



National School Boards Association

LEADERSHIP Insider

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PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL LAW & POLICY

A Membership Benefit of NSBA National Affiliates

Starting a School Foundation

What you should know before you start fundraising

By *Kate Coventry*

Facing increasing pressure to do better with less, many school districts are looking to education foundations for additional support and resources. Public school foundations, also known as local education funds, are nonprofit, charitable organizations that work to improve public school student achievement by encouraging educational innovation and providing new or enhanced equipment, money, and services.

Foundations fund scholarships, curriculum enrichment programs, teacher training, teaching resources, staff positions, and parent involvement programs. Some engage in public policy work to systemically reform school governance, finance, leadership, curriculum, and standards.

Many foundations seek to reinvigorate community participation in the local schools and enhance their visibility. In addition to promoting volunteer opportunities within schools, public school foundations create new volunteer opportunities for community members, including fundraising, activism, and strategic planning.

Distinct from the school district and school board, a public school foundation has its own board of directors and staff.

Only a few foundations have formal relationships with the school board that give board members voting participation in the foundation's operations. This position outside of the school system is often advantageous, as it allows the community to see that the foundation is working to improve public education without any vested interests.

Public school foundations emerged in the 1980s after voters in several states

A recent study indicates that there are currently more than 4,800 school foundations in the United States associated with all kinds of schools. Foundations vary in terms of staff size, budget, and reach. The average amount raised by school foundations is only 0.3 percent of the typical district's budget. Though small, this funding is critical because it often has fewer strings attached than state and federal funding.

Start with Partners

School board members, business leaders, superintendents, parents, and concerned citizens—essentially anyone—can

“ Foundations are becoming increasingly popular due to decreased tax revenues, budget cuts, and rising expectations. ”

approved legislation limiting property taxes—and, by extension, school funding. Now foundations are becoming increasingly popular due to decreased tax revenues, budget cuts, worries about students switching to private schools, and the rising expectations of what constitutes a good education.

start a foundation. But regardless of who starts the process in your school district, it is essential to create a steering committee of partners with different perspectives and experiences. In the early planning stages, it is especially important to include people with experience in fundraising, assessment, and education.

IN THIS ISSUE

4 Foundations at work

6 The board-foundation partnership

7 LEFs: Fundraising and beyond

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About NSBA

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Hawai'i, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

About the National Affiliate Program

The National Affiliate Program extends NSBA's services directly to local school districts. School districts are eligible to join provided they are members in good standing of their state school boards association.

About the National Education Policy Network

The National Education Policy Network (NEPN) helps foster better communication, understanding and management of local school districts through better policy-making. It offers access to a sample policy clearinghouse and current policy-related resources, as well as publications and tools to help districts keep their policy manuals well-organized and up-to-date.

About the Council of School Attorneys

The Council of School Attorneys provides information and practical assistance to attorneys who represent public school districts. It offers legal education, specialized publications, and a forum for exchange of information, and it supports the legal advocacy efforts of the National School Boards Association.

Partners should also include business leaders, university officials, philanthropists, alumni, reporters, school employees, and parents. These partners can provide needed background information, financial support, professional guidance, and volunteer time to the endeavor. Interviewing members of public school foundations in nearby communities with similar demographics can be especially helpful in deciding who should be represented on the steering committee.

Once this partnership group is formed, your next step is to identify organizations that currently fund education efforts in the community and determine what needs a school foundation can fill. Many communities undertake feasibility studies or surveys to examine these issues, as well as to identify potential funders. It is also important to consult with the people who will receive the proposed funding, most often school leaders, staff, and teachers.

Next, the group should determine the foundation's structure based on the identified needs. Public school foundations can be tied to individual schools or operate districtwide. Some have argued that it is easier to raise money for a districtwide foundation.

Trust or Nonprofit Corporation?

The steering committee must also decide if the foundation should be a trust or a nonprofit corporation. Most public school foundations are nonprofit corporations and, as such, have operations similar to those of for-profit corporations. The board of directors carries out the foundation's activities, elects officers, and keeps records of its work.

