

## Assessment



# Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation: Organizational Assessment

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## INTRODUCTION

The Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation (TTCF) connects people and opportunities, generating resources to build a more caring, creative and effective community, and supporting the leadership needed to tackle challenges and create opportunities that will build a more nurturing environment for all. TTCF serves communities from North Lake Tahoe to Emerald Bay in the West, and to the North East Truckee, Donner Summit, Sugar Bowl and surrounding communities.

TTCF has been building philanthropy in North Tahoe through its work with donors, nonprofits and communities for more than a decade. Established through the vision of William Hewlett and the commitment of community leaders, TTCF opened its doors in 1998 and has grown to serving thousands of people and awarding over \$10,000,000 in grants and scholarships since inception.

Individuals, families, businesses, and organizations create charitable funds that help meet the challenges and opportunities of the region. TTCF offers a variety of financial and programmatic vehicles to connect donors to causes, from immediate basic human needs to field-of-interest funds. Donor gifts allow the Foundation to respond quickly to the needs of the evolving community, providing leadership and direction through proactive grants to non-profit organizations throughout the Foundation's region.

The Foundation's assets, approximately \$20,000,000 are held in trust and managed by an external professional investment advisor. More than 3,000 donors have set up over 75 funds to support the hundreds of nonprofits at work in the region. More than 200 grants are awarded annually in the following areas:

- Arts and culture
- Education and youth development
- Environment, conservation, and animal welfare
- Health and human services

Since 2008 the Foundation has focused its discretionary grantmaking on basic needs due to the challenges created in the area from the recession.

An active, committed 13-member volunteer Board of Directors, comprised of some of the region's most distinguished civic and business leaders, governs TTCF. TTCF is staffed by 6 professionals who carry out the mission, vision and objectives of the Foundation. In addition TTCF hosts supporting organizations that provide both grant making and direct services to the region served by the Foundation.



## REGION

The North Tahoe area is magnificently beautiful and one of the most popular and desirable locations in the Western United States. Lake Tahoe is considered the jewel of the High Sierra, one of the deepest and bluest lakes in the world. At 6,229 feet above sea level, Lake Tahoe is the highest lake of its size in the United States. From the lake, there is a stunning 360 degree panoramic view of the Sierra Nevada Mountains which rise to over 10,000 feet.

Visitors traveling to the North Lake Tahoe region generate a substantial portion of the area's economic activity. The region provides a rich offering of world-class winter sports and summer outdoor activities. Much of the local economy depends on visitors and owners of vacation homes (part-time residents), and multi-home residents who contribute significantly to businesses that provide accommodations and entertainment in the region. Exquisite destination resorts and restaurants draw repeat visitors who often choose to retire or relocate within the communities around the Lake after developing a love of the area over many years.

North Tahoe has approximately 68,000 permanent residents with a substantial number of 2nd homeowners (depending upon the season) easily more than doubling this number during certain seasons. The region is complex in governance with two states, four counties and multiple city and municipal entities. The needs of the community are typical of those found in areas with a significant service economy.

## THE FOUNDATION

Since the founding of TTCF, the Board, staff and community have not only embraced the potential benefit of the Foundation to the community but have also worked with both passion and commitment to achieve the goal of growing the Foundation's capacity to be an active and effective community leader working to improve the conditions for all. The result has been 13 years of engaging donors, non-profits, public agencies, political leaders and community members to come together around common purposes to benefit their communities.

