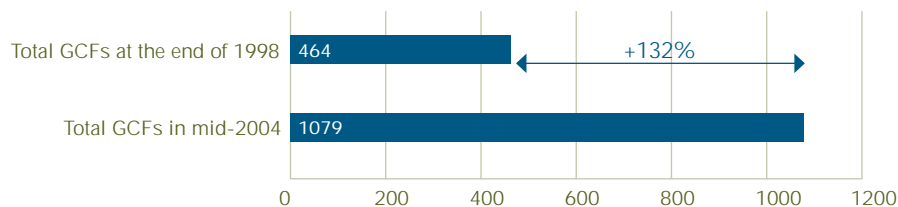


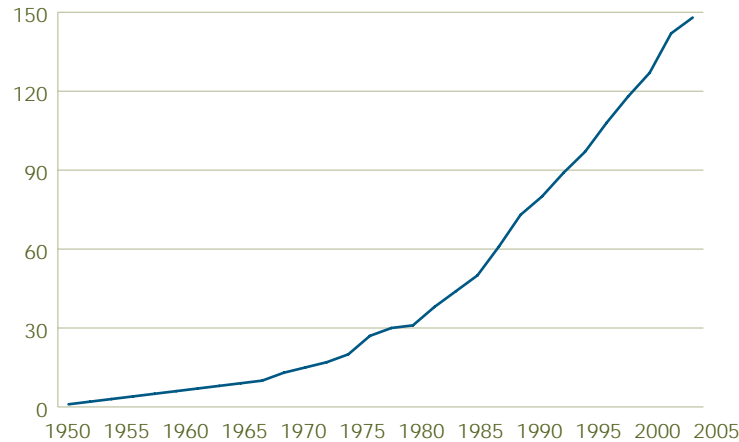
FIGURE 6
Number of GCFs: 2004 vs. 1998

Note: 146 of the 154 responding foundations with GCFs are included here. Eight of the responding foundations that have GCFs did not report on the number of GCFs they had.

WHEN DID ALL THESE GCFs GET STARTED?

Most of the community foundations in the sample (82%) report establishing their first GCF in the 1990s or later. More than half (59%) of those with geographic component funds established their first GCF after 1995, which attests to the newness of this phenomenon. See Figure 7.

FIGURE 7
Number of foundations with at least one GCF

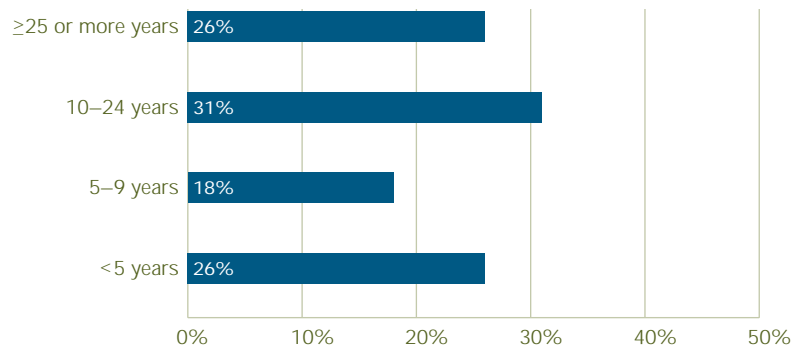


Note: 148 of the 154 responding foundations with GCFs are included here; 6 of the responding foundations that said they have GCFs did not indicate in which year they established their first one, and so are not included.

Although this seems to be changing, community foundations in the past have varied considerably as to when during their organizational lifetime they establish their first geographic component fund. Forty-four percent report establishing a GCF within ten years of their own founding, almost one-third (31%) established their first GCF between 10 and 24 years after their founding, and about one-quarter (26%) did so after 25 or more years. See Figure 8.

Older foundations took significantly longer to establish their first GCF—further testimony to the newness of the phenomenon. Foundations that are 30 years or older established their first GCF at an average age of 38 years, while newer foundations—those 10–29 years old and those younger than 10 years old—established their first GCF 10 years and 4 years, respectively, after their own establishment.

FIGURE 8
Years between establishment of lead foundation and of first GCF



The pattern is similar when foundations are broken out by asset size, which makes sense since older foundations generally have greater assets. Foundations with assets of \$50 million or more set up their first GCF an average of 32 years after their own establishment. By comparison, those with assets of between \$10 million and \$50 million established their first GCF 14 years later, and those with assets of less than \$10 million developed their first GCF an average of 8 years after the formation of the lead foundation.

WILL THERE BE MORE GCFs IN THE FUTURE?

Two-thirds of the responding community foundations report plans to add or start new GCFs. Of those that already have GCFs, 70% plan to add new ones; of those that do not have GCFs, 59% plan to start one. Clearly, the number of GCFs will grow in coming years, increasing the need for information and guidance on how to establish, sustain and grow these entities. See Figure 9.

The already-strong presence of GCFs in rural areas is likely to get still stronger: 71% of foundations that actively serve rural areas *and* already have GCFs plan to add more; 62% of those that actively serve rural areas but don't have a GCF plan to start one.

As the trend of establishing GCFs grows, however, GCFs might also be used by an increasing number of foundations that are *not* rural-focused. Currently, about half of the foundations not actively serving any rural areas — 22 of 46 — have a GCF. Of the 24 currently without a GCF, 12 plan to establish one. This suggests that the GCF trend, while more present in rural areas, is not exclusively rural, and that community foundations (and/or their donors) increasingly believe that GCFs serve some useful purpose.

