

Inspiration from Romania



ASSET LENS

In a town architecture, some spaces invite us to dream, to communicate with others and be the best versions of ourselves, while other spaces constrain us.



In an open architecture of community philanthropy, we try to create opportunities for each one of us to be the best version of our visionary, generous, connected and inclusive selves.

The strengths focus approach is present in many community foundation programs like Youth Banks, sports fundraising events and donor circles.

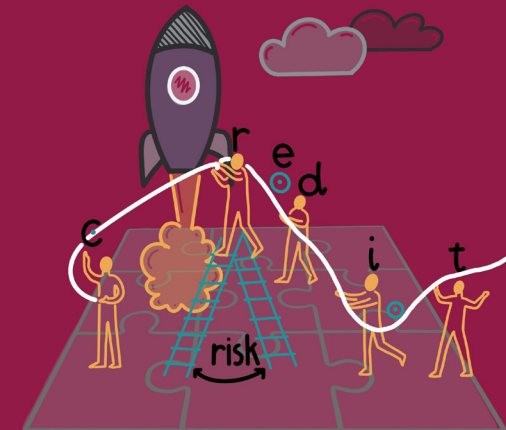
These programs are all based on the strengths of the community, not just individuals. We actively look for ways that different community members complement each other. Some can contribute ideas, others organizational spirit, others money.

This requires leaders that trust others and are ready to share resources.

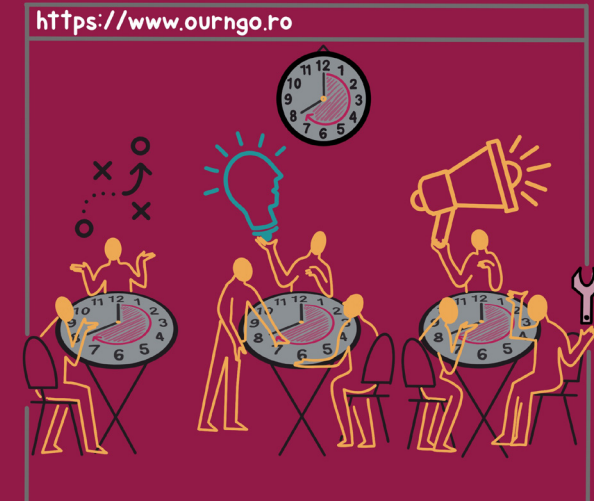
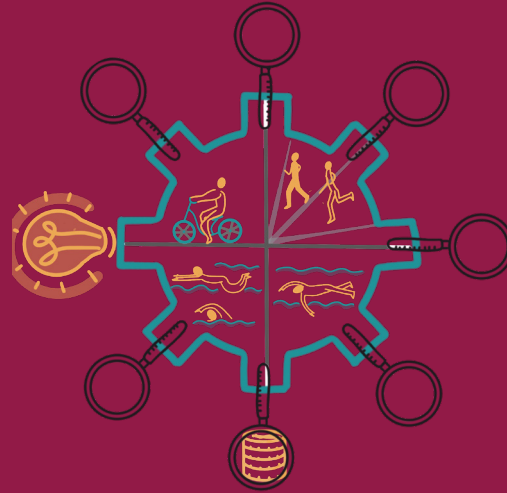
Leaders who can identify capacities and are able to match them like a puzzle building a broader picture.

It also requires leaders who are ready to share the credit and the risks. We can really view this as design thinking applied to community engagement.

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MOBILIZING LOCAL ASSETS

We are so used to ignoring the resources in our own communities that we may even believe there are none.

Community foundations create new ways of engagement that help bring to surface resources in many forms – talents, connections, money.



For example 3,9 million US dollars were raised in Romania by community foundations through **sports fundraising events**. These encouraged participants to raise money for specific local causes. Both individuals and private companies in the community participate to support the projects through the events. They are a great way to understand more about the specific needs and initiatives in the community.

They also help NGOs meet like-minded people who can be long term supporters and contributors. The positive feeling of growth through these connections and the sport itself combines with the energy of the results achieved in terms of funds.

The 8 hours overtime initiative brings specialized expertise to support local NGOs develop their strategies, knowledge areas and marketing products.

