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THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION INITIATIVE:

A PEER
EVALUATION
2022



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INTRODUCTION :::

The European Community Foundation Initiative (ECFI) is "a collaborative initiative committed to strengthening and promoting the community foundation movement in Europe. ECFI is hosted by the German Association of Foundations (The Association of German Foundations – BVDS) and [up to 2021 was] run in partnership with the Center for Philanthropy in Slovakia."[1]

The present evaluation was commissioned in the context of ECFI's support received from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. This evaluation report covers the period of 2020 – 2022, relies on impressions over many years of activity, and is meant to support ECFI in its strategic planning process, which is about to be launched. The evaluation process was field-driven and relied on the input of professionals from community foundations (CFs), community foundations support organizations (CFSOs), and other philanthropy organizations.

The Center on Global Affairs and Post-development (C-GAP) at the Făgăraș Research Institute (FRI) was commissioned by ECFI to facilitate the development of the peer evaluation process and the writing of the report. The evaluation team was drawn from the field and included Rachel McGrath (UK), Dr. Alejandro Hernández Renner (Spain), Ansis Bērziņš (Latvia), and Dr. Stefan Cibian (Romania). The team developed and implemented the evaluation process, consulted with peers from the field and from the ECFI team, gathered data and analysed it, and produced this report assessing ECFI's effectiveness in achieving intended outcomes and, where possible, highlighting potential gaps and opportunities. The evaluation process was conducted between November 2021 and April 2022. It consisted of four focus groups carried out with CF and CFSO professionals, a structured discussion with the ECFI team, interviews with third organizations of relevance for ECFI's activity, multiple meetings of the peer-evaluation team, and several report drafts.

The evaluation process was based on individual and collective reflection, conducted primarily among peers from the European CF movement. Professionals from the following countries were part of the peer-evaluation process: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and external partners and funders.

Overall, those participating in the discussions significantly appreciated ECFI's work, exposed a good understanding of ECFI's institutional limitations, as well as a declared willingness to be more engaged in shaping ECFI's future: "ECFI has a lot to offer, it is a convening spot. Now it is time to structure it and envisage it further." [2] Furthermore, overall, we heard deep recognition of ECFI's work and the opportunities brought by it for the European CF Movement. One can observe that ECFI became in a few years not only a part of the CF Movement, but also one of the key actors weaving a more consolidated community philanthropy field in Europe, "I would miss, [...] to exchange with my peers from Europe, they would not be accessible to me without ECFI. The emerging countries' meetings gave me the opportunity to meet with colleagues who were at the same level of development and share joys and sorrows. I hope they continue. I am a big fan of study visits throughout Europe [...]. Another thing that was quite useful was the thematic meetings. I took part in quite a few."

The report is structured on several areas of reflection, including reflection on ECFI's raison d'être, ECFI's internal organization, ECFI's work, and third topics. The first part of the report will present ECFI's work in the past two years and the assessment of the evaluation team. Overall, the report presents the free and professional opinions of its authors, based on the discussions with peers from the European CF Movement, bringing in voices of CF and CFSO practitioners wherever possible.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: REFLECTION ON ECFI'S WORK :::

"One of my best experiences in the CF movement, has been with ECFI. It raised expectations regarding to the SDGs, localized conditions within countries, different histories, mentalities, challenges, need for diversity in the CF model, some of the more inspirational people. Knowledge sharing is important, CFs seen as very local, as custodians of civil society, not seen as connectors, but through connectedness their relevance is increased." (CF practitioner, UK)

ECFI, in a nutshell, weaves a more connected and consolidated CF Movement in Europe. ECFI "has achieved a lot, has really brought together a European CF scene." The experiences presented by those participating in ECFI events indicate that strategically ECFI is filling a significant gap in consolidating community philanthropy, in principle the CF community "at an institutional level, ECFI is the guarantor of the movement," giving CFs visibility and recognition. It is seen as "a very important platform" and as "good infrastructure" engaged in enlarging the field of CFs and making it visible. Furthermore, "ECFI is somehow there giving a guarantee, [...] legitimacy" and confidence for CFs and CFSOs. Also, ECFI acts as a connector toward CFs and CF movements in other parts of the world, primarily in Canada and the US.

Expectations on the side of CFs and CFSOs towards ECFI are high. That indicates an array of needs and challenges articulated at national and European levels, which will be explored below. Key aspects relate to language, connectedness, learning and training processes, visibility and relevance of the field, research on the field, the capacity of CFs/CFSOs, and impact assessment. Further expectations concern ECFI's role in driving community philanthropy efforts in Europe and collaborating with relevant philanthropy-related actors and third parties.

Although often perceived as an organization, ECFI is a program functioning within The Association of German Foundations, based in Berlin, Germany. The wide array of needs mentioned above also highlights a capacity challenge related to the number of ECFI's team members, funding, positioning in relation to other philanthropy organizations and third relevant actors, and strategic alignment. As it stands today, expectations from CFs and CFSOs, given their diversity, are surpassing the capacity of ECFI's team. That corelates with a funding model under development as it is little likely that ECFI will be able to rely on CFs and CFSOs for a significant level of funding. ECFI is funded primarily by the C.S. Mott Foundation, while European support appears challenging to mobilize.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine both bring additional layers of complexity to ECFI's work. The COVID-19 pandemic led to rethinking ECFI's work and testing multiple online formats and activities. While CF practitioners are affected by the pandemic leading to limited bandwidth for online engagement, ECFI's virtual study visit, SDG workshops, and thematic sessions, have all been broadly appreciated both content-wise and as a methodology for further engagement (in parallel with more in-person engagement).