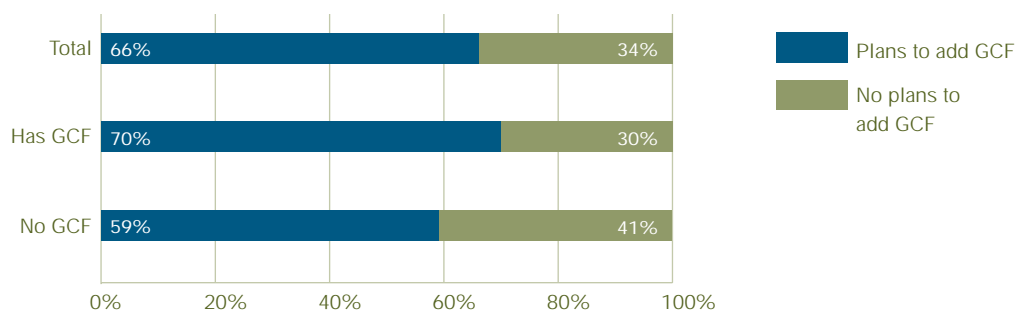


FIGURE 9
Plans for starting or adding new GCF, related to current GCF status

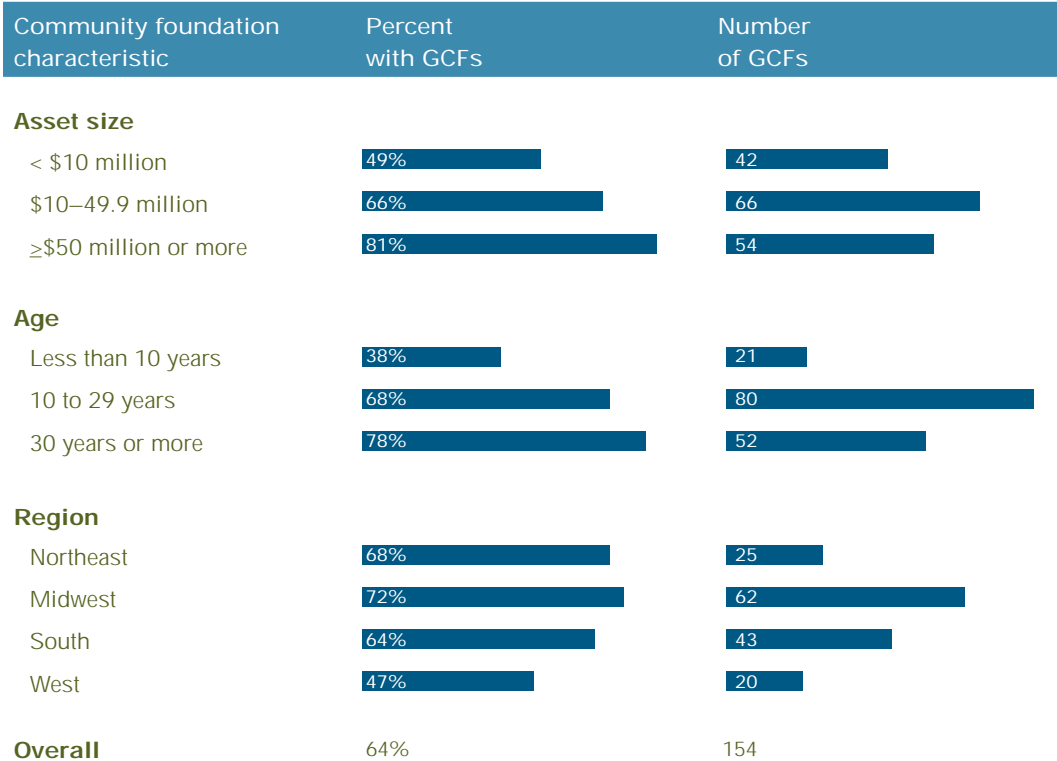
WHICH FOUNDATIONS HAVE GCFs?

Larger foundations are more likely to have developed GCFs: 81% of those with assets of \$50 million or more have GCFs, compared to 66% of those with assets between \$10 million and \$50 million and 49% of those with assets of less than \$10 million. Similarly, older foundations (which also tend to have greater assets) are more likely to have GCFs. More

than three-quarters (78%) of the foundations 30 years or older had GCFs, compared to 68% of those 10 to 29 years old and only 38% of those less than 10 years old.

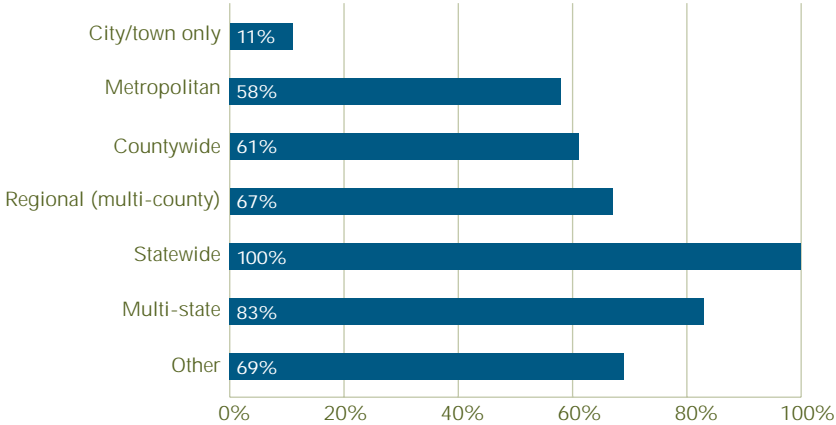
Regionally, foundations located in the West are *less* likely to have geographic component funds: 47% of those have GCFs, compared to 72% of foundations in the Midwest, 68% of those in the Northeast, and 64% of those in the South. *See Figure 10.*

FIGURE 10
Community foundations with GCFs by asset size, foundation age, and region



In short, foundations that are older, larger, and/or actively serving rural areas are more likely to have established GCFs than are others. GCF-holding foundations currently are most likely to be found in the Midwest and least likely to be found in the West.