Skilled and specialized volunteers contribute during the 8 hours spent together in the same space to specific products that NGOs need so as to improve the effectiveness of their work, such as building a website.

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Other ways that community foundations use to engage corporate, individual or family donors is through named funds.

Corporate named funds in Romania have supported themes like excellence in education, innovation, environmental protection and the activation of local communities.

Individuals and families have used everyday life occasions to connect with friends and ask them to replace birthday or wedding gifts with contributions to their fund.

The **Auerbach Fund set up by the Bucharest Community Foundation** is an example in this area, with contributions from wedding guests supporting a more active life for elderly citizens. Many individual donors also contribute to scholarship funds managed by community foundations.

In all of these cases, the foundations manage transparent frameworks for the mobilization of resources and bring back to the donors and the community reports on the results produced with the money raised.

The main message that community foundations send to their local communities is that **philanthropy is useful and accessible**, but also fun and connected to real life situations.

POWER TO ACT

Bring back a sense of responsibility and power to act.



The current context creates a lack of trust and disengagement as people feel that decisions and resources are far from where they stand and that there is limited action they can take.

This is particularly true for the youth, the elderly, and neighborhood communities. Community foundations focus on local actions and resources and those areas of community life that people have power to influence and act upon.

For example, **the Neighborhood Days program in Sibiu** has focused on helping one neighborhood community understand itself better by working together to address its needs and celebrate together.

Special event days without cars also helped to free up space for the community to use in new ways and to build a vision of how a more environmentally friendly city can look like.

Another example comes from **the Bucharest Community Foundation**. With the support of the supermarket chain Mega Image, the foundation has built a corporate named fund for local community engagement.

The fund focused on the joy of living and doing things together and offered grants to over 20 citizen initiatives.

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BUILDING NEW ORGANIZATIONS

Help broaden the leadership and engagement of communities by contributing to the creation of new citizen initiatives and organizations.



As funders of NGOs and informal citizen groups, usually through small grants, community foundations stimulate people to come together for their first projects, to put their ideas in practice and learn in a flexible funding environment. It is quite often that a community foundation will be the first supporter of a new initiative that later grows and can engage more donors and partners.

For example, the **YouthBank funds** supported high-school students to build local teams of fundraisers and grantmakers and offer funding to other youth-led teams.

Over 500 projects initiated by high school students were supported across Romania in 12 years, with the funds mobilized by their peers.

Many of these young people, who brought forward their ideas for change and received support, are now contributing in different capacities in civil society organizations.

The **Ikea Fund for the Environment in Bucharest** supports initiative groups built around a particular green area, as a ground for bringing neighbors together.

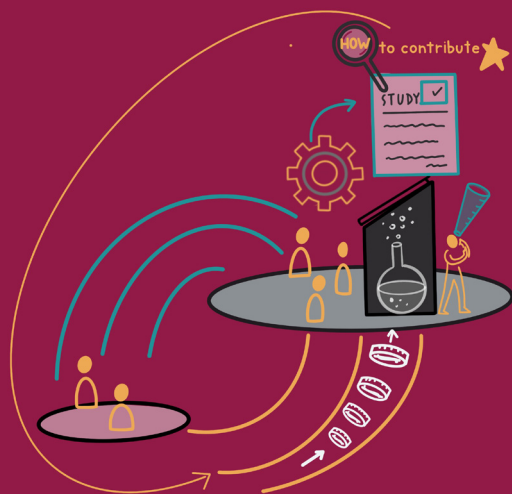
Half of the 12 projects supported came from informal groups, people who teamed up for this particular action and may later decide to continue together.

A multi-year thematic fund of the **Sibiu Community Foundation** has supported projects that connect science and education with passion for these topics. It has also helped create a community of teachers and providers of educational opportunities who, with the support of the foundation, have set up an educational hub – both a physical space and an interactive network.

This newly formed organization capitalizes on the resources that the fund helped mobilize. It has become a way of strategically taking forward the science education initiatives and sharing the lessons of this journey.

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COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Building shared understanding and wider response

A community foundation helps people in its territory understand how they can act and work together and also to discover, create and build new ways to move forward as a community.



For example, in **Fagaras**, the foundation researched the position of the diaspora in its life. A large number of people born and raised in the community now live or work abroad due to the limited opportunities in Fagaras, following the closure of a chemical plant 30 years ago.

