

# 5 lessons from our first 15 years

Using our lessons learned to  
author the next chapter of progress for  
Iowa's Community Foundations



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Lesson 1:  
Sometimes a simple story says more.



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## A place for donors...

- to share their gifts.
- to invest assets in their community.
- to pool their money for bigger impact.



## The money works...

- like an emergency fund in times of disaster.
- like a checking account to help make good things happen.
- like an investment account for our community's future.

# Call to action: Which simple story is right for you?

What's your simple story?

Metaphor:

- Bank
- Farm
- Bicycle
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Does it share the most important parts, simply?

- Where donors can share gifts and assets.
- Helping today.
- For our future.
- For good.
- For our community.



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## Lesson 2:

Investing in your fund's operations IS  
investing in your community.



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## YES, YOU HAVE FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR OPERATING.

**County Endowment Fund - Endowed Fund:**  
Use your annual payout to support operations.

**County Endowment Fund**  
5% of the grant funding should be used for  
"philanthropic promotion"

Up to 5% of annual grantmaking funds  
you receive (the 75% that you  
distribute) can be used for your own  
"philanthropic promotion"



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# Call to action: Which operational investment is right for you?

- Staff/contractor
- Marketing materials
- Donor events
- Planning
- Convening community leaders
- Other\_\_\_\_\_

## Considerations

- What are the strengths of your Advisory Board?
- What capacity should you add to complement the talents of the board?



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Stand if your community  
foundation has  
invested funds in operations.



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Lesson 3:  
You never have to start from scratch.



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# Call to Action: Don't start from scratch. Use your resources. Work your network.

## Other Affiliates

- Affiliate learning circles
- Affiliate email list-serve for what you're seeking
- Marketing templates and ideas

## Iowa Council of Foundations

- Liaison for state programs
- Examples/best practices from across the state
- Toolkits

## Your host

- Grant due diligence
- Accounting and investment management
- Marketing\*
- Governance
- First call for help
- Annual goal setting



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# Lesson 4: Don't wait to make good.



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## Call to action: Don't wait to make good. Build all three ways of making good.

### Understand

- Needs assessment.
- Convene nonprofits and leaders and ask what's important.
- Buy 52 cups of coffee.

### Respond

- Establish a disaster/opportunity fund today.
- A regular grantmaking process that is fast, has limited rules, and open for competition.
- Raise unrestricted dollars.
- Don't wait for a grant cycle.

### Ignite

- Find a few areas to focus on over time.
- Convene donors. Share learning. Ask for partners.
- Establish a field of interest fund on an important issue.
- Raise unrestricted dollars for leadership initiatives.



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# Meet your donor

Name three principles of the way your work with donors.



## Lesson 5:

Treat your grantseekers the way you treat your donors.



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# Build relationships

## Do this.

- Meet with grantseekers
- Visit programs
- Publicly share grant decision makers
- Give advice and name the limits on your authority
- Ask grantseekers what kind of support would be most helpful

## Not that

- No personal contact with the Foundation Board members or grant-making committee



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# Be considerate of time

## Do this.

You only need five questions

- What will you do?
- Why is this needed?
- What will result?
- How much will it cost?
- How can the foundation help?

Decide faster

## Not that.

- 8 copies
- Paper submission
- Require foundation budget forms
- Decisions taking more than 4 weeks
- Ask for 501(c)3 documentation.
- Ask for information available on the web (board members, 990 annual report)



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# Honor their wishes and needs

## Do this.

- Treat grantees as the expert.
- Look for ways to say yes.
- Three or fewer rules.

## Not this.

- Grants may not exceed \$3,000.
- Grants are not made to operating budgets.
- Grants are only for new projects.
- Travel or seminars not eligible for funding.
- We don't fund salaries.
- Require matching funds.



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# Be flexible

## Do this

- Aim for three or fewer rules.
- Prioritize the **ONLY** rule you must have 501(c)3 or government entity
- Remain open to the many effective ways social change happens.

## Not that

- No fiscal sponsors.
- Only one open grant at a time
- No applications from “friends of” and “foundation” arms of nonprofits
- Crisis requests will be denied.
- No projects that duplicate other offerings in the community.



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# Extend trust

## Do this

- Treat grantseekers as the experts
- Assume competence and good intent
- Imagine the grantseeker is in the room when you talk about a proposal

## Not that

- Requiring more than one report per grant/year
- Reimbursable grants
- Require a copy of the audit for requests less than \$250,000



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Bonus Lesson:  
Building assets are a community  
foundation's super power.



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# Five lessons

1. Sometimes a simple story says more.
2. Investing in your fund's operations IS investing in your community.
3. You never have to start from scratch.
4. Don't wait to make good.
5. Treat your grantseekers the way you treat your donors.
6. Bonus: Building assets are a community foundation's super power.



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# Call to Action: Today

- Don't start from scratch.
- Use your network to look for something meaningful and actionable.
- Apply for an idea implementation grant.
- Keep going.



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