FIGURE 11
GCF incidence by community foundation service area



The coverage area of a community foundation does not relate to GEF holdings: the majority of almost every type of community foundation has geographic component funds. Each community foundation answering the survey was asked to classify its coverage area as city/town-only, metropolitan, countywide, regional (multi-county), statewide, multi-state or other. In every one of those categories *except* city/town-only, more than 50% of the foundations reported at least one geographic component fund. Not surprisingly, every statewide foundation (100%) holds GCFs. *See Figure 11, facing page.*

HOW ARE GCFs CONCENTRATED?

Eighty percent of the foundations that have any geographic component funds have more than one GCF. About one-third (34%) have either two or three; almost one in every seven (14%) has ten or more. *See Figure 12.*

These funds are concentrated in a relatively small number of community foundations. Six foundations report having 30 or more GCFs. The 20 foundations in the sample having 10 or more GCFs have a total of 649 between them. Translated into percentages, this means that 60% of all geographic component funds in this sample reside in roughly 14% of the foundations that have GCFs.

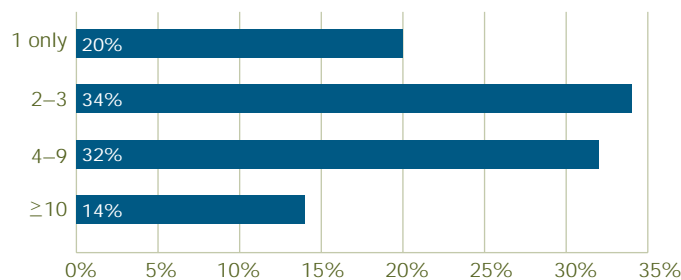


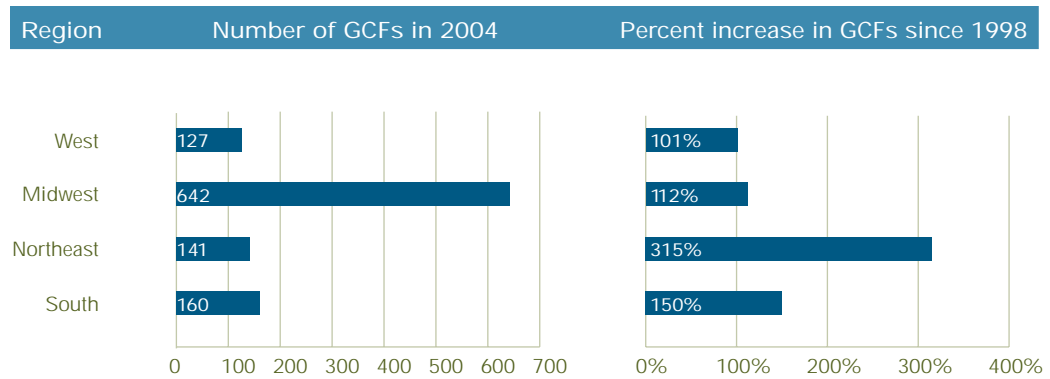
FIGURE 12
Number of GCFs held by foundations with at least one GCF

WHERE ARE GCFs GROWING?

Since 1998, community foundations located in the Northeast have experienced the largest increase in GCFs, with the number of GCFs rising from 34 in 1998 to 141 in 2004, an increase of 315%. In comparison, while foundations in the Midwest had the largest number of GCFs (303 in 1998 and 642 in 2004), the number of GCFs there rose by only 112%. The number of GCFs in the South rose from 64 to 160, an increase of 150%. In the West, the number rose from 63 to 127, an increase of 101%. *Figure 13 (next page)* shows the distribution of GCFs across regions and the percent increase in the number of GCFs from 1998 to 2004.

FIGURE 13

GCF number and percent increase between 1998 and 2004, by region



The growing prominence and credibility of GCFs is evidenced by their increasing use by smaller foundations—which also tend to be the newer foundations. Smaller foundations (those with total assets of less than \$10 million) and those actively serving rural areas showed the largest recent growth in the number of GCFs.

Foundations with assets of less than \$10 million increased their number of GCFs from 57 in 1998 to 263 in 2004, an increase of 361%. By comparison, the number of GCFs among foundations with total assets of between \$10 million and \$50 million rose from 231 in 1998 to 473 in 2004 (+105%); among foundations with assets of \$50 million or more, the number grew from 176 in 1998 to 338 in 2004 (+92%).

Foundations serving rural areas increased their number of GCFs from 426 in 1998 to 1,007 in 2004 (+132%) compared to foundations serving no rural area, which increased their GCFs from 38 in 1998 to 72 in 2004 (+89%). Three-quarters of all GCFs represented in the sample (814 of 1,079) are primarily rural. This seems to indicate that the growth of GCFs may be due to the extension of philanthropic coverage by community foundations to previously underserved rural areas. Coupled with the earlier finding that lead community foundations that actively serve at least *some* rural area in their territory are more likely to have GCFs than are those that do not serve rural areas, *it is fairly clear that the growth in GCFs represents significant growth in rural philanthropy.*

4. ASSET DEVELOPMENT AND GEOGRAPHIC COMPONENT FUNDS

HOW MUCH DO GCFs HOLD IN ASSETS?