Since TTCF was founded, it has:

1. Become an honest and trusted community resource focused on improving the lives of the residents of the community
2. Developed a reputation for carefully and responsibly stewarding Foundation assets while growing the asset base from \$0 to just under \$20m
3. Managed operations utilizing strict fiscal controls along with:
  - a. Augmenting operating budget by:

- i. Effective use of volunteers
- ii. Development of innovative funding devices to support operations through the establishment of:
  1. Business support: Community Ski/Ride Pass Program
  2. Donated and significantly reduced price of office space
  3. Family friendly personnel policies
4. Committed to include and engage community members in all aspects of Foundation operations
5. Identified and worked with leaders in the community to craft and successfully implement solutions
6. Engaged a wide-range of volunteers as co-producers allowing the Foundation to provide more support than would be expected of a foundation of its size and history
7. Always remained nimble and committed to providing just-in-time resources to assist local community based organizations in solving local problems
8. Invested necessary financial and human resources to solve local problems
9. Built the assets and human resources of the Foundation in support of the community

Throughout its 13-year history, TTCF has not been satisfied with simply providing funding to effective non-profit organizations. It also engaged with the community to craft solutions to local problems that were identified as critical for the continuing health of the residents of its service area. Some examples of current and recent Foundation initiatives that have benefited TTCF's communities:

- The **Community Collaborative of Tahoe Truckee**, a regional collaborative comprised of 40 community-based organizations that vision and work together to create a safe and healthy environment for children, youth, and families.
- **Speak Your Peace** was a campaign to improve communication by reminding individuals of the basic principles of respect. In 2009-10, TTCF conducted a large community campaign to encourage people to use the nine tools of civility when engaged in public debate. At that time, nearly every public body plus over 1,000 citizens signed up to practice civility using these tools.
- TTCF recently coordinated a **Call to Action**, a weekend fundraising initiative to support basic operating requirements of local nonprofits hit hard by the economic decline.
- TTCF, along with many community partners, convened a community forum to discuss suicide prevention. Over 75 people attended this gathering at which strategies and ideas were shared for keeping youth safe, resilient and thriving.
- The **Queen of Hearts Women's Fund**, officially launched in February 2006, with the goal to identify 1,000 women to give a minimum of \$1,000 and raise \$1 million dollars within 1 year. This goal was exceeded and \$1.3 million has been raised to date and membership continues to grow. The fund is an opportunity to learn and



participate in philanthropic giving, while tapping the influence and power of the women of the community.

- TTCF has launched a **New Funds Initiative** to expand its grantmaking and internal capacity.

## **ASSESSMENT REPORT OVERVIEW**

When the Founding President of the Foundation, Lisa Dobe, advised the Board that she had decided to take a new position, the Board of the Foundation determined that this would be an excellent point to conduct a thorough assessment of the Foundation's programs, activities, services and operations. This report outlines the results of that assessment.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Many of those interviewed see the Foundation as being ready to "take off," with one interviewee saying, "The Foundation has proven over the past 13 years that it is a leader and can make a significant difference in our communities. Now is the time to work on growing its impact." Another interviewee suggested, "The Foundation is at an inflection point in its growth and development."

Many of those interviewed felt the Foundation has been successful, but has come to a crossroads and has a choice to make. TTCF could continue to operate as it has been for the past 13 years, or it can apply what it has learned and consider what is possible based upon a more strategic approach while strengthening its donor development and stewardship, grantmaking, and community leadership.

If TTCF continues on the course it has been following over its 13 year history – providing a relatively modest amount of both financial and human capital to its service area based upon an opportunistic approach to its work - it will continue to grow modestly for years to come. The impact of its work will continue to provide significant support to the communities the Foundation serves. However, it will probably not be able to provide the level or diversity of support many in its service area think it can and should be able to provide.

Should the Board of Directors decide that now is the time to expand the vision of the Foundation, it can take the base that it has carefully built over the past 13 years and modify both its approach and strategy with the goal of growing its impact. For example, the Board and new CEO could decide to expand its engagement with community stakeholders through the development and execution of programmatic and community leadership strategies, while simultaneously aligning donor giving to community needs.

Regardless of the direction the Board decides to take, shifts in both organizational objectives and tactics need to be made. We will first discuss those changes the Foundation should consider making regardless of the path the Board chooses to take.

## ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

### 1. Mission and Strategy:

- a. Consider refreshing the Foundation's Mission: "TTCF connects people and opportunities, generating resources to build a more caring and effective community." Working with the new CEO, the Board should review the Mission and ask questions like: Does the Mission represent the work of the Foundation today? Does the Mission provide the community with a clear and concise understanding of what TTCF does? Will the Mission guide the Foundation into the future?
- b. As is the case for most foundations, strategy is a key element of how a community foundation works. For new community foundations, usually the best strategy is to be opportunistic. TTCF is no exception; it effectively learned to work with those that wanted to work with it. However, as community foundations mature, they need to become more strategic in their work as they will be asked to be and do more than they have the capacity to successfully complete. TTCF has been very successful over the years but it now needs to become much more strategic in all that it does.

The Board and staff should consider developing a decision-making framework that is focused on the external context in which they work. They also need to develop and communicate how the programs they support are connected to their strategy. In other words, they need to have an articulated strategy that guides their work and provides the diversity of stakeholders they work with information as to what and why they are undertaking their work.

Many of the stakeholders to whom we spoke were extraordinarily articulate about one and sometimes two specific projects that TTCF had successfully undertaken, but all of the stakeholders found it difficult to identify the broader mission and objectives of the Foundation. Community foundations are complex by nature and this communication can be challenging for any community foundation, but not impossible.

For the future, TTCF should consider becoming more strategic about how its programmatic work builds its understanding of community needs through research and data. It also needs to communicate this information more

widely to its community of stakeholders on a regular basis.

It is going to be important for the Foundation to develop regular, effective and transparent systems that provide donors and other stakeholders a clear understanding of how Foundation programs align with programmatic strategies, community needs and donor wishes.

2. Articulate & Celebrate Values and Achievements:

- a. The Board and staff should consider examining what the Foundation has achieved over the past 13 years. Although the Foundation has articulated the following values, it is not clear from the interviews with Board, staff and other stakeholders that they understand how the work the Foundation has done and is doing is articulating the Foundation's expressed values:
  - i. We value our region
  - ii. We value and respect our donors
  - iii. We value individuals and organizations that work to benefit our community
  - iv. We value our role as leaders

As is the case with Foundation strategy, the Board needs to translate how what they have done reflects the Foundation's values. This process will provide the basis upon which some and possibly all of the values above have been put into practice. Additionally, other values may emerge from this examination that might be added to the values of the Foundation.

There are three examples that stood out during the interviews. Since the founding of the Foundation there has been extensive and effective use of volunteers, careful and resourceful management of the operating budget and fostering of a family friendly workplace. No one knows how effective the Foundation has been in recruiting, retaining and using professional level volunteers in its operation, and at managing and keeping the Foundation's operating budget as low as it is. Finally, the Foundation has promoted and adopted family friendly policies that assure that staff is able to give primacy to both their work and families.

TTCF would benefit by articulating these examples along with other values as these are important elements of the Foundation's past that have successfully driven the Foundation up to this point. Furthermore, as the Foundation moves forward, articulating these values will assure that as demand for change occurs, those aspects of the Foundation's operations that set TTCF apart from other community foundations as well as non-profit organizations will not be lost without careful consideration by the Board, staff and community.

- b. TTCF has, as is the case with other community foundations that become leaders in their community, stepped back from taking credit for their work. The reason is simple, TTCF's work is always focused on supporting the good and effective work of the organizations who should and do receive credit for success in the community. Community leadership is an activity that depends upon not just engaging stakeholders. It is about learning from and working with diverse publics while helping develop the skills and agency to make decisions and work together across differences. TTCF is seen by many of the folks that were interviewed as an organization that has done this successfully. It is time the Foundation made clear what it has done to date and what it will do in the service of their communities for the future.

