

Point de vue sur les fondations territoriales – Barbara McInnes, Présidente Directrice Générale de la Fondation Communautaire d’Ottawa en 2014

Entretien avec Barbara McInnes, présidente directrice générale de la fondation communautaire d’Ottawa qui a mené ces 25 dernières années le développement des community foundation au Canada. Elle nous livre, dans cet entretien son expérience et sa vision des fondations territoriales en France.

Nathalie Wierre, French Foundation Centre: *You helped start the Community Foundation of Ottawa in 1987 and, over the past 25 years, have been deeply committed to the development of community foundations in Canada, the Unites States and Europe. What are the main lessons have you learned?*
Barbara McInnes, President & CEO, Community Foundation of Ottawa :

One important lesson is that, no matter where our community foundations are, the successful ones share certain characteristics. Of course there are many, many differences because each community foundation reflects its own community. But, because of the shared values and common purposes, there is much that we can learn from one another.

Another observation is that the world of community foundations is extremely transparent and generously shares anything that could be of use to others.

Finally, I have learned that most community foundations go through similar growth cycles, facing common issues at different stages. One benefit of this is that we can learn a great deal from those who have gone through them before.

What are the main evolutions you have noticed in local philanthropy?

Over the years, there have been significant changes in how our local charitable activities are funded. In particular, the diminishment of government funding has caused increasing numbers of charities to close their door, thus depriving people of important services. Other charities have become more focused on fundraising, sometimes diverting their attention from the services they provide.

Another outcome is an increasing interest, on the part of charities and funders, to develop alternative forms of financing such as Impact Investing and social enterprise.

What are you thinking about community foundations in France?

(Barbara took part at two events organized by the French Foundation Center: the seminar "Fondations territoriales, pour une philanthropie de proximité" last October in Paris and the study visit in Canada in November 2008).

Community foundations in France have great potential. There will be uniquely French issues to deal with but the model has proven itself adaptable to a great many cultures and philanthropic traditions. There are already a few good examples in France. They can be very helpful as others try to establish themselves.

I think the main challenge will be to get people to trust the local, regional focus instead of the traditional centralized approach more common in France. The opportunity is that these very local institutions are going to be needed as a way of attracting private philanthropy as the French economy can no longer support the government spending that has sustained public services. That provides an tremendous incentive.

From your point of view, what are the decisive conditions to create a community foundation? To develop a network of community foundations?

A successful community foundation has to be embedded in the local community and be led by local people who are broadly representative of the community they serve. These need no be the people of wealth, (though they will need to attract large amounts of money) but rather, the community's thought leaders, people who are listened to and respected by others.

To create a network, it would be important that all members derive some value from it. This can take to form of helping all members by sharing information and experience, providing collective learning opportunities and branding of the field. For the more established community foundations, who may not need very many of these services, the value they would derive would be the confidence that other community foundations would be supported so that the reputation of the whole field would not be tarnished by one organization having difficulties that become public.

What are the main obstacles?

For an individual community foundation, there are a few obstacles to be overcome:

- The general public has trouble understanding what the foundation does. It's hard to explain briefly.
- It may take a long time for the foundation to earn a reputation for integrity so it is a trusted institution in the community. Trust is key to success and it has to be earned.
- It can't be seen to belong to the establishment or the elite in a particular region. It needs to demonstrate that it is for everyone, rich and poor alike.

In 2014, the world's first community foundation – The Cleveland Foundation – is celebrating its centenary. What events have you organized?

A large number of community foundation people will be attending the big celebration in Cleveland and using it as an opportunity to get together with like-minded groups. For example, many of the participants of the now defunct Transatlantic Community Foundation Network, expect to use the occasion to re-connect and, perhaps, plan how to continue their work together.

For the local community foundation it is an ideal opportunity to build public profile using marketing material that will be available through the Council on Foundations and Community Foundations of Canada (in both French and English).

Biography:

Barbara McInnes has been with the Foundation since its inception in 1987, overseeing its growth to what is the eighth largest of Canada's 165 community foundations. Barbara was awarded the Order of Canada in 2008 for her contributions as a leader and catalyst for the development of the community foundation movement both in her city and across Canada. She served as a founding director on the Board of Community Foundations of Canada for 12 years. Her international interests include extensive work with the Council on Foundations and with the Transatlantic Community Foundation Network. Active in her community, she has been a Governor of Carleton University, President of the Ottawa Estate Planning Council and of the Ottawa School of Art, Board member of United Way and numerous other professional associations and voluntary sector boards.

To know more about the [Community Foundation of Ottawa](#)