The foundations in our sample hold a total of \$1.12 billion in endowed assets in their GCFs. Projecting from this sample (34% of the field) to the total U.S. community foundation population suggests that GCF-endowed assets currently total over \$2 billion and could be as high as \$3 billion.

As a group, community foundations with geographic component funds hold about 14% of their collective endowed assets in GCFs. On average, these foundations hold 23% of their endowed assets in GCFs (about \$7.7 million). The median, however, is only 5%, implying that a few foundations with a relatively high proportion of endowed assets in GCFs are skewing the average upward. *See Figure 14.*

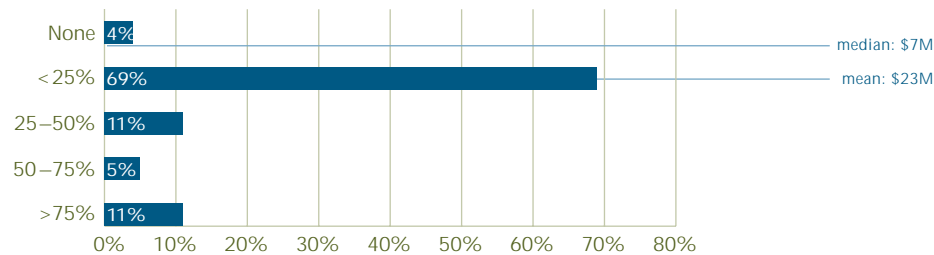


FIGURE 14
Percent of foundations' endowed assets in GCFs

It is worth noting that older foundations and those with more assets generally have a smaller *percentage* of their endowed assets in geographic component funds, even though these foundations have more *aggregate dollars* in GCFs. As *Figure 15* shows, the GCFs of foundations with assets of \$50 million or more contain an average of \$18.6 million.

Community foundation characteristic	Average percent in GCFs	Average dollar amount (in millions) in GCFs
Asset size		
< \$10 million	37%	\$1.2
\$10–49.9 million	16%	\$2.7
≥\$50 million or more	18%	\$18.6
Age		
Less than 10 years	37%	\$1.3
10 to 29 years	22%	\$6.3
30 years or more	18%	\$12.9
Overall	23%	\$7.7 million

FIGURE 15
Amount of foundations' endowed assets in GCFs, by foundation size and age

In percentage terms, however, this amount represents only 18% of these foundations' total endowed assets. In comparison, foundations with less than \$10 million dollars in endowed assets have 37% of their assets in GCFs—but this amounts to an average of only \$1.2 million.

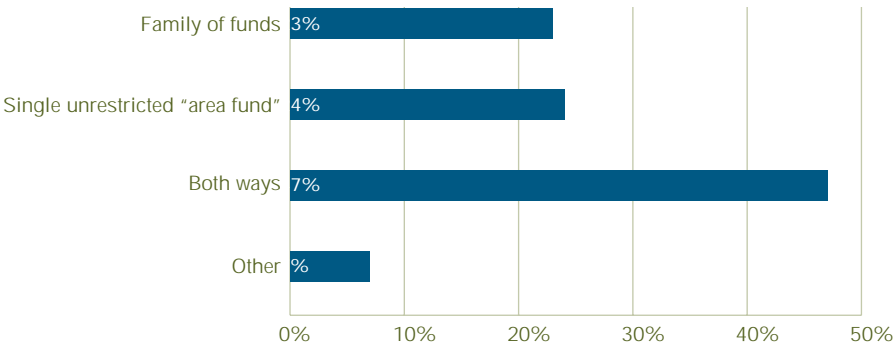
A similar pattern emerges regarding the age of the foundation. The GCFs of foundations that were established 30 or more years ago hold an average of \$12.9 million, which is just 18% of these foundations' assets. By contrast, foundations that were established less than 10 years ago hold 37% of their assets in GCFs, but that percentage amounts to only an average of \$1.3 million in raw dollars.

This data suggests that, as a group, newer and smaller foundations may be turning to GCFs as a strategy to fulfill their mission. It may also be that, in recent years, new foundations are emerging most frequently in previously underserved rural areas—areas that lend themselves to the establishment of GCFs.

HOW RESTRICTED ARE GCF ASSETS?

GCFs organized as a single unrestricted fund and those organized as a family of funds or dedicated subaccounts are equally prevalent. Almost one-quarter of the community foundations with geographic component funds organize their GCFs as a single unrestricted “area fund” — with multiple donors — that covers the entire local service area. Nearly the same number of foundations hold their GCFs as “families” of various types of funds dedicated to specific purposes or subareas. The remaining half of the community foundations with GCFs organize and hold these funds *both ways*. “Other” responses, given by 7% of the respondents, include answers such as individual, memorial and scholarship funds. See *Figure 16*. Overall, because of the large proportion of “area funds,” this data suggests that GCFs represent a larger source of unrestricted endowment than other funds typically held by community foundations.

FIGURE 16
GCF organization within lead organization



HOW DO GCFs GROW THEIR ASSETS?