Interviewees did not feel that the Foundation always understands or embraces its community leadership role, although most feel that it has been successful in taking on this role in specific efforts. Time and again respondents described individual Foundation grants and initiatives that helped bring to the fore and begin to solve important community problems. "Speak Your Peace", "Call To Action" and "The Community Collaborative" were mentioned most often as prime examples of the community leadership role the Foundation has taken. Every respondent celebrated the Foundation's work. Some also asked why the Foundation did not take credit for this work. Now is an ideal time for the Foundation to celebrate its past work as well as articulate what and how they plan to continue to grow this work in the future.

### 3. Development:

- a. Growth for a community foundation is dependent upon the support it can generate from donors. TTCF has done an excellent job of building a base from which it can continue to grow the number of donors choosing to do their philanthropy through the Foundation. Community support for the Foundation and its work is strong; therefore the Foundation should be able to continue to grow its donor base.
- b. However, through the interview process there were a number of donors who were dissatisfied with the Foundation's relationship with them.
  - i. Donors to the legacy funds of the Foundation felt that once they committed to making their legacy gift that the Foundation seemed not to have the capacity to keep them engaged in the activities of the Foundation.
  - ii. Long-term donors felt that decisions were being made without sufficient outreach to them. One example that was repeated time and time again was the recent name change of the Foundation (Truckee Tahoe became Tahoe Truckee). Most felt that they should have been asked for their opinion and informed of the change before the name

change was announced. Additionally, from many donors' vantage points the actual announcement was handled badly by the Foundation. One opined "the name of the Foundation is a major brand issue and that the Foundation seemed to be at best ambivalent to the name change the way it was announced".

- iii. Many donors felt that unless they "fit into the Foundation's programs", they were not asked to be engaged as often as those who "fit in".
- iv. A number of respondents were of the opinion that the Foundation was less collaborative with those non-profit organizations that were doing community wide fundraising. This resulted in the sense the Foundation moved away from supporting organizations that TTCF perceived as being competitive with the Foundation. One respondent said that TTCF should see and portray itself as the "Mother Hen" of all non-profits implying that it should be out in the community making sure that they support all of those organizations that add value to the community.

In these four cases it is clear that the Foundation should consider regularly reaching out to, listening to and providing opportunities for feedback from its existing donor base. Donor cultivation is not just about asking for money, it is about making sure the donors feel that their concerns and issue areas are important to the work of the Foundation. Without proactive engagement of the existing donor base, outreach to new donors will suffer. As the old adage goes, you are as good as your most recent critic says you are, or are not.

#### 4. Grant Making:

- a. The focus on basic human needs over the past 3 years was well understood and agreed to by Truckee and Kings Beach non-profits, donors and leaders. However, there were some concerns expressed by non-profits and donors that it is time to begin supporting other program areas again, e.g. education, culture, arts and the environment.
- b. For those not living in Truckee and Kings Beach there appeared to be a desire to see the Foundation fund more broadly in the entire service area rather than being so focused on Truckee and Kings Beach. They were very clear that the Foundation had done excellent work in both of these communities. However, they felt that the Foundation needed to reach out to their communities anew, listen to the communities about the needs that exist and then work with the communities to develop programs that would focus on identified needs.

#### 5. Focus On & Improve Marketing & Communications:

There was broad consensus amongst respondents that the Foundation needs to do a better job of getting its story out to the community – particularly donors.

- a. The Foundation should consider allocating resources to hire or contract out the communications, marketing and PR functions of TTCF with the goal of supporting the Director of Donor Engagement’s work with current donors as well as expanding to new donors.
- b. Communication efforts can be more creative and pertinent to the specific role of the Foundation than is currently being presented to the community. In addition the effective use of communications will help the Foundation manage community expectations. Providing regular community reports focused on program activities and community conditions will also provide the communities that the Foundation works with more information about the work that it does.