A charitable trust, on the other hand, is governed by a trust instrument that appoints the original trustees, dictates their responsibilities, and determines the selection process for future trustees. If the foundation is established as a charitable trust, the mission of the foundation should be carefully selected. It is difficult to change a charitable trust once it has been established, so this arrangement suits donors who want to preserve their original charitable intentions. Changing the mission of a nonprofit corporation is much easier, making the nonprofit structure best for donors who are interested in future flexibility.

The foundation needs strongly defined purpose, goals, and objectives to guide its work and define its fundraising materials. Here are examples of each for a hypothetical foundation created to promote after-

school opportunities at a particular school:

- The purpose describes the issue or issues the foundation will address. The foundation "improves the quality and number of after-school activities offered at X School."
- The goals express what the foundation hopes to achieve. The goal of the foundation is to "create an after-school program that serves every child at X School."
- The objectives are the specific things the foundation will do to achieve the goals and fulfill its purpose. "X Foundation will raise \$100,000 and secure 100 volunteers by September for the after-school program."

About the Board

The foundation's steering committee should choose a nominating committee to identify potential board members, keeping diversity in mind. A broadly representative board is essential in gaining community support and in fundraising. Most foundation boards have between 11 and 21 members. If the board is too small, the members may become overworked, but if it is too large, every member may not participate fully.

Nearly all foundations create standing committees that deal with much of the regular business of the board and make recommendations for action to the full board. Depending on their individual needs, foundations may have an executive committee, composed of the board officers, along with governance, audit, finance, fundraising, and nominating committees. Most boards require members to serve on at least one standing committee.

In addition, most foundations appoint special task forces to address specific needs. These task forces are often temporary. Both standing committees and task forces should have clear responsibilities, guidelines, and goals.

There are no general rules about term length for board members. Many foundations impose a limit of two terms and require a waiting period of one or two years before a person can rejoin the board. It is a good idea to stagger members' terms so the entire board is not being reelected or replaced every few years. Staggering the terms helps maintain a balance of new board members, who bring fresh ideas, and seasoned board members, who offer institutional memory and experience.

When making offers to potential mem-

bers, a detailed “job description” can help individuals make informed decisions about joining the board. Your foundation should have a general job description for board members, along with specific job descriptions for leadership positions, such as chair, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer. The job descriptions should clearly delineate the amount of time and money each board member is expected to contribute.

Some boards require their members to make a contribution annually or to make gifts of a certain amount. Others ask that the board “give or get”—that is, give personally or solicit others for specific amounts. Still other boards make no financial requirement of their members. Keep in mind, however, that funders may ask whether the board has a 100 percent financial participation rate.

The job description should also specify the number of full board meetings, the number of committees the person is expected to serve on, and the estimated number of committee meetings. Many boards have attendance requirements, with members risking probation or expulsion from the board if they miss too many. Board Source (www.boardsource.org) is an excellent resource for board job descriptions.

You will also need to develop procedures for keeping the board informed. Without relevant information, the board is operating in a vacuum—making decisions for the foundation out of the context of current realities. Establishing a formal communication system can simplify this process and ensure that the board receives updates on current programs, financial statements, media coverage, and upcoming activities. Having this information will also help your board members be effective spokespeople for your organization.

Finally, your foundation will need clear procedures for staff-board relations. Many foundations make their chief executive officer a voting or nonvoting ex officio member of the board in the belief that board membership improves the CEO’s authority in the organization and the quality of board-executive working relations.

Others, however, believe board membership blurs the distinction between the board’s responsibilities and the CEO’s responsibilities. For example, if the CEO is a member of the board, it can be more difficult for the board to monitor and assess his or her performance objectively.

If the chief executive officer is not a board member, it is essential to develop a

formal mechanism to allow the executive to contribute insights into the daily operations of the organization to the board. Additionally, a number of other staff members may attend meetings to present information. The staff should not intervene unless asked, however, and should not have voting rights on the board. In many foundations, each board committee has a staff liaison who attends meetings and provides relevant organizational information.

The Legal Technicalities

The next step is to complete the basic paperwork and other tasks necessary to establish your foundation legally. The steering group should consult individual state laws before proceeding—perhaps with the services of a knowledgeable attorney.

If the foundation is a nonprofit corporation, you must request forms for incorporation from the secretary of state or state attorney general. In most states, articles of incorporation and bylaws are needed to complete the incorporation process. Additionally, you must submit Federal Form SS-4 to the Internal Revenue Service to receive an Employer Identification Number.