The foundation supported a study that looked at how the diaspora can contribute to the current and future life of the community. They then followed up by creating exploratory opportunities for this contribution.

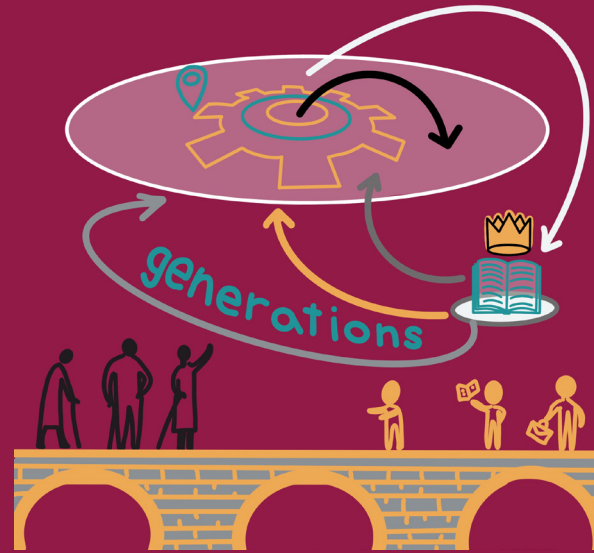
The Bucharest Community Foundation adapted the **Vital Signs** methodology developed in Canada to help surface important facts about the community, as data generally is either missing or cumbersome to find or understand.

The heart rate of the community report focuses on three main areas: education, health and belonging, as well as overviews on other fields of community life including safety, social economy, mobility, culture and arts.

The Sibiu Community Foundation also gives people in its territory the opportunity to reinvent their city as a smart and sensible place centered around ideas for the future.

CitySense is a program supported by tech company Wenglor which combines hackathons and grantmaking tools to stimulate community members to propose and implement prototypes that use technology to improve their quality of life.

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Other ways through which community foundations help social innovation are through partnerships with other foundations and nonprofits active at the national or international level.

These NGOs, which specialize in certain issues and responses, are able to propose and share experience on quality methodologies and can contribute their own resources to help address key needs.

Generations is a partnership between several community foundations and the Princess Margareta of Romania Foundation.

The program focused on creating bridges between generations, combining volunteering from elderly people with the needs and resources of the afterschool programs for children in vulnerable circumstances.

Community foundations helped mobilize money locally and identified local nonprofits who could carry this work, while its national partner contributed expertise and leveraged the funds raised locally.

Most of the funds that community foundations develop also have a capacity building component. This helps local leaders, initiatives and NGOs to better understand the objectives of the fund, propose interesting initiatives and build connections with others who can contribute.

As such, communities can try new things and move forward based on local leadership, and also on a range of ideas, experiences and resources that come together.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Building community resilience and respond to crisis and risk

Community foundations can take a long-term view, reflected in approaching not just current issues, but helping communities better prepare for the future. They are also well placed to respond quickly to emergency situations, mobilizing community assets and networks for good.



For example, the **Bucharest Ready** campaign and fund organized by the Community Foundation focuses on mitigating risks and preparing responses in case of an earthquake affecting the city. Bucharest sits over an earthquake area and some of its older buildings are at risk, but the lack of resources to invest and the emotional impact of this risk on people has generated limited dialogue and action so far.

The initiative of the Bucharest Community Foundation brings together NGOs, business and governmental bodies to increase knowledge of each others' efforts and help coordination and mitigation plans.

The spark for this response has been a very well researched article on the risks of the earthquake and mitigation opportunities published by DOR magazine, motivating the director of the foundation to start a strategic initiative in this area.

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The Covid-19 situation determined a movement-wide activation of community foundations and their supporters in Romania. Some community foundations had just started their activity, while others already had years of experience, yet for all directly supporting a health emergency has been a novel experience.

In spite of this, a listening approach towards communities and medical staff and the power of the network have helped generate quick solutions to challenges.

As a supporter of philanthropy at a national level, as well as of the community foundations movement, the Association for Community Relations (ARC) developed an emergency fund that helped leverage local resources.

ARC has also coordinated a knowledge sharing network that included both community foundations and national NGOs with specialized expertise in working to support the medical response.

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