## SHIFTING THE HORIZON AND MODIFYING THE APPROACH

Should the Board decide to use this moment in the Foundation’s history to take what many of the respondents feel is the next and right step, then the Board along with the new CEO will need to consider the following:

1. Mission and Strategy:

The Board and new CEO need to articulate the why and how the Foundation will shift its goals for the future with a clear strategy as to how it plans to achieve these changes. The following needs to be considered when proposing a change to the mission and creation of Foundation strategy:

- a. Revise the mission statement and consider adding a vision statement. Although these are often times seen by Boards and staff as being tedious, it is recommended that if the Foundation shifts its horizon, then it will need to have succinct and clear mission and vision statements in order to communicate effectively with its stakeholders.
- b. With a revised mission and a new vision for the Foundation, it will be imperative that there be a strategy and workplan developed that will allow both the Foundation and its stakeholders to track the progress toward putting into action both the mission and vision.

2. Cultivate & Expand Community Leadership Role:

TTCF needs to consider playing an enhanced role as a community clearing house, partner, listener, convener, collaborator and leader.

- a. TTCF’s service area is considered by most interviewees as Balkanized and, although generally congenial, unable to cooperate on common issues and concerns. Most respondents felt that the Foundation was in a great position to work with communities to begin to reduce the barriers to collaboration of

the region through their ability to convene around problems that cross perceived geographic/cultural barriers.

TTCF was mentioned over and over again as the one organization that has the respect and reputation to engage and help lift the 'Pine Cone Curtains' that exists between and amongst the Lakeside Communities, Truckee, and Donner Summit.

- b. TTCF can grow its services within its current geographic area and beyond through taking on leadership around common issues and concerns.
- c. Consider listening sessions in each of the communities where the Foundation has less visibility and using the information gleaned from these sessions to propose leadership initiatives with affected communities.
- d. Mentioning the success the Foundation has had taking on knotty issues in both Truckee and Kings Beach, many interviewees felt that TTCF needs to increase its outreach to the broader region with programs designed to meet local needs continuing to use some of the same convening, partnering and leadership strategies that have been successful in Truckee and Kings Beach.

3. Development:

To move the Foundation to the next stage of development, it will have to develop a careful strategy for growing the assets of the Foundation more rapidly than is currently the case. This means looking at new and expanding ways of growing both grantmaking resources as well as building the sustainability of the Foundation through endowment development:

- a. As one respondent put it, the Tahoe Truckee area has both single home residents as well as multi home residents who all believe they live in the region. TTCF needs to reach out much more effectively than it has in the past to the multi home residents. If these potential donors are considered a priority, the new CEO along with Board members will need to look at going to where these donors work. As the majority of multi home residents work in the San Francisco Bay Area it will make sense to develop relationships with the Bay Area community foundations so that the new CEO and Board members can use their facilities to meet with groups of potential donors. Given the experience of other resort-rural community foundations the time allocation to reach out to these donors would be in the neighborhood of 30% to 50% of the CEO's time.
- b. Given that the abundance of TTCF donors are from the Truckee area, it is clear that TTCF needs to reach out more broadly to the Tahoe City region and West Shore residents. To be successful this means that TTCF's grantmaking programs will need to be aware of and prepared to take on community needs of north and west shore residents.