All responding community foundations were asked to list the strategies and tactics they used to develop GCF assets. (This question was not designed to assess effectiveness.) One-on-one contact is the most frequent strategy GCFs use to grow endowments, especially one-on-one contact with donors (41%) and one-on-one contact with professional advisors (40%). Promotional outreach to the community—for example, outreach to the media, promotional presentations and direct mail—is used by 56% of the respondents. More than one-third (34%) use targeted messages that emphasize, for example, the community benefits of having a community foundation, the tax advantages, or the permanence of giving to community foundations. Eleven percent of the respondents target specific constituencies such as businesses, nonprofit organizations, and community alumni or their families. Ten percent use tactics that emphasize developing particular types of funds, such as acorn funds, donor-advised funds and capital campaigns.⁷

WHAT ROLE DO “MATCHES” PLAY IN GROWING GCFs?

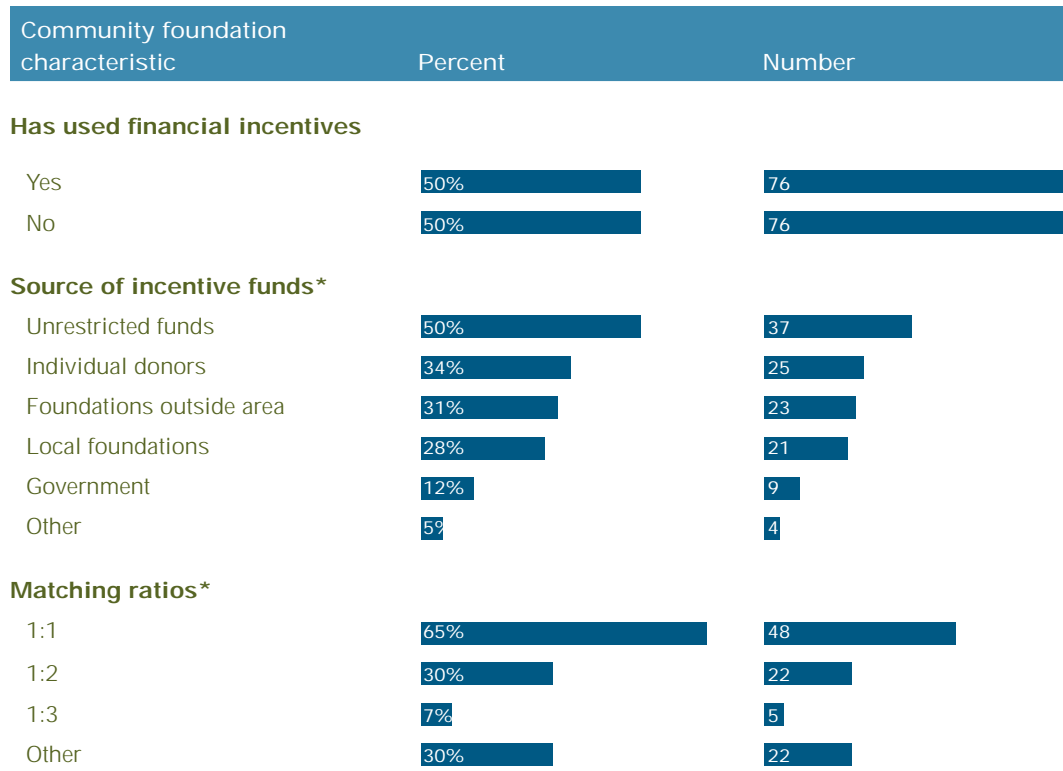
Foundations with GCFs were asked a series of questions to determine if they use financial incentives to establish and grow their GCFs and, if so, what types. Half reported using some sort of financial incentive—or “match”—to establish or grow their GCFs; 46% are *currently* using an incentive.

The most common incentive source for the match, used by 50% of the foundations with GCFs, is the “lead” foundation’s own unrestricted funds. About one-third (34%) use individual donor funds as the match. Other sources of match include foundations outside the local area (31%), local foundations (28%), and government (12%). The survey did not distinguish between whether the match was intended to encourage endowed gifts or gifts for operations. *See Figure 17, next page.*

The incentive funds used varied with the size and age of the foundation. Sixty-nine percent of foundations with assets of \$50 million or more used their own unrestricted funds, compared to 45% of those with assets of between \$10 million and \$50 million and 33% of those with assets less than \$10 million. Similarly, 68% of foundations 30 years or older used their own funds, compared to 47% of those 10 to 29 years old and 25% of those less than 10 years old. By contrast, the use of individual donors as a source of incentive funds was favored by foundations that are 10 to 29 years old, with 42% in that category using individual donor funds, compared to 13% of foundations less than 10 years old and 27% of those 30 or more years old.

⁷ Respondents could give more than one response, so percents add up to more than 100.

FIGURE 17
Use of
financial
incentives to
grow GCFs



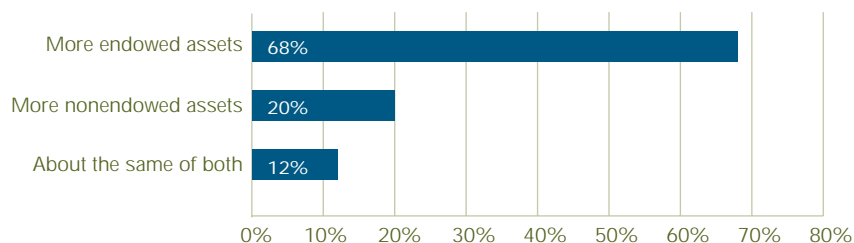
*Respondents were asked to check all that apply, so percents add up to more than 100.

Typically, match funds are provided on a 1:1 basis. Sixty-five percent of the matching programs provided a 1:1 match, 30% matched at a ratio of 1:2, 7% matched new funds at 1:3, and 30% of them report other ratios — some higher, some lower, some multiple ratios, and many with a dollar limit for the amount they will match. *See Figure 17.*

WHAT PROPORTION OF GCF ASSETS ARE ENDED AND NONENDED?

