

Announcement and Call for Applications

Rural Economic Development Philanthropy Innovators Network

A Partnership with the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group & the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship

Foundations active in rural places want to see their work lead to a stronger set of outcomes for the rural communities they care about. They want to build economically prosperous regions that also help low-income families, businesses and communities get ahead.

Among the regional institutions that hold the vision of “a prosperous economy for *all*,” place-rooted foundations, especially community foundations, are well situated to play the role of change agent. Many are driven by their missions to advance prosperity and stronger livelihoods for all. And community foundations also bring a comprehensive and diverse set of tools and resources to the partnership table. **What change *might* we see in rural America if more place-rooted foundations embraced a role in economic development – and practiced Economic Development Philanthropy (EDP)?**

To build the record and expand the practice of EDP, the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group (CSG) and the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (CRE) are inviting rural-serving community foundations to apply to participate in an 18-month action-learning network for up to nine foundations: the ***Rural Economic Development Philanthropy Innovators Network (REDPIN)***. REDPIN builds on national workshops Aspen CSG and CRE offered in 2015 and 2016 that explored innovative roles place-rooted foundations are taking in economic development. The methodology we will use builds on decades of successful peer-to-peer learning we have managed – which has led to significant action and results for scores of foundations across the country.

This Innovators Network will offer participating foundations a framework for identifying the best leverage point(s) for foundation action, expose foundations to a range of relevant and inventive current practices, and provide them with an environment of peer advising and support that helps each foundation take productive EDP action. To better target what works in their context, over the course of the Network, each participating foundation will analyze their local economic system and apply community and economic development tools to help low-income families, places and firms get ahead. The Innovators Network will also build and refine understanding about what it takes to implement EDP with excellence; develop new EDP tools to share with other foundations, policymakers and economic development practitioners; capture a wide range of EDP stories to provide inspiration to the field; and advance the practice of doing economic development differently – that is, in ways that both build regional resilience and address inequality.

REDPIN Objectives

- Explore how “economic development can be done differently” to help reduce inequality and poverty even as it increases regional resilience and prosperity.
- Help each participating foundation identify and make progress on its specific actions to advance rural family, business and/or community economic success.
- Apply and improve an action framework for determining why, where and how to invest foundation non-financial and financial resources to improve rural economic outcomes.
- Engage the expertise of foundations that are already practicing and innovating EDP, along with economic development and family economic success experts, from both within and outside the Innovators Network.
- Improve and evolve the framework through our collective learning and action in order to build a stronger economic development toolkit and strategy set for use by the Network and the field.
- Advance the field of EDP by capturing and disseminating the learning and stories surfaced in the Network.

What is...
Economic Development
Philanthropy?

*Place-rooted foundations
mobilizing their full range of assets
to build regional economies
that produce prosperity for all.*

REDPIN Structure

- Six to nine foundations will comprise the peer Network – over an 18-month duration.
- Three in-person gatherings (one every six months, starting in late spring 2017).
- Three-person teams from each foundation participate in all the gatherings – must include at least the foundation CEO and one board member; additional member may be other foundation board or staff member or key local partners. (The team may expand beyond three at the foundation’s discretion and expense.)

Value for Rural-Focused Community Foundations

- Opportunity to focus and to take action on your foundation’s role in advancing economic development and prosperity in your region.
- Access to innovative foundation peers within and outside the cohort who are *already* practicing EDP and successfully producing prosperity outcomes.
- Access to expertise and technical assistance via invited experts and the CRE-CSG staff and resource network.
- Deeper exploration via virtual exchanges on specific challenges or issues of interest to Network members.
- Significant portion of Network costs covered by CSG and CRE through our grant resources and fundraising.
- The honest advice and counsel of peers who are deeply engaged in this work.
- Identity within the field as an innovator.

What Community Foundations Must Commit

- Muster a consistent team of at least three community foundation leaders or key partners, including CEO and at least one board member.
- Entire team must attend all the convenings (*every effort is made to consult teams before setting meeting schedule*); and do advance preparation for the convening (team interviews, local research, presentations and reflection).
- Develop a short-term “EDP action plan” at each convening – and work on the plan back home.
- Cover all travel and lodging costs for your team.
- CSG-CRE funder requires a financial “match” from each participating foundation of \$2,500 per convening. The match can be a grant or a payment from the foundation, a sponsoring organization or individual donor – whichever works best for each foundation. The payment schedule can be adapted to foundation circumstances.

What REDPIN Brings to the Field

- Strengthen the ability of place-rooted rural foundations and leaders to address rural economic development while improving sustainability, justice and equity outcomes, especially for those on the margins.
- Create stronger place-rooted foundation partners for regional and national philanthropic institutions that want to invest in rural communities and regions.
- Provide new tools for community foundations, in particular, to increase impact and relevance within a changing economic and philanthropic landscape.

To Apply: Your Next Steps

If this Rural Economic Development Philanthropy Innovators Network aligns with your foundation’s current or emerging priorities and you want to participate, please complete our [online application](#). **Applications are due by February 10**; participants will be selected by March 3. Please contact Travis Green (Program Manager, Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group, csg.program@aspenninst.org or 202-736-5856) if you have any questions – *or if you are very interested but have significant resource constraints*. For more on how we think about Economic Development Philanthropy, please read our article in the September 2016 issue of *The Foundation Review* – [A New Domain for Place-Rooted Foundations: Economic Development Philanthropy](#).

CRE and CSG will launch REDPIN in spring 2017 with funding secured for the first Network convening. We are actively fundraising to ensure sufficient resources for the two remaining convenings.