- c. As TTCF has modest resources and the fact that the Tahoe area is known world wide as an environmental wonderland that is undergoing environmental demands that are hard to control, it would make sense for the CEO and Board to begin to develop relationships with regional, statewide, national and international foundations focused on environmental protection and supporting sustainable communities. The ability to promote the role of the Foundation in joining others in providing ways to better manage this incredible natural and human resource could provide initial resources that might be augmented by local donors and philanthropies to make lasting and sustainable change in the region.
  - d. Based upon feedback from stakeholders, the Foundation needs to begin to or expand its collaboration with Parasol Community Foundation, El Dorado Community Foundation, Tahoe Fund, Tahoe Forest Hospital, and other like organizations. For donors and foundations alike, it is important they see the larger philanthropic organizations working together to solve local problems. As we interviewed principals with all of the mentioned as well as other similar organizations, we found them quite open to working with and in collaboration with TTCF.
  - e. To be able to support these efforts TTCF will need to allocate the appropriate level of staff resources to development. Presently, Foundation staff struggle to maintain the current demand, for a workplan that includes the activities above, more staff/volunteer resources will be necessary.
4. *Expand & Increase Grantmaking Capacity:*  
The Board and new CEO should look for ways to expand discretionary and directed grantmaking programs that support the Foundation's region as well as a larger vision around community leadership:
- a. TTCF Board, staff, volunteers, donors and community stakeholders drive the work of the Foundation. It is imperative to maintain and expand that base of support for the Foundation going forward.
  - b. The grantmaking program of the Foundation has always engaged a broad range of stakeholders in the community. This has been and will continue to be an extremely successful strategy for the future. To be able to expand this work, the Foundation will have to be willing to commit more resources to the effort, in addition to providing more opportunities for the community to engage in discussing and deciding on those activities that will be most beneficial to the community at large.

Given the work already completed by the Foundation to determine the greatest needs in the community and the subsequent grantmaking focused on these community needs, the Board and staff should consider becoming the area's clearinghouse for information and reporting on a regular basis about the relative health of the community. Stakeholders repeatedly stressed the need for this



information being shared across the community. They also felt that there is no better entity than TTCF to provide broad based information on the conditions of residents and the environment.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Olive Grove Consulting was retained by the Board of TTCF to carry out the assessment and assist the Board in conducting the search for the new President and CEO of TTCF. Foundation programs, activities and services were reviewed by the Olive Grove Consulting Team (OGCT) that included document review along with interviews of Board and Staff from July through mid-August of 2011.

Approximately 120 stakeholders were identified by TTCF and OGCT as possible interviewees. Stakeholders were contacted by OGCT by phone or via email. Of this group 64 responded (including TTCF Board and staff) and were interviewed. The stakeholders included:

1. Current and former board members
2. Staff
3. Donors
4. Grantees
5. Non-profit organization CEO's (including other foundations and community foundations in the area)
6. Public agency officials
7. Political leaders
8. Business owners and leaders
9. Community leaders

The following community stakeholders were interviewed:

Claudia Anderson, Elizabeth Archer, Chris Askins, Bill Ausfahl, Arlene Becker, Polly Bredt, Tom Bredt, Breeze Cross, Marilyn Disbrow, Kath Eagan, Sandy Evans-Hall, Dave Ferrari, Steve Frisch, Nancy Gisko, Ernie Grossman, Cindy Gustafson, Ruth Hall, David Hardie, Glen Harelson, Randy Hill, Tom Hobday, Pam Hobday, Melanie Jackson, Steve Jennings, Mark Johnson, Roger Kahn, David Kahn, Rob Kautz, Tony Lashbrook, George Lebard, Lise Maisano, Phyllis McConn, Dean Meiling, Lynne Madonna, Perry Norris, Bruce Pohl, Bob Schapper, Maia Schneider, Martha Simon, Mark Steingard, Brinn Talbot, Mary Tilden, Emilio Vaca, Tom Van Berkem, Terry Watt, Isabele Wilson

The interview schedule was designed to query:

1. Respondent's background and involvement with TTCF;

2. Their assessment of where the organization is at present, strategically and operationally;
3. Their ideas about the future of TTCF and the profile of the ideal person to become the next TTCF President and CEO.

The interview schedule was designed to provide each respondent the utmost amount of freedom in taking the discussion where he/she wanted. Interviewers often times probed respondents relative to each of the questions based upon their responses. The interviewers conducted a few of the interviews together at the outset to assure that there was comparability and consistency between interviews. Each interview lasted from 30 minutes to an hour and was done in person - or on the phone.

The response rate to the request to interview was over 50%, a very high rate for these kinds of assessments. Normally one can expect a response rate ranging from 10% to 20%.