Several CFs and CFSOs showed that they are aware of receiving benefits through ECFI that they do not contribute sufficiently towards (especially not financially). Several interviewees expressed a willingness to contribute more and assume more responsibility in driving ECFI's efforts further. This discussion highlights that a key issue to be addressed is ownership over ECFI's work by CFs and CFSOs and, related to that, the broader governance of ECFI.

The following sections of the report engage with the above topics in more detail, highlighting the encountered perspectives and reflections of colleagues and peers. We will add a layer of reflection in all sections, also articulating brief recommendations.

A BRIEF ASSESSMENT OF ECFI'S RECENT ACTIVITY :::

From January 2021 to December 2022, ECFI is implementing its program as presented in its internal documents. The evaluation team received the relevant internal documents, reviewed ECFI's communication channels, and had the occasion to discuss with ECFI beneficiaries and team. In this section we will first briefly present the ECFI's plans for this period and thereafter share our assessment and recommendations. The report further brings together input and suggestions from field practitioners, with the aim to support ECFI in both developing its new strategy and further connect to CFs and CFSOs it targets through its activity.

Brief presentation of ECFI's activities

Based on ECFI's internal documents, a core focus of ECFI is "strengthening and promoting the community foundation movement in Europe. "The European CF Movement encompasses more than 800 CFs in 26 countries, as well as 29 CFSOs based in 23 countries." (ECFI internal document)

For the period 2021-2022 ECFI set up several outcomes for its work (presented in table #1 below).

Table 1. ECFI's Outcomes for 2021-2022 (ECFI internal document):

ECFI's OUTCOMES		
1	CFSOs and CFs in Europe are interacting, learning from one another, making use of new knowledge and value the support offered by ECFI	
2	Number and connectedness of CFs and CFSOs in Europe increases in at least 6 countries where there are no or very few community foundations	
3	Staff and boards of European CFs prioritise their community leadership role, maintain active relationships internally and across national borders in Europe and can identify how they have shared and learned from the experiences of others	
4	European CFs and CFSOs feel informed and part of a vibrant European movement and are being recognised by policymakers, the wider philanthropy support ecosystem, donors and the media, as important actors in European communities	
5	New projects and/or financial support become available for the achievement of ECFI's strategic priorities and outcomes	
6	CFs and CFSOs in Europe are aware of and understand the SDGs and the relevance to their work	
7	Increase in the number of CFs that utilise the SDG framework in their work	
8	Raised profile and highlighted the potential of CFs among others with an interest in SDGs at national and international level	

ECFI defines its activities for strengthening and promoting the CF movement to include capacity building, learning events, study visits, thematic meetings, reflection group meetings, various peer-to-peer conversations, networking events, conferences, research, and engagement of the CFs and CFSOs on the topic of SDGs.

As an output of ECFI's research activities, publications such as country guides and reports. A special focus is put on the SDGs, an area of activity where ECFI aims to rise the interest of CFs and CFSOs. In addition, ECFI uses various channels for communicating to CF practitioners, philanthropy practitioners and organizations, and the wider public. Such channels include the ECFI website, Facebook, and Twitter.

Further online resources for CFs and CFSOs are collected on ECFI's webpage. Through its communication approach, ECFI aims to build networks with relevant organizations in Europe, in order to "make the case for the development of the movement."

Since its establishment, ECFI paid significant attention to the diversity of participants in ECFI activities. Over the years, ECFI managed to become an inclusive program, reaching to most countries in the movement. Also, ECFI includes in its activities a variety of CF practitioners from board members, executive directors, to various roles within CFs and CFSOs. ECFI pays significant attention to the evaluation of ECFI's activity from the participants at ECFI events. Several rounds of surveys have invited participants to share their perspectives and evaluate their experiences with ECFI.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a significant impact on ECFI's work, as much of the previously planned activities were meant to happen in person. Throughout the pandemic ECFI presents significant efforts to adapt their activity to the online environment. Multiple online meetings and events have been organized throughout the pandemic period, including a virtual (stay at home) study visit in the Netherlands.

In 2021 ECFI organized numerous events, bringing together 406 participants (203 unique participants) coming from 123 organizations located in 34 countries. A selection of representative ECFI activities is included in table #2.

ECFI's learning activities	 Collective Learning 2021 on Digital Transformation Thematic meetings which involved 59 participants in discussions around sustainability, fundraising in times of crisis, and climate change. The 2021 'Stay at Home' Study Visit involved 57 participants from 21 countries. 9 Emergent Countries Conversations were held in 2021 with participation from Albania, Austria, Georgia, Hungary, Portugal, Serbia, and Spain. The 2021 Learning Lab engaged 6 collaborators working on CF-relevant topics.
ECFI's networking and thematic activities	 CF2CF Exchange, one exchange that started in 2020 was concluded in 2021 and another exchange was organized in 2021.
ECFI's work on the SDGs	 "SDG Wake-up Call" workshops were offered in 3 countries – Germany, Romania, and Ukraine, reaching 26 organizations (23 CFs and 3 CFSOs).
ECFI's research and learning materials work	 From SDG Talk to Action' Report. Community Foundations Embracing the SDGs- Stories from Across Europe' 10 'Stories from the Field' published on ECFI's webpage 16 reports (including 'action learning' from the field) on relevant topics for CFs and CFSOs shared in the network The filed-driven evaluation process kick-started in 2021.
ECFI's communications work	 ECFI's webpage was re-launched in 2021. ECFI participated in various conferences and webinars, sharing the experiences learned by CFs and CFSOs. 13 newsletters distributed in the ECFI network. ECFI maintains a Facebook account, a Facebook group (CF Practice Exchange), and a Twitter account (@ECFInews).