Foundations with GCFs were asked if any of their GCFs accept and utilize nonended dollars, and 79% of the lead foundations responded affirmatively. Overall, 536 of the 1,079 GCFs (50% of the total) accept nonended dollars. For more than two-thirds (68%) of the lead foundations, ended assets are the bulk of their GCFs; 20% report more *nonended* assets, and 12% say they have about the same amount of ended and nonended assets. *See Figure 18.*

FIGURE 18
GCF
compositions



5. ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE OF GCFs WITHIN LEAD FOUNDATIONS

HOW ARE GCFs HELD WITHIN THE LEAD FOUNDATION?

Most community foundations with GCFs (71%) report holding GCFs as advised funds. More than one-quarter (27%) hold them as agency funds, 15% as supporting organizations, 9% as field-of-interest funds, and 5% as designated funds. Almost one-quarter of the respondents (22%) also gave “Other” responses, which included unrestricted funds, community funds, component funds and a mix of options; many of these probably also fall into one of the prior categories.⁸

HOW MANY GCFs HAVE SEPARATE NONPROFIT STATUS?

It is worth noting that 217 of the 1,079 GCFs (20%) in this study are independent 501(c)(3)s. Although the survey collected no comparison data, it is probable that GCFs are much more likely to establish a separate corporate entity than is any other type of endowed fund held by a community foundation, with the exception of supporting organization funds.

WHICH STARTS THE ACTION — THE GCF OR THE LEAD FOUNDATION?

It appears that the passive (or responsive) approach to building geographic component funds is nearly twice as prevalent among community foundations as an activist approach. More than half the community foundations with GCFs (53%) say they develop their geographic component funds when communities or groups approach them, as opposed to 27 percent who report an intentional, active program to develop geographic component funds. One-fifth gave “Other” responses, which can include using both of the above-mentioned processes. See *Figure 19*.

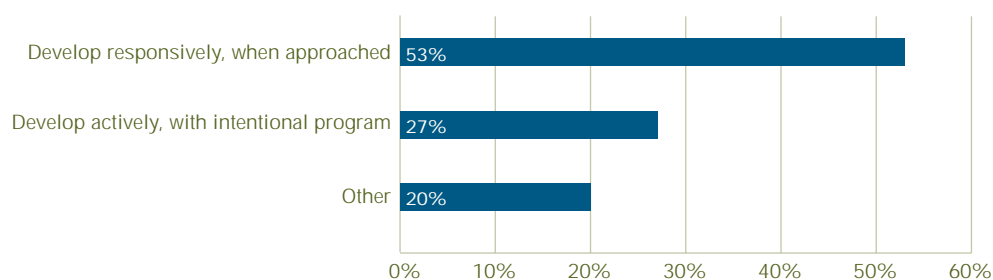


FIGURE 19
Catalyst for
establishing GCFs

⁸ Respondents could give more than one response, if applicable, so percents add up to more than 100.

Foundations that have an active GCF development program, however, are likely to have more GCFs than those taking the passive approach. Foundations that said they actively develop GCFs have an average of ten GCFs, while those who take a responsive approach average only five. Differences by foundation size and age in this regard are minor and not significant. *See Figure 20.*

FIGURE 20
Process by which community foundations establish GCFs

Process	Percent of foundations	Total number of GCFs	Average number of GCFs/foundation
Have intentional program to develop GCFs	27%	403	10.08
Develop GCFs when approached by others	66%	381	4.95
Other	81%	295	10.17

WHAT GCF-RELATED CRITERIA, POLICIES AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES DO LEAD FOUNDATIONS HAVE?

When asked if they have criteria for establishing GCFs, 54% of the community foundations with GCFs say they do. The most important criteria, mentioned by nearly all of those respondents, are the quality and commitment of the local leadership. Other criteria that respondents cite are local philanthropic potential and financial commitment (88%); organizational readiness (29%); and community criteria such as population, breadth of community, and geographic location (26%); and the lead foundation’s readiness—for example, in terms of staffing or financial resources (12%).⁹

Should component funds ever wish to separate from the lead foundation, 29% of the foundations with GCFs report having a formalized policy or procedure for disaffiliation already in place; 71% do not have such a policy.

Thirty-four percent of the lead community foundations with GCFs have a lead foundation board subcommittee or a special committee of selected GCF board members to advise the lead foundation on its overall GCF efforts. Over half (58%) of the lead community foundations currently do not have such an advisory group—but ten years ago, this was likely a much larger percentage.

Foundations most often call their GCFs’ governing bodies Boards (41%), followed by Advisory Committees (37%) and Advisory Boards (6%). Responses of “Other” were given by 16% of the respondents.

⁹ Respondents could give up to three responses, so percents add up to more than 100.

6. STAFFING THE GROWTH AND WORK OF GCFs

DO ANY GCFs HAVE THEIR OWN STAFF?

About one-quarter (26%) of the *lead* community foundations with GCFs report that *some* of their component funds employ their own staff. Of course, this means that far fewer than 26% of GCFs themselves have their own staff; indeed, it could be an extremely small percentage. Even so — assuming that 26% of the 154 responding foundations with GCFs have only one GCF with its own staff (a *very* conservative estimate) — this means that at least 40 GCFs in this sample have their own staff.

Larger lead community foundations — those with assets of \$50 million or more — are more likely to have some GCFs that employ their own staff (43%) than are smaller lead foundations (20%).