If you want the foundation to be a tax-exempt entity with 501(c)(3) status, you must file Federal Form 1023 with the IRS within 15 months of incorporation. This form requires a three-year operating budget and a listing of the foundation’s board of directors. Once the form is filed, the IRS will grant temporary tax exemption, also known as an advance ruling, to the foundation. After the advance ruling period, the IRS will request additional information to grant a permanent exemption status.

In addition, most states require the foundation to register with a state regulatory body and apply for exemption from state sales or property taxes. Tax exempt status must be obtained before fundraising begins. Be sure to keep copies of all of these papers for the foundation’s files.

The foundation must open a bank account and set up auditing, gift registration, and acknowledgment procedures. Foundations need to comply with IRS contribution recording requirements when issuing receipts to donors. Financial records, including donor records, must be maintained, and financial reports will need to be given to the board of directors and others in the community. Many foundations have an accountant set up a gen-

eral ledger and draft financial statements. The foundation will need to have an audit performed by an outside firm or an internal audit committee.

All foundations must file a federal tax return, Federal Form 990-PF, detailing the foundation’s income, expenses, assets, large contributors, managers, and highly compensated employees. In most states, copies of the Federal Form 990-PF must be filed with the attorney general’s office. Foundations should speak with an attorney or certified public accountant to discuss any additional state reporting requirements. Federal law mandates that these records be available to the public.

Planning and Programming

After you have completed all of the legal and financial technicalities, your foundation is ready to develop programming and begin fundraising. Many foundations find strategic planning essential at this stage of development. Here are some suggestions:

- Identify action plans to implement each goal. Action plans should be specific and include steps that realistically address the needs you have identified. Be realistic, too, about the roles and responsibilities each team member is expected to accomplish. Trying to do too much too soon will dampen the spirit of other volunteers.

- Determine how much money is needed for a start-up organization. Consider the amount of money needed for one year’s funding, and then develop strategies to achieve multi-year funding. Be patient and know that with careful planning, financial resources will become available.

- Monitor and update your plan. Determine what is working well and what needs to be adjusted. Contact other education foundations to learn about their techniques and strategies for achieving their organization’s goals. Most foundations are willing to share their strengths and limitations with others who are just beginning.

- Take time at the end of each quarter to evaluate the foundation’s activities and reexamine the needs of your school or school district. Be open to innovation.

Finally—and most important—take pride in the fact that your foundation is well on its way to making a difference for students.

Kate Coventry is foundation coordinator for the National School Boards Foundation, www.nsbfd.org.

Local Foundations at Work

Case studies—and advice—from three education foundations

How does the idea of a local education foundation play out in reality? These foundations differ in their structure, operations, and programming. *Leadership Insider* asked three different foundations to describe what they do and offer advice and suggestions based on their experience. Each description also includes contact information so that readers can learn more.

Anthony Wayne Education Foundation Waterville, Ohio

The Anthony Wayne Local Schools, consolidated in 1950, enroll nearly 4,000 students in a 76-square-mile district in Whitehouse, Ohio. A spirit of volunteerism was already well established and thriving when the superintendent challenged the district's business manager about a decade ago to set up some kind of school/community/business partnership that would enable individuals and businesses to round out the educational mission of the school district with financial contributions.

The result was the Anthony Wayne Education Foundation (AWEF), a 501(c)(3) charitable corporation dedicated to the encouragement and promotion

of academic ability, achievement, and excellence in Anthony Wayne schools.

An independent board of trustees manages the AWEF, with the superintendent and treasurer serving as ex officio members. To date, the AWEF has concentrated on building its endowment and serving as a repository for memorial and honorary contributions, as well as distributing grants for specific educational projects not ordinarily provided for in the school district budget.

Grants have been as small as \$50 and as large as a few thousand dollars and have provided funding for interactive art, theater, and music workshops and programs; field trips; supplemental reference materials; multiple annual scholarships; and teacher education and enrichment, among other projects.

Amassing an endowment has been the foundation's biggest challenge. The AWEF has embarked on numerous campaigns but acknowledges that it needs to establish itself further as a well-known entity within the community in order to build the endowment.