BRIEF ASSESSMENT OF ECFI'S WORK AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS :::

The evaluation team commends ECFI and ECFI's staff for their demonstrated dedication to strengthening the CF movement in Europe. The evaluation team reviewed ECFI's work against set outcomes and types of activities and finds that ECFI succeeded in realizing its plans with excellent results, in proportion to the means available. ECFI conducted its activities diligently and showed perseverance and resilience during COVID-19 times, adapting its work to the virtual environment.

ECFI did not only manage to bring together CF and CFSO practitioners at the organized events, but also managed to provide meaningful and insightful learning experiences that motivate professional engagement and strengthen their practice. Furthermore, ECFI positioned itself as a trusted partner for CFSOs and CFs, leading to an increasing number of partnerships (see the number of ECFI sponsored content in CFSO conferences in 2022).

The evaluation team has been equally reassured by the positive reactions of peers from around Europe and by the care and appreciation they demonstrate towards ECFI and its team members. CF and CFSO professionals have expressed great appreciation for the efforts made by the ECFI team to conduct thoroughly organized activities and to respond to all inquiries for assistance. Furthermore, the interviewed participants expressed utmost consideration and appreciation for the unique opportunities provided by ECFI.

There are multiple strengths in how ECFI conducts its activities, engages CF professionals, shares insights and organizes learning processes, connects to a significant number of professionals across Europe, etc. ECFI's context is however complicated by three important factors:

- ECFI is filling in a significant gap in the European philanthropy environment the lack of organizational capacity for community philanthropy and for community foundations.
- CF movements, CFSOs, and CFs in Europe are very diverse, with different needs and learning trajectories. As such, the level of expectations is both elevated and diverse, making it rather difficult for ECFI to cater for all expectations.
- The availability of resources for Europe-wide CF cooperation is rather limited as most CF movements are in an early development phase and CFSOs and CFs are little likely to prioritize or afford European-level activities, although many express their interest in the continental cooperation dimension.

These three challenges put pressure on ECFI, making it essential that ECFI:

- Understands well and monitors the evolving needs of CFs and CFSOs;
- Identifies modalities for prioritizing inclusive learning strategies and processes that address a well-selected array of CF and CFSO needs;
- Identifies diverse funding partners that can support capacity building, networking, and learning processes for CFs and CFSOs.

General recommendations :::

- ECFI is in a good place to prioritize discussions with CFSOs and CFs about potentially covering certain costs for European-level activities.
- For organizing certain learning events or programs (e.g., study visits) ECFI could consider having CFSOs as core partners, including by raising funds for the respective events. Similarly, for organizing thematic events or programs, ECFI could seek the partnership of thematic organizations, funders, European or global associations of associations.
- While ECFI is doing a visible effort to communicate itself to CFSOs and CFs, the evaluation reveals perceptions that are not in line with ECFIs messages. To strengthen ECFI's communication strategy, ECFI could conceive communication guides for CFs and CFSOs engaged in ECFI activities or that want to contribute to strengthening the European engagement of CFs.
- ECFI has strategic partners in CFSOs and CFs. Stronger partnerships and roles could be designed for CFs and CFSOs who believe firmly in the importance of the European dimension, and can allocate energy and resources to objectives aligned with ECFI's strategy.
- ECFI should continue to strengthen and diversify the learning processes it offers for CFs and CFSOs.
- ECFI could further strengthen its capacity building processes. Building on its experience to date, on the conducted research, and on the assessments of the learning processes, ECFI could design processes adequate for the different levels of development of CFs movements, CFSOs, and CFs.
- ECFI can further strengthen its relationship with research organizations, research centers, universities, and individual researchers in order to advance documentation and research on CFs in Europe.
- ECFI can further develop partnerships with relevant organizations and institutions (national, European, and international), on topics of relevance for CFs, including the SDGs, and the importance for philanthropy for democracy, to bring more expertise on the respective topics in the CF movement and to raise the profile of CFs.
- Furthermore, ECFI should consider developing an advocacy area of work, that can aim to raise the profile of the CF movement in front of European decision-makers and to strengthen the advocacy capacity of CFSOs. Furthermore, ECFI could expand its research work to support drawing lessons from CF's actual and potential engagement with large donors, governments and governmental programs that invest in local communities through CFs.
- ECFI should continue to strengthen its relationship with other philanthropy-focused networks and organizations, in order to positively consolidate the perception on community philanthropy in European countries.

While these are some general recommendations of the evaluation team, the next section will engage more substantively with some of the areas of activity of ECFI where the team collected input from practitioners and philanthropy practitioners. The evaluation team finds useful to present in this report the thoughts and perspectives of CF practitioners as they formulated them, in order for ECFI to be aware and reflect on further developing its own strategy, objectives, and programs.

