

Assessing, Addressing & Progressing

Philanthropy Improves Community Environments and Health for All

A growing number of foundations are investing in efforts to assess and address environmental conditions in local communities. This grantmaking is grounded in evidence linking common hazards to health problems, such as research on air pollution and asthma, lead paint and neurodevelopmental deficits, contaminated water and cancers, and pesticides and Parkinson's. Philanthropy's investments are making neighborhoods healthier places to live, testing approaches along the way that may help future grantmaking.

Everyone in a community benefits from clean air, safe drinking water, and healthy indoor and outdoor conditions. Research in environmental health has demonstrated that environmental exposures *in utero* and in early childhood may amplify impacts of genetic and other health determinants and trigger adverse health consequences across a lifetime. This means healthy environments are critical for children and pregnant women, as well as for seniors and others most vulnerable to toxic exposures. Environmental quality also particularly affects communities of color, the poor, and low-wage workers who face multiple health stressors in neighborhoods, at home, and on the job.

Foundation motives for helping communities assess and address local hazards vary. Most health funders seek to improve health outcomes and reduce disparities, tackling environmental health objectives within broad "health for all" agendas like Healthy People 2020. Environmental grantmakers aim to protect ecosystems and to build public awareness of our health stake in environmental protection. Funders focused on specific communities may invest to improve local livability and recreational opportunities, improve social equity, reduce pollution-related costs, and enhance community appeal for families and business.

Grantmakers' initial motives vary as do their communities' conditions. But everyone can draw from a growing base of data, stories, tools, and potential partners as they make their own unique contributions. There is a common progression across diverse efforts, as funders go from initial assessments to action to evaluation and next steps towards healthy environments for all.

■ Assessing

A first step is to look at community needs and assets: What is known about community environmental health hazards? Who is being affected or is most vulnerable? What activity or community capacity already exists, whether in the public, academic, or nonprofit sector? There are many sources of information that may be helpful, from public data sets and media archives to peer networking within affinity groups.

A second step is to consider where, within this landscape of concern and capacity, it might make sense for a particular foundation to focus, given its goals, populations of concern, resources, and relationships. These assessments inform the next moves into funding and action.

■ Addressing

Foundations are helping communities address environmental health needs in varied ways. Often grantmaking aims to *improve knowledge* about local environmental conditions and their consequences for communities and populations of concern. A grant might support a scan, research, or monitoring project. Other grants generate knowledge and community dialogue, funding *convenings or collaborations* that enable diverse stakeholders to meet, share information, and develop priorities for action.

Philanthropy is expanding use of formal assessment methodologies for integrating information about health and community conditions into decisions, such as:

- *Health Impact Assessments*, which identify health considerations for upcoming decisions like land use planning;
- *Cumulative Impact Assessments*, which map data on current social, environmental, health and other factors to help identify "hot spots" of vulnerability; and

- *Community Environmental Health Needs Assessments*, identifying environmental improvement needs that could be addressed as part of tax-exempt hospitals' community benefit or community building obligations under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

As foundations and communities learn more about environmental hazards or conditions of concern, they may use that knowledge to develop action priorities.

Philanthropies geared towards *responsive grantmaking and capacity-building* often invite proposals to address locally-identified needs and priorities. Their grants lists might include neighborhood organizing, academic research projects, or a public agency improving its public health communications about air and water quality. Philanthropy may step in to help communities cope with disaster-related environmental health problems, for instance to monitor contaminants in soil, water, or homes following a flood.

Some foundations take on *targeted interventions* to reduce a specific hazard, such as to remediate lead paint in housing or to retrofit exhaust filters on school buses. Others develop *strategic initiatives* that bring substantial resources and a multi-year commitment to an area of work, such as in health and housing. Many foundations support *advocacy*, for instance through grants enabling environmental justice groups and health care professionals to have greater voice in decision-making and public policy.

■ Progressing

Grantmaking at the intersection of community health and community environments is inherently cross-cutting, and it often yields several kinds of results. Funders draw on grant reports, evaluations, and their own experiences to identify quantitative and/or qualitative outcomes. Tangible results might come in the form of new data, improved mapping, or indicators of hazards and health. For instance, a project to improve children's indoor environments might monitor public housing units for hazards like lead paint and mold; it might remediate hazards and then track reductions in units affected or health markers such as young residents' blood lead levels and rates of asthma attacks.

Alongside metrics, funders may consider how a project has affected community relationships and capacities. A health impact or cumulative impact assessment, for instance, may have elevated attention to local conditions, forged new connections among stakeholders, or strengthened

community advocacy about health concerns in future land use decisions.

One local environmental health grant often leads to others, as projects deepen understanding of community needs and assets. Through investments, analysis, and sharing of lessons learned, funders are advancing knowledge and capacity for further progress towards healthy environments for all.

About HEFN and this Toolkit

HEFN is a network of funders investing at the intersections of health and the environment.

HEFN's mission is to maximize philanthropy's impact on environmental health and environmental justice.

This "Assess, Address, and Progress" toolkit highlights information, stories, and resources for grantmaking to improve community environmental conditions and health.

Contact info@hefn.org for member information and additional funder resources.