Ironically, the challenge is greater because of the school district's overall success. Anthony Wayne has the highest state ratings and a history of conservative, pru-

dent fiscal management, and some residents and local businesses do not see any urgent need for additional financial support for the district beyond paying their taxes.

Nevertheless, the foundation has been a success, and virtually all Anthony Wayne students and teachers have benefited from its grants. AWEF is currently practicing patience and perseverance as it develops some major annual fundraising events to further establish a core identity, build its endowment for long-term financial security, and connect with the right businesses and individuals in the community to obtain endowment-level funding sources.

Contact: The Anthony Wayne Education Foundation

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or
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Web site: www.a-wayne.k12.oh.us

Charleston Education Network Charleston, S.C.

The Charleston Education Network (CEN) is a new brand of education foundation that has adopted a theory of action using strategy, leverage, policy, and advocacy—sharply focused on high levels of achievement for all children—to cause marked improvement in public education.



Help With No Child Left Behind... Only One Click Away!

The National School Boards Association can help you make sense of the new law through its No Child Left Behind Web site. This site provides the latest information on NCLB, its impact on school board governance, solutions for meeting adequate yearly progress, tips on hiring and retaining highly qualified teachers, and more. Visit our site at www.nsba.org/nclb.



Our reasoning is simple. Systems are notoriously resistant to change, especially fundamental, foundational change. For that kind of change to occur, there must be some mechanism that insists on significant improvement and real accountability that is closer to local schools than to the state house or the White House. The mechanism driving change must also mobilize the public to create the imperative for improved public education. The public schools, after all, are the public's schools.

Somebody must oppose the status quo; otherwise, the status quo wins by default. Archimedes claimed that given a lever long enough and a place to stand, he could move the world. The role of the Charleston Education Network is to forge that lever and provide the right place to stand.

Words of advice:

1. First, it's about children. Take the high moral ground of what is best for children and hold it. Make everybody else either join with you on that high ground or stand against children.

2. Be clear about what you are trying to accomplish. If it isn't about making certain that you do right by every child, don't bother. You must be serious about doing the best for all kids.

3. Education reform is not for the timid and faint-hearted. Gather together a group of courageous people. Without courage and a critical mass of people, what you do will be hollow and may actually help leave children behind.

4. Make up your mind from the outset to be relentless. This is hard work.

5. Make everybody—especially the members of your group—focus on results. It is easier, and much more familiar, to focus on programs and process. At the end of the day, though, if children still cannot do the three Rs well, all the programs and process don't really count for much.

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Deer Valley Education Foundation Phoenix, Arizona

Our foundation was formed in 1986 as one of the first educational foundations in the state of Arizona. The foundation serves the Deer Valley Unified School Dis-

RESOURCES ON EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS

All of these resources and many more are conveniently available online at your National Affiliate page on NSBA's Web site, www.nsba.org/na. We strongly encourage you to visit the site, which provides a wealth of resources related to this and other topics. If you need your National Affiliate password or other help accessing your Members Only resources, contact Diane Skerrett at dskerrett@nsba.org.

- "Beyond Money: The Benefits of an Education Foundation" (American Association of School Administrators): www.aasa.org/publications/sa/2001_08/havens.htm.

- "Community Guide to Understanding the Greenville County Public School Budget" (Alliance for Quality Education) www.allianceforqualityed.org/BudgetGuide3_03.pdf. *Although specific to the Greenville County South Carolina schools, this guide is a good overview of public school budgets and budget process from a layperson's perspective.*

- "Education Foundations: Changing Public Education And the Way Connecticut Communities Pay for It" (Connecticut Policy and Economic Council, Inc.): www.cpec.org/ppr/edfoundations.htm.

- "Elements of Successful Public School Foundations" (California Con-

sortium of Education Foundations): www.cceflink.org/pinto1.htm.

- "How to Create an Educational Foundation" (Ohio School Boards Association): www.osba-ohio.org/foundation.html.

- "How to Start a Local Education Foundation in Oklahoma" (Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence): www.ofe.org/lef/start.html.

- "How to Start a Local Education Fund" (Public Education Network): v2.publiceducation.org/lef/start.htm.