The evaluation team finds the input received from peers to be extremely valuable and is deeply thankful to all colleagues who took time to share thoughts and experiences in the past months. Therefore, the upcoming two sections aim to present a structured peer-reflection on ECFI's work, hoping that the provided insights prove useful in ECFI's further strategic planning process.

IN-DEPTH PERSPECTIVES ON ECFI'S AREAS OF ACTIVITY

While ECFI's activity is briefly described above, this section will build on the previous to provide more space for reflection on some of the core types of ECFI activities. This reflection summarizes and presents in a structured way the insights collected through the evaluation process. The recommendations presented in this section are bringing forward the perspectives of practitioners that took part in the evaluation process and those of the evaluation team.

The wide variety of recommendations highlight the incredibly diverse needs and stages of development of the CFs and CFSOs from the European CF movement. The evaluation team feels it is useful to capture all voices of the interviewed practitioners, while recommending that ECFI takes these learnings in its strategy planning process where they can be prioritized.

ECFI's activity on learning and exchanges : :

ECFI's number one focus is on designing learning experiences and exchanges. Based on the discussions with peers and team members, the focus on learning and exchanges is unequivocally seen as the top priority. That paves the ground for a particular approach to ECFI using its resources to address CFs' and CFSOs' needs.

ECFI-organized exchanges, thematic sessions, and study visits are intensely appreciated. ECFI's focus on learning creates a space perceived well by CFs and CFSOs, where they can connect, learn about each other's experiences, and get inspired and motivated to drive their practice forward.

Study trips and exchanges are the highlights, as they offer the occasion to connect more thoroughly, engage with, experience, and reflect on the practice of peers from different environments, leading to powerful reflective experiences on one own's practice. "I thought that the practice of getting to know one country very well is a really good experience. These study trips are a value-creating exercise. We could get to know the CFs and the context in which they operate and develop. ECFI was organizing physical ones, but I also participated to the virtual tour in the Netherlands, and it was really excellent. It took advantage of the online and should be continued."

Exchanges are also perceived as "very good [... and] with easy access." They enable CF practitioners to connect while designing the agenda and curating their experience. "The exchange programs are very easy and administratively are simple. They bring a lot of benefit."

A further learning methodology ECFI implements are the thematic meetings. These highlight topics of interest for the European CF Movement, aiming to facilitate more in-depth engagement and sharing. Some of the focus topics so far include digital transition, climate change, and the SDGs. Mobilization on particular topics, such as the pandemic, adds value to the cohesiveness and learning processes within the Movement.

The benefit for participants is considered high, "I gained much knowledge on these network meetings, I have been part on the second edition of the Learning lab, I would miss this kind of collaboration among us." Furthermore, repeating some of the thematic meetings is also appreciated "We thought it was quite clever for ECFI to repeat some of them because people change." CF and CFSO practitioners ask for these meetings to continue, "please keep providing thematic sessions. Not only face to face, but also on a low budget, and keep connected to the grassroots."

An underlying dimension of ECFI's work is catering for the professional development of staff and board members from the field. This focus is relevant for at least two reasons. First, the availability of training sessions in CF practice is perceived to be extremely scarce. Second, in many European countries the number of CFs is reduced leading to a limited professional community. Therefore, a European approach to building CF-related professional skills, enables staff and board members to become better professionals and feel connected and part of a relevant field. The self-confidence and improved practice generated by such activities are one of the key impact areas ECFI could monitor in the future.

Professional development experiences are linked to the learning practices described above and to ECFI's capacity building activities. From the perspective of CF and CFSO practitioners, more targeted learning activities could be implemented, such as mentoring. "Mentorship among us has been a great journey during the past year. We learned a lot from other colleagues in more advanced countries." Other professional practices, such as job shadowing and more diverse methodologies for sharing knowledge, can be explored by ECFI.

Challenges in engaging with ECFI's learning opportunities

CF and CFSO practitioners also mentioned several challenges in accessing the experiences ECFI puts forward. A first key challenge relates to the limited capacity and staff of both CFs and CFSOs to respond positively to the "many opportunities" provided by ECFI.

A second key challenge relates to the language used during activities. Several CFs might not have staff members speaking English, while some CFSOs mentioned only having one person who does. Taking part in (online) events is perceived to be the most difficult for practitioners who do not speak English well. At the same time, translating documents and team meetings are perceived to be more accessible. Translating documents into more languages is a good practice encouraged by CFs and CFSOs, also seeing a role for themselves in such an activity (i.e., some CFSO practitioners mentioned they could ensure the translation of specific reports and documents). The online format of events is also challenging for some practitioners, "the online part (is an asset to have) but for me it is an absolute turn-off. For a longer thematic exchange, it does not work." Overall, the online activities were highly appreciated in a pandemic context where inperson meetings could not be held.

Communication of activities is broadly perceived to reach those who are already in touch with ECFI. Being connected through several channels – the newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, the website, and e-lists – enables practitioners to receive news and details about ECFI-organized activities. At the same time, several practitioners who are not well connected to ECFI exposed a lack of access to information about ECFI's activities.