Overall, the formal staffing of GCFs raises new management issues for lead foundations and suggests a new market — GCF staff leadership — for professional development in the community foundation field.

WHICH LEAD FOUNDATION STAFF HELP GROW GCFs?

The CEO is cited by 72% of the responding foundations as the lead foundation's staff member who is most likely to be involved in developing or administering the foundation's geographic component funds. Other foundation staffers who participate in the administration and development of GCFs include development staff (cited by 34% of respondents), program staff (32%), finance staff (25%), and "Other" (17%).¹⁰

Not surprisingly, foundations with smaller asset size (less than \$50 million) are more likely to have their CEOs help develop and administer GCFs than are those with assets of \$50 million or more. Among foundations with assets of less than \$50 million, 81% report that their CEOs develop and administer GCFs, compared to 55% of foundations with assets of \$50 million or more. Larger foundations are more likely to have program or development staff developing and administering their GCFs.

¹⁰ Respondents could check all staff categories that participate, if applicable, so percents add up to more than 100.

WHAT LEVEL OF EFFORT DO LEAD FOUNDATIONS DEVOTE TO GCFs?

GCFs are not a core activity for most lead foundations. Most community foundations (79%) say they spend 20% or less of their core staff time on the development or administration of their GCFs. Only 9% say they spend more than 40% of their core time on GCFs, while 8% admit they have no idea how much time they spend.

The smaller the lead foundation's assets, the more core staff time it is likely to spend on GCF-building activities: 32% of lead foundations with assets of less than \$10 million spend more than 20% of their core staff time on GCF work, compared to 21% of those with assets of \$10 to \$50 million and 14% of those with assets of \$50 million or more. This difference probably reflects some economies of scale, but it might also relate to the earlier survey finding that GCFs constitute a larger portion of the smaller foundations' assets, and to the general trend that smaller foundations tend to be short-staffed.

WHO BEARS PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR GCF ASSET DEVELOPMENT?

More than half (56%) of the community foundations with GCFs said the GCF's board or staff has primary responsibility for GCF asset development, 29% cited the lead foundation's staff, and 6% named the lead foundation's board. "Other" responses were given by 9% of the foundations with GCFs, and included answers such as a combination of GCF and lead foundation staff, the community, and other responses.

7. TOPICS AND RESOURCES FOR FUTURE ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

MAY OTHERS USE THIS DATABASE?

Yes. This research represents only an initial glance at a relatively new mechanism of philanthropy, especially in serving the needs of rural regions. Consider this work to be a first, incomplete step in broadening our knowledge and understanding of geographic component funds.

We hope that this study will be of practical value to community and foundation leaders, and that it will stimulate additional research. Keep in mind:

- **More analysis of this survey is possible!** This survey findings report is a “headlines” analysis that only goes so deep. From the same database, other researchers could likely surface a raft of additional useful findings and critical questions for the field.
- **This survey offers a solid base to assist with other research and analysis.** The database created with this survey can be useful in tracking trends over time and in providing supplementary or comparative data for other community foundation and rural philanthropy research. Even as this report is being prepared, Aspen CSG already has a request from one philanthropy researcher to utilize this survey database to enrich other data she is collecting for a community foundation study.

Aspen CSG welcomes requests to utilize this data from researchers who are studying the community foundation and community and rural development fields. Please contact us for conditions and permission.

To consider the potential for additional analysis, please see the questions as well as the “jump structure” of the survey, which can be found on our website at www.aspenccsg.org/rdp/survey2.pdf.

WHAT ARE SOME USEFUL TOPICS FOR FIELD-BUILDING RESEARCH?

Compared to other types of foundations and to other types of community-based nonprofits, community foundations have been the focus of amazingly little constructive or evaluative research. This is particularly true of rural-focused community foundations. Over the last few years, however, new interest in community foundations and their role in community building is percolating—possibly because of the recent birth and sudden

growth of varying community foundation models both in the United States and around the world.

Among the many yet-to-be-plumbed research topics in this country, the growth and impact of community-focused philanthropy, the development of geographic component funds, the “business model” that will sustain community foundations, and the role of community philanthropy in rural development all deserve further study.

On the following pages, we offer a beginning list of salient research topics and questions primarily related to the GCF phenomenon. There is much overlap in these questions, and many of them require qualitative study as well as simple (and not so simple) counting. The list is by no means exhaustive, and we give it only rough organization, primarily to provoke thought. We choose these questions because they surfaced in our own research or because they frequently arise in Aspen CSG’s work with community foundations that participate in our Rural Development Philanthropy Learning Network.

JUST THE GCF FACTS

- How many GCFs exist in the *entire* field? How many existed 10 year ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago?
- What is the range of asset size of GCFs over time?
- What are the total endowed and nonendowed assets held by GCFs?
- How much grant and program funding flows annually through GCFs?
- What is the breakdown of GCFs focused on rural, suburban and urban places?
- How many community foundations have GCFs, and how many GCFs do they have?

GCFs IN RELATION TO LEAD FOUNDATIONS

- For both the lead foundation and the GCF, what are the tangible and nontangible costs and benefits of GCFs, in terms of community impact (program, grantmaking, marketing)?
- For both the lead foundation and the GCF, what are the tangible and nontangible costs and benefits of GCFs, in terms of asset development?
- For both the lead foundation and the GCF, what are the true operating costs and operating benefits of GCFs?
- What are various business and operational models for the establishment and growth of GCFs, and how do they compare in cost and impact?
- How are GCFs more or less cost-effective than free-standing community foundations?

- What specific operating innovations create or frustrate “economies of scale” in the development of GCFs?
- What are the most critical issues that arise in relationship building between a lead foundation and GCFs — and what are the most effective options for addressing them?
- Where is the growth of GCFs experiencing the most success, and the connection between the GCF and the lead foundation developing well?

MISSION, GOVERNANCE AND IMPACT

- What models are there — and what is their relative success or effectiveness — for establishing a constructive connection between the mission, standards of operation and impact of the lead foundation and those of its geographic component funds?
- In what ways are GCF assets used to help accomplish the community-building mission of the lead foundation — and *vice versa*?
- How are GCF boards developed? How do their compositions differ, and what difference does composition make?
- How — and how well — are GCF and lead foundation board members prepared, developed and utilized as organizational and community-building assets for both GCFs and the lead foundation?
- How do GCFs conduct and measure the impact of their grantmaking and program activities?
- How — and how well — has the spread of GCFs contributed to fostering rural philanthropy and community economic development?

GCF DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

- What asset development tactics do GCFs pursue, to what effect, and in what significant ways do they differ from standard lead foundation asset development tactics?
- What fee amounts do lead community foundations charge GCFs? What organizational and fund structures are used for GCFs, and to what effect?
- What range of formation, orientation and training methods help or hinder the development of GCFs and their leadership?
- What range and levels of service do lead community foundations provide for GCF development at start-up and over time?
- What are the skill sets of a community foundation (or GCF) executive, and how do they compare in terms of performance?

- How do community foundation staff look for, find and retain committed, dedicated local board members?
- What is the range of lead foundation and local staffing structures used to develop and advance GCFs, and what are their relative effectiveness, costs and benefits?
- What does it take to make a GCF become “self-sustaining”?

TOOLS, TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- What tools and training can improve both the relationship between lead foundations and GCF advisory boards and their performance?
- What assistance do GCF staff and board need that would require tailoring existing community foundation professional development tools or developing new training and material?
- What roles have the Council of Foundations, Regional Associations of Grantmakers (RAs), for-profit consultants and nonprofit associations, technical assistance organizations, and networks played in providing assistance to GCFs and their lead foundations? How effective has the help been, and what help is most needed in the future?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

SURVEY ORIGINATORS. The *Growing Local Philanthropy* survey was developed and conducted by the staff of the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group (CSG) during the summer of 2004. The Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group staff team that developed the survey included:

- *Bethany Coleman*, 2004 Summer Associate
- *Diane Morton*, Program Associate
- *Jane Stevenson*, Associate Director
- *Janet Topolsky*, Director

SURVEY BETA TESTERS. Before it was finalized for the field, the following individuals, with grace and humor, helped CSG “beta test” this survey. We thank them for their wisdom and patience—and for their valuable critiques, which helped sharpen the wording, logic and order of the survey.

- *Patrice Abbe*, Community Funds Specialist, Minnesota Community Foundation
- *Sidney Armstrong*, Consultant; former Executive Director, Montana Community Foundation
- *Heather Larkin Eason*, Executive Vice President, Arkansas Community Foundation
- *Sid Groeneman*, Groeneman Research & Consulting, Inc.
- *Martha Abbott Hill*, Senior Program Officer, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
- *John Molinaro*, Vice President–Program, West Central Initiative (Minnesota)
- *Kathleen Moxon*, Chief Administrative Officer, Humboldt Area Foundation; Program Director, Institute of the North Coast (California)
- *Betsy Mulliken*, Executive Director, Fremont Area Community Foundation (Nebraska)
- *Carla Roberts*, Vice President of Affiliates, Arizona Community Foundation
- *Eric Seacrest*, Executive Director, Mid-Nebraska Community Foundation
- *Norma Schuiteman*, Executive Director, Community Foundation of South Puget Sound

SURVEY ANALYSTS. After the survey was fielded, the report analysis—from crunching numbers to summarizing findings in both words and graphics—was prepared by *Sid Groeneman* of Groeneman Research & Consulting, Inc., and *Mousumi Sarkar*. We thank Sid and Mousumi for their thorough and dedicated professionalism, for their good spirits, and for their perseverance through many reviews and revisions of the findings.

SURVEY FINDINGS REVIEWERS. To tease out deeper significance, generate additional analysis ideas, and reflect on the results as part of the larger picture of rural development and philanthropy, we reviewed initial findings with an additional set of expert colleagues.

We thank them for their time, their keen insights, and their ongoing contributions to the field.

- *Jason Gray*, Research and Policy Director, Southern Rural Development Initiative (SRDI)
- *Jennifer Leonard*, President and Executive Director, Rochester Area Community Foundation
- *Elizabeth Myrick*, Senior Program Associate, Aspen Institute Nonprofit Sector and Philanthropy Program
- *Pete Plastrik*, Integral Assets, Inc.
- *Gabriel Works*, Works Associates, Inc.

FOR MORE ON THE SURVEY

- Aspen CSG welcomes requests to utilize this data from researchers who are studying the community foundation and community and rural development fields. Please contact Diane Morton at diane.morton@aspeninstitute.org for conditions and permission.
- To see the questions that were asked and the “jump structure” of the survey, download the original survey at www.aspencsg.org/rdp/survey2.pdf.
- If you have questions about the content of the survey and the report, please contact Janet Topolsky at jt@aspeninst.org.
- If you wish to obtain print copies, you may download additional copies of the report from www.aspencsg.org/rdp or contact Diane Morton at diane.morton@aspeninstitute.org.