- "Local Education Funds: Complicity or Reform?" (Hayes Mizell, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation): www.middleweb.com/HMlef.html.

- National Center for Public and Private School Foundations (College of Education, University of Northern Iowa): www.foundationsk12.coe.uni.edu/about/evaluation.html. *This national Web-based support system is designed to encourage and assist in the development of public and private K-12 school foundations. The Web site features overviews, resources, frequently asked questions, and discussion boards.*

- "Summary—Private Giving to Public Schools and Districts in Los Angeles County: A Pilot Study" (Rand): www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1429/MR1429.sum.html.

trict No. 97, a 28,000-student district at the north end of Phoenix.

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster excellence in education by funding programs that enhance the capabilities of Deer Valley's schools to stimulate students' academic achievement and enrich the learning environment.

The foundation provides scholarships for students and grants for teachers to enrich and enhance their educational environments and provide incentives for achievement and scholastic involvement, as well as rewards for high-performing teachers.

Our premier fundraising events each year are a golf classic and dinner auction. Additional projects include Teacher and Nurse of the Year programs, mini-grants for teachers, student aid grants and college scholarships, and grants for students to attend academic competitions. In addi-

tion, the foundation maintains a fund that provides child development materials and books to parents of local newborns.

Advice for involving partners:

1. Make sure your top administrator, whether it is the superintendent or a principal, is your partner.

2. Find at least one wealthy local benefactor to be your partner.

3. Recruit a diverse board of trustees that represents all segments of the community.

4. Enlist a coordinator of communications and make that individual a partner.

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The Board-Foundation Partnership

How to work productively with your local school foundation

By Susan Sweeney

Parent and community involvement is critical to improving public schools. This one constant is found in all studies of public education, and it is the basis for local education foundations and for the California Consortium of Education Foundations (CCEF; see box).

The state's education foundation movement began in the early '80s with the passage of Proposition 13, which reduced local funds available for education and transferred the locus of control from communities to the state. Since then, the number of local education foundations has grown sharply—and continues to grow.

Currently, there are more than 450 such foundations in California, many of them established during the last three years. These foundations have trained many thousands of community volunteers who serve on foundation boards, bringing new ideas and perspectives to education issues.

A Shared Goal

With more than 1,000 school districts and county offices of education, configured in a variety of ways, California's public education system has often been described as a crazy-quilt operation in which no one size fits all. This also aptly describes local education foundations.

As grassroots organizations, local education foundations are as different in operations and programs as the communities they serve. However, they all have the same goal: to strengthen public education at the local level.

Sponsored programs range from teacher grants to comprehensive math collaborations, from after-school child care and enrichment programs to computers and laboratory science programs. Many efforts address broad community needs—providing education for parents and other community members, for example, or focusing on nutrition, self-esteem, and enrichment activities for children, or providing an institutional voice through which communities can address the local needs of their children and schools.

Local education foundations also strengthen public support for public schools. It is worth noting the high corre-

lation between communities with foundations and those with successful local voter initiatives.

The School Board Connection

Local education foundations used to be considered quick fixes for small problems, but they have now become part of California's education landscape. And in the current economic climate, these foundations are serving even more as education partners, working with school boards and administrators to address unmet needs at the local level.

CCEF has worked with the California School Boards Association to establish a sample policy for the relationship between local foundations and school boards. CCEF continues to facilitate this dialogue in addressing school board and administrative organizations statewide. Additionally, CCEF board members represent both school board and administrative points of view.

How can school boards and administrators work effectively with local education foundations? It is essential to realize that local education foundations can never replace the primary funding for or management of local schools, nor do they intend to do so. Rather, they are partners who work to enhance local public education, bringing local resources to bear on local needs.

With this in mind, several specific rules help improve the partnership:

1. Recognize that a local education foundation is an independent, community-based organization. While it is in support of public schools, it is not an arm of the school district.

2. Before any money is raised, work with foundation leaders to develop clear guidelines on how resources will be allocated.

3. Educate foundation leaders on education issues at the state and county level as well as the specific needs of your local community. (In California, two nonprofit education advocacy groups—EdSource and EdVoice—provide an important resource.)

4. Communicate frequently. Foundation members are the schools' ambassadors in the community and provide a pool of future school board members.

5. Develop formal opportunities for interaction. Include foundation reports and presentations as part of school board meetings; involve foundations in back-to-school events so teachers can see the foundations' roles in the school community; appoint a liaison from the school board and the administration to sit on the foundation board—often as an ex officio, non-voting board member.

6. Actively look for ways to support and work with the foundation. Some school districts, as in Pasadena, provide office space for the education foundation; others offer administrative support, such as printing. Often a foundation and school district will jointly fund a needed project, such as the Peer Education Program in San Francisco. A growing number of foundations are providing funds for staff development.

7. Actively participate in foundation events in the community. It reinforces the feeling that “we're all in this together” when community members see the superintendent or school board president playing a key role.

8. Be accessible to foundation leaders

ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM

Established in 1982, the California Consortium of Education Foundations (CCEF) focuses on strengthening public education at the local level. This is accomplished by linking schools with their communities through local education foundations. As a statewide nonprofit organization, CCEF serves as the voice of California's education foundation movement, facilitates the development and evolution of local foundations, and promotes training and collaboration between education foundations.

CCEF believes that local education foundations are in a unique position to identify and secure important community resources in support of local schools. Additionally, local foundations are particularly well suited to serve as conveners, facilitating community involvement and growing volunteer leadership.

in meeting with major donors.

9. Listen to concerns and needs identified by the foundation leaders. They feel the pulse of the community and are committed to your schools.

10. Recognize the foundation as an important partner that brings in untapped

resources in the form of dollars, volunteers, and in-kind services. And work with the foundation as a convener to bring community groups together around issues affecting students.

Local education foundations can be important education partners, and school

boards and administrators can help ensure that every community benefits from that partnership.

Susan Sweeney is executive director of the California Consortium of Education Foundations in Stanford, www.cceflink.org.

Local Education Funds and School Boards

A rapidly growing partnership

By Wendy D. Puriefoy

It has always been a challenge for school board members to fulfill their duties and obligations, but in recent years it seems the job has become even more complicated. Once it was enough to oversee governance of a district and to supervise and provide guidance to district leaders. Today, the full job description also includes fundraising, building partnerships with outside organizations, and lobbying lawmakers for better resources.

Local Education Funds (LEFs) have sprung up in communities across the nation to respond to these new realities. When the first LEFs were organized 20 years ago, school districts were finding themselves increasingly isolated from the publics they served. The New Federalism of the Reagan era was forcing schools to compete for fewer federal dollars; taxpayer revolts, such as Proposition 13 in California, were limiting the availability of state dollars for local educational needs; business leaders were criticizing schools for producing graduates who could not perform in the job market; and white parents were pulling their children out of urban schools.

National panels were just beginning to focus on poor student performance. But nobody understood then how deeply entrenched the problems were. Further, the words “race” and “urban” were hardly mentioned when discussing the issues facing public education.

One of the few philanthropies willing at the time to invest in public education was the Ford Foundation, which was particularly interested in the concept of local education funds because it believed these funds were better positioned than national foundations to bring about real reform. In 1983, Ford awarded the first of three \$2 million grants to create the Public Education Fund, a precursor of the Public Edu-

cation Network.

From this relatively modest beginning, PEN has grown into a national movement. Today it has 87 LEF members in 34 states plus the District of Columbia. These LEFs serve 11 million children (21 percent of the nation’s total enrollment), more than half of them eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. The LEFs are in 16,700 schools (18 percent of all public schools) and 1,220 districts, including seven of the nation’s 10 largest districts.

Some were founded by civic-minded individuals to bring better resources to schools. Others were founded by business interests hoping to improve the quality of the local workforce. Still others were founded by parents who advocated for better performance and held districts accountable for results.

Fundraising and Beyond

Many know LEFs for their fundraising prowess. Initially, the LEFs established their credentials in local districts by distributing mini-grants directly to teachers or small projects. In the 1990s, they shifted to bigger strategies driven by the desire to support systemic change and PEN became a national conduit for large philanthropies interested in promoting their programs through the local foundations.

Among them were the National Library Power Program funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund; the Comprehensive School Health Initiative funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Americorps/Project FIRST funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Today, the typical LEF has annual revenue of \$630,000 and provides \$30,000 in grants to its community each year. In 2002 alone, LEFs raised nearly \$190 million

from various sources.