A role in this communication thread is also played by CFSOs, which in some countries are more efficient at passing on information than in others. Some CFSOs and CFs are perceived to lack the necessary tools to pass down information about ECFI. Equally, ECFI is perceived not to have a communication strategy and toolkit for how CFs and CFSOs could better communicate being a part of ECFI's network. Also, further engagement at a leadership level is needed to ensure that CFSOs and CFs value ECFI's work and want to share the information with their colleagues.

Expectations and suggestions to be considered by ECFI

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CF and CFSO practitioners proposed several ideas and suggestions for further strengthening ECFI's learning activities and experiences.

Regarding communication channels, several voices articulated the need for more engaged CFSOs and for a communication process were CFs and CFSOs can easier communicate about ECFI and its activities – e.g., having ECFI's logo on CF and CFSO webpages, etc. ECFI could encourage, guide, and support such practices.

When it comes to channels for communicating more in-depth content, suggestions include a diversification of the communication products of ECFI, "I would plead for alternative vehicles for sharing information – the newsletter vehicle is not the best, it is useful, but there are other communication vehicles out there, more attractive and more agile, e.g., the Community Foundations of Canada podcasts¹. A way of staying connected to the right information, maybe in a more attractive way than emails or reports, it does mean more organizational capacity."

Another area refers to configuring longer-term learning processes. For example, building on the work with consultants to create manuals and guides that can be useful for CFs and CFSOs (e.g., on fundraising). Calls for both more conceptual and more practical forms of exchanges and learning were mentioned, indicating the heterogeneity of the CF practitioners in terms of their expertise on various professional topics and in relation to holding different types of skills. That supports the need for more structured and comprehensive learning processes that address, in various formats, the needs of practitioners with different degrees of expertise, as well as of organizations and national movements with various degrees of capacity and complexity.

Participation can be strengthened by co-designing such learning processes together with CFSOs and CFs. There is a significant need for curated content for CFSOs engaged in shaping national movements at various levels of development, to address CFSO needs and crating space for ownership over the learning products ECFI puts forward.

More specifically, ECFI is encouraged also to make more efforts in reducing duplication of outcomes and deliverables in CF and CFSO processes, "sometimes when I am in the emerging countries group, I feel we are already producing the documents that were already produced somewhere else. It is important to systematize." Furthermore, practitioners suggested more formats such as internships, mentorship programs, different forms of exchanges, and formats designed to bring CFSOs together and support CFSOs to support their constituencies better. Study visits are perceived to be a powerful learning experience, especially so for the host organizations. Regarding the emerging CF movements, a suggestion is to organize study visits to these countries, "if the country feels comfortable opening to a group of visitors, it could be a good thing for the rest of Europe where they have older or newer CFs, from the point of view that it would allow (emerging) countries to benefit from such experiences."

Finally, CFs and CFSOs are aware that a lot of the knowledge on which ECFI learning experiences are based is derived from CFs' experiences and enhanced by CFSOs' capacity to reflect and engage with such experiences. Several suggestions indicate that ECFI could design more ways to make CF and CFSO knowledge resources more accessible. A related suggestion is to build mechanisms through which CFs and CFSOs become themselves learning curators on key areas of expertise.

¹ https://alliance2030.ca/podcasts/

Key recommendations

- ECFI could design learning processes (training sessions, courses, exchanges, series of study visits, etc.) for addressing the more heterogeneous needs of practitioners and organizations at various levels of professional/organizational development and capacity.
- ECFI could continue to build processes for curating learning experiences tailored more specifically to the needs of specific CFSOs or clusters of CFs.
- ECFI could design mechanisms for activating CFs, CFSOs, and practitioners in becoming learning architects and curate learning experiences for peers.
- ECFI could develop partnerships with universities and academic and professional organizations for enhancing learning, education, and training opportunities for CF and CFSO practitioners.
- ECFI could develop SDG-focused learning partnerships with various organizations, universities, and companies with a strategic focus on sustainability.
- ECFI could build an interactive and dynamic virtual platform focused on learning and connecting practitioners in community philanthropy, thus aiming at the creation of a community of experts in the field at European level.
- ECFI could co-develop learning and educational products for supporting continuing education and training within CFs, CFSOs, and other learning partners.
- All the above can open the space for exploring new engagements with potential funders and partners to complement ECFI's funding model.

ECFI's activity on research

A second strategic area for ECFI's work is conducting research on the CF movement and community philanthropy more broadly (including the SDGs). This area has been mentioned several times by practitioners, highlighting the essential role ECFI's research has for the CF field in Europe and for their own practice, "on the case studies and the good practices that ECFI collects, they are very useful for us. We share all these documents in our blueprint and check on what other peers are doing in Europe." Furthermore, data collected by ECFI is appreciated as it supports further research and analysis.

ECFI's engagement with the community philanthropy program at the City University of New York (CUNY) has been mentioned and appreciated by one interviewee. It brought a focus on European CFs in a program that otherwise is mostly focused on North American CF experiences, "ECFI was much more present in this course in 2020 than in previous ones when American and Canadian examples were much more present."

There are other expectations on the side of CF and CFSO practitioners about continuing to collect data, producing reports on the CF field in Europe and generating more analytical publications.

- ECFI could continue its engagement in stronger research and learning/teaching partnerships that can systematically generate research and educating practitioners in CFs.
- Through such partnerships, ECFI could build, together with partners, a research agenda on community philanthropy in Europe and a network of partner organizations, universities, and researchers that could deliver on that agenda.
- ECFI could strengthen partnerships with other relevant organizations that brings together researchers, such as professional and academic networks and organizations.
- ECFI could join/launch Europe-wide consortia for accessing funding for research on community philanthropy in Europe.

ECFI's activity on convening and . . connecting CFs and CFSOs . .

Another strategic area for ECFI is mobilizing CFs and CFSOs and supporting the emergence of a more cohesive and impactful CF Movement in Europe, "[t]here are many positive achievements, before there were just incidental contacts at the European level." Without exception, interviewed practitioners who have been in contact with ECFI recognize ECFI's work in this field. At the same time, practitioners who have not been sufficiently in touch with ECFI realize that they have missed relevant learning experiences and are keen on connecting with ECFI and other European peers.

The value that is perceived in attending ECFI activities includes professional development, professional insights, inter-cultural learning, being exposed to CF practices and approaches in different cultural contexts, not feeling alone in countries where there are few CFs, as well as to community challenges that while being distinct, they are nevertheless relevant. Such practices further bring connections and a deeper experience that contribute significantly to the cohesion of the CF field in Europe.

All activities mentioned above are means for convening CFs and CFSOs. Therefore, the convening role of ECFI is more a horizontal area of activity, building on everything else ECFI does. ECFI brings together CFs, CFSOs, and third actors, having in mind primarily learning, research, sharing of experiences, and engagement with the SDGs. The chosen formats play an important role in how convening is realized, whether in person or online. There is a perceived difference between the relevance of convening on a European level for more established and emerging CF national movements and related CFSOs. In some countries where there is pressure on civil society from their respective governments, and even more so in the context of the war in Ukraine, the European level is fundamental for maintaining a feeling of belonging and giving hope and strength when needed as well as spreading awareness among the rest of members of the movement about the global situation in Europe.

An essential suggestion derived from the peer reflection is that such convening could be further scaled up and curated so that the right people for certain types of collaborative engagements are put in contact. Furthermore, while cooperation is seen as complicated, ECFI can further explore methodologies for convening that empower and make cooperation easier.

Convening is a strategic priority also for CFSOs. Therefore, the collaboration between ECFI and respective CFSOs is an area that is slowly advancing, and that can be further explored, "this year – Assifero, FFCR, and UKCF, all contacted me, to ask for our input in the design and input in their national conferences, that is a breakthrough, that did not happen before. [...] To think about the conference, what can ECFI bring in terms of knowledge and expertise" (ECFI team member).

- ECFI could further highlight convening as a transversal strategic area of work to best capitalize on the convening potential of all other ECFI activities.
- ECFI could design methodologies for strengthening the convening objectives of all other activities and aiming to institutionalize such modalities for convening.
- ECFI could further prioritize identifying and curating convening occasions for European CFs and CFSOs (within larger national, European, and global events, etc.).
- ECFI could further expand its convening activities to include relevant third actors working on sustainable development (SDGs).
- ECFI could create a "Who's Who" guide / map of CFs and CFSOs in Europe.

ECFI's activity on SDGs

A further strategic area for ECFI is engaging CFs and CFSOs with the Sustainable Development Goals. While ECFI's efforts in this area are recognized, for several interlocutors the topic is perceived as difficult. Except for the UK, and partially Germany and Italy, all other movements are either marginally open or outright opposed to focusing on the SDGs.

ECFI's work on the SDGs is, as mentioned above, recognized. ECFI put forward several workshops, activities, and discussions on the SDGs, leading to increased awareness of the SDGs within the European CF field and a full-fledged program on the SDGs developed by UKCF. ECFI's approach on the SDGs is seen as pragmatic and practical, delivering knowledge and abilities to engage with various SDGs, focused on data gathering for the SDGs, providing space for reflection on the SDGs, and on the way one looks at their own community based on engaging with the SDGs.,"I thought the presentation that James did for us was really impressive, and what he did, he did not only talk about SDGs, but about advantages and the community impact side of things and attracting support."

ECFI's work on the SDGs is taken to a different level by starting to focus on specific SDGs, as is the case with the focus on climate change. ECFI was proactive in the context of COP 26 and engaged CFs in relevant discussions at that level while showing the contribution of CFs to relevant objectives and targets.

The impact of ECFI's work on how CFs and CFSOs engage with the SDGs varies. Some CFSOs are connecting in more strategic ways with the SDGs, "[o]ne good example for that is learning around the SDGs and beginning to recognize how we can reframe our work in relation to the SDGs." Other CFs and CFSOs still engage less with this topic.

UKCF is the main example of a European CFSO that strategically engages with the SDGs due to ECFI's work, "at UKCF, if we did not have participants at the ECFI activities on SDGs, we would not be doing the level of activities on this topic. [...] Without ECFI we would have no Mott funding. [... now] it is a national strategy embedded in UCKF and the network of CFs." This focus on SDGs trickles down at a CF level, leading to new partnerships and modes of engagement of the private sector.

One such example is Milton Keynes CF, "[g]overnment is encouraging. Universities are being actively encouraged, to have SDGs part of their remits. Corporates in Milton Keynes, such as Santander, too. That means it is much easier to relate to Santander. [...] We followed the Canadian model of Vistal Signs. Our Vital Signs is very well received. We linked the SDGs to Vital Signs. [...] each area we report on is linked to the SDGs. We have more credibility through the SDGs."

Still, other CFSOs do not see the relevance of SDGs in their context, as neither nationally nor in the private sector the SDGs are not yet a priority. One such example is Bulgaria, "When we talk about the SDGs, for me it very much depends on the level of development and CSR rules of the country. In Bulgaria, it is very difficult to go, if you are a CF, or even a foundation that is fundraising, and talk about the SDGs. It is something else, you can go there and talk about the communication of their company, outcomes, but not the SDGs, they don't know and don't care. No matter to whom you are talking to is useless."

A contested topic about CFs and SDGs is the actual contribution of CFs and community philanthropy to achieving the SDGs. While perspectives are placing CFs as modest contributors, a more systematic analysis in that direction and more substantive research could show the actual contribution. Furthermore, engaging with governmental and intergovernmental (including the UN) entities can be realized irrespective of the level of impact, given the importance that Agenda 2030 places on private financing for sustainable development (Addis Ababa Agenda).

Further expectations regarding ECFI's engagement with the SDGs relate to the strength, nature, and mode of ECFI's engagement. Building on the pragmatic approach of presenting the SDGs to CFs and CFSOs, a space for more 'philosophical' and strategic discussions around the SDGs could be opened. Furthermore, building on the UK's and Canada's examples, ECFI could showcase modalities in which government resources are invested for the SDGs through CFs. Also, the positive experiences with localizing the SDGs by CFs through the Vital Signs reports present a further potential area of action. Some practitioners see the SDGs as a potential "tool for reporting on advocacy and efficacy of each CF."

More specifically, building a series of events on the SDGs or a learning group that is active for longer periods of time, exploring in more depth the subject, and providing more structure are perceived as useful. Lastly, the SDGs are seen as a strategic opportunity for raising the profile of CFs in their own communities, nationally, and in Europe, if the European Movement could jointly produce a report.

While many CFSOs do not see the relevance of the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda gets significant and increasing traction at global, European, national, and local levels. It is only a matter of time until more CF national movements and increasing numbers of CFs become aware of their ability to position themselves as leading actors on sustainable development. ECFI can continue to contribute substantively to raising awareness among CFSOs and CFs on the relevance of Agenda 2030. Further more practical capacity building on SDG-related topics can also be considered.

- ECFI could design more types of learning processes around the SDG, including more in-depth and longer-term programs. Such programs could be developed in partnership with CFSOs/CFs and third experts, and could be run also in local languages.
- ECFI could develop workshops for strategic engagement with the SDGs for CFs and CFSOs that are seeing value in the 2030 Agenda.
- ECFI could, in partnership with CFSOs and other relevant partners, facilitate a national and European, simple but scientifically consistent, impact measurement tool and reporting process on CF contribution to the SDGs.
- ECFI could build partnerships with European institutions and organizations working on the SDGs at a European level and could join SDG-related networks in Europe and globally.
- ECFI could support CFSOs to engage with national governments and national-level SDG platforms and organizations, where CFSOs come to understand the relevance of Agenda 2030 for their activity.
- ECFI could develop workshops and training sessions on SDG-related indicators and data collection by CFs and CFSOs, including meaningfully linking Vital Signs with the SDG reports.
- ECFI could partner with or broker partnerships among CFs and CFSOs for developing vital signs reports that rely on localized SDG targets.
- ECFI could accompany CFs in their SDG localization processes, and harvest areas of relevance for local communities that currently SDGs do not capture, in order to profile CFs at a global level and show the relevance of their work for the sustainability of local communities.
- ECFI could relate with the UN Agencies and become an interlocutor transmitting relevant input based on CF experiences in local communities.

ECFI's activity on consulting ... and capacity building ...

While ECFI is not emphasizing sufficiently its capacity-building work, this comes across as another key area of action in discussions with CF and CFSO practitioners, "[t]he first time I met ECFI, I saw it as a resource organization." CFs and CFSOs, at various levels of development, are reaching out with various questions towards ECFI staff and value the insights, responses, data, and perspectives they receive in response. The need for input from ECFI staff is greater than what CFs and CFSOs feel they can ask for. There is a feeling of putting extra pressure on ECFI staff. ECFI staff is seen as key potential mentors for some professionals in the field, "ECFI staff have so much knowledge and could act as a mentor for some of us."

Practitioners underscore several capacity-related needs that ECFI partially addresses. Among these are exposing CF professionals to valuable European-level experiences, working with those motivated to learn, distil learnings in easy-to-use materials for others, capture good practices and share with others in ways that do not de-motivate professionals. Furthermore, ECFI is seen as well-positioned to "develop a program for support organizations, with ECFI team as mentors for support organizations, individual plans, mentoring, growing."

Key recommendations

- ECFI could conceive a capacity-building component of its strategy, seeing its current activities as building blocks.
- ECFI could design specific capacity-building programs for CFs and CFSOs on topics where it has expertise and build on the learning component it has put in place.
- ECFI could develop partnerships with European networks to bring further capacity to the community philanthropy movement.

ECFI's activity on making the · · · CF movement visible

A key expectation resulting from most discussions with CF practitioners is that of ECFI playing a key role in making the European CF Movement visible. While all voices see such a role for ECFI, their more specific expectations are not aligned. Some examples include the importance of CF Movement visibility in front of relevant stakeholders in fundraising or in front of a wider public for whom understanding CFs is rather difficult.