But LEFs have not limited themselves solely to providing funds to cash-strapped districts. They work hard to boost public confidence in local schools, and they do so by providing them with the professional and technical resources necessary to improve practice.

Researchers have noted that LEFs have certain characteristics that set them apart from other organizations that support education. They have paid staffs and diverse boards of directors that reflect the composition of their communities. They tend to work in districts with high numbers of low-income children. And they are committed to making systemic reforms in the districts where they work.

The Work of the LEF

The tasks LEFs perform as school reform partners cluster around eight areas:

- 1. Help build a community-wide agenda and commitment to school reform.** In New Orleans, for example, the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation provided a forum for different constituencies to find common ground.
- 2. Restore and build the public’s confidence in schools.** In Providence, the LEF there, the Public Education Fund, established a commission to conduct an independent assessment of the schools.
- 3. Create an infrastructure that institutionalizes community participation.** The Boston Plan for Excellence in Public Schools and the Pittsburgh Council on Public Education provided infrastructure that sustained strong business participation in school reform in those cities.
- 4. Promote knowledge of school improvement,** often by writing reports addressing the need for policy change.
- 5. Coordinate services for children and families,** often by supporting family centers in schools or by creating pathways to college programs.
- 6. Promote authentic ideas for school improvement** by encouraging experimen-

ARE YOU READY TO WORK WITH AN LEF?

If your interest in working with a local education fund is guided primarily by the prospect of tapping another revenue source, think again.

LEFs can help you with your school or district fundraising needs, but only if you are willing to take a hard, critical look at the way you educate students.

Before signing up with a local education fund, ask yourself these five questions:

1. Are you interested in developing a long-term relationship with an outside partner who will offer guidance and technical assistance in return for your commitment to strive for continuous improvement?

2. Are you ready to engage the public in an honest dialogue of your failures as well as your successes?

3. How would you react to outsiders commenting on the governance of your district, including how you budget money for operations and infrastructure?

4. Are you looking to collaborate with outside partners to develop effective professional development for your teaching corps?

5. Do you believe in the importance of leadership training for parents and teachers?

tation, change efforts and policy changes to support a better curriculum.

7. **Ensure adequate resources for districts** by attracting funds from national foundations and by mobilizing local opinion to lobby for more equitable public funding.

8. **Foster leadership development** by supporting teacher networks and training parents to be leaders so they can interact effectively with schools.

Although these tasks are common to most LEFs, the approaches they use vary, depending on the local environment. In Miami, for example, the Education Fund recognized that teachers were preparing students for the job market without ever having stepped into the business world themselves. So the LEF created internships in local companies for Dade County teachers, library media specialists, and administrators. The internships helped bridge the gap between intention and experience.

In New York City, New Visions for Public Schools took a daring approach to whole-school change, creating 40 small, theme-based schools. Each was developed with ideas from parents, individuals, cultural groups, and civic and education institutions. The successful experiment encouraged the NYC Board of Education to establish the Office of New School Development.

And in North Carolina, the Durham Public Education Network organized a series of open meetings, opinion surveys, and planning session to highlight the

obstacles faced by minority students.

A Public Responsibility

Such accomplishments do not come easily. Engaging the public in the work of schools is a complex undertaking that often depends on the willingness of district and school administrators to forge relationships with crucial friends. In most cases, LEFs have developed close, trusting relationships; in others, the districts have been wary.

In the end, a partnership is most likely to succeed when all parties recognize that public education ultimately is the public's responsibility. LEFs can contribute technical know-how, skills, and resources to a district, but they will never replace the public's responsibility to fund and support its own schools.

As the number of organizations working with schools and districts continues to grow, LEFs will continue to experiment with new strategies, polish those that have served them well, and seek resources that help public schools ensure a high-quality public education for every child.

Wendy D. Puriefoy is president of Public Education Network, a national organization of local education funds and individuals working to improve public schools and build citizen support for quality public education in low-income communities across the nation. PEN believes an active, vocal constituency is the key to ensuring that every child, in every community, benefits from a quality public education. For more information visit www.publiceducation.org.



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