- ECFI could further engage with CFs and CFSOs to better understand this area of profiling the CF Movement and build a space where CFs and CFSOs can align on this topic.
- ECFI could map and cluster key stakeholders for the CF Movement in Europe and build a strategy of engagement with them.
- ECFI could elaborate and send to European institutions and relevant national institutions, in close coordination with national CFSOs, and also with key stakeholders in the field like Philea (Philanthropy Europe Association), a basic set of information about what CFs are and how they constitute a relevant new model for local philanthropy and impact, and how they reinforce civil society, while showing how certain governments already engaged CFs in strengthening local communities.

ECFI's perceived role in relation . . . to advocacy activities

Closely related to the previous point of making the CF Movement in Europe visible and building its profile but going much further – which implies very specific and significant additional resources – come more specific expectations related to potential work on advocacy. The discussion on advocacy has multiple perspectives. ECFI could play a role in doing advocacy at a European level, supporting CFSOs to build advocacy capacity at a national level, and supporting CFs to balance their advocacy and fund development/fundraising practices.

Supporting CFs in balancing their actions becomes increasingly important as the global policies and moods, including the SDGs, bring increased pressure on finding impactful solutions to root-cause problems, putting increasing pressures on some traditional donors,

"We are looking at how we can advocate for change, which is often about root causes and system change, without alienating some of the good people who shore up that system. [...] We are, there is an anxiety about being seen to be radical, or an advocate for change when actually some of the context of our donors is quite different. Not an uncommon challenge in CFs [...] But partly through our work on SDGs, we have kind of started to be recognized, there is a way we could move in the advocacy space that does not alienate current or future donors, in fact if we do it right it can help."

At a national level, ECFI could support CFSOs in strengthening and building their advocacy capacity on "local philanthropy and the democratization of local philanthropy" and engage in "core strategic influencing with our political institutions, to highlight the importance of CFs." Furthermore, ECFI could collect and present case studies of good practices from among the EU countries on a series of policy issues related to civil society and local communities.

At a European level, ECFI is seen as best positioned to mobilize behind itself a large number of organizations that can get the attention of European Institutions. ECFI could follow the example of some other European networks (such as EuroChild, CONCORD Europe, SDG Watch, etc.), and be "organized as a network, with a secretariat based in Brussels, very good in advocating for the members at an EU level. So, for me, it would be good if such a secretariat and network existed. We should find a way to do that if it is possible. I know there are a lot of constraints about funding." ECFI could, were it to find it strategically relevant, undertake the role of advocating the agenda of community philanthropy and the importance of community philanthropy infrastructure organizations (such as the CFs) for the sustainability and resilience of local communities.

Other practitioners question whether ECFI is prepared to make such a step, despite the significant amount of work seen as relevant in that direction. Such advocacy engagement is seen as needing high capacity, numerous resources, and good preparation for maintaining a sustainable voice among policymakers, "[i]f you want to stay at a European level you have to earn it."

Further critical voices point out that the concept of community foundations is in essence an American concept and that more work needs to be done to be portrayed and perceived as European, to have a chance to influence EU institutions. A connection to EU values, policies (such as social and regional development), presence in Brussels, and language are all seen as necessary to be perceived as European.

- ECFI could strategically reassess its focus on advocacy as to reflect the needs and perspectives of CFs and CFSOs.
- ECFI could develop learning contexts and processes on advocacy.
- ECFI could envisage organizing some basic advocacy actions towards some particular institutions (like the Economic and Social Committee of the EU, the Committee of the Regions, or the EU Parliament) and networks (for example, European third sector relevant networks, or donor networks).
- ECFI could assess whether a presence in Brussels is possible.

ECFI's work on new CF movements :::

An essential contribution of ECFI is seen in relation to the emerging CF Movements. ECFI is a source of courage, inspiration, knowledge, partnership, resources of various sorts, and connections for CFSOs that are hoping to develop a CF movement in their country, "[i]f ECFI did not exist we would not exist. We are engaged in ECFI since 2018, and participated at several events, CF to CF visits, and ECFI meetings. With ECFI's support we conducted feasibility studies and started promotion and community work. All the meetings with other countries gave us strength and motivated us that it would work [...] I think we are not wasting time in our work. We are using lessons learnt from partners."

In this area, ECFI is seen as well-positioned to partner, share knowledge, and support in designing CF Movement building programs.

Key recommendations

- ECFI could further prioritize this area of work and strategically approach diverse ways in which it can support emerging CFSOs and national CF movements.
- ECFI could build partnerships with various stakeholders for ensuring the kick-start support are necessarily better, but for emerging movements.
- ECFI could further strengthen and diversify its instruments for engaging emerging CF movements.

Further practitioners' perspectives · · · on the future of ECFI's work

- ECFI could build further on the knowledge and inspiration activities by "developing a resource center, network of experts, peers, people who would build programs tailored to our needs, like a database of people who would do that, trainings."
- ECFI could rethink its way of measuring success as it "is still often measured in numbers, as in there are now more CF's. I don't believe more CFs are necessarily better, but a better CF-field, which is a difficult discussion in some countries in Europe."
- ECFI should further increase its capacity to deliver more on CF and CFSO needs, "[w]e cannot dream big if there is no staff to carry through."
- ECFI could articulate a clearer statement about "what you fight for."
- ECFI should enlarge the network of stakeholders, funders, and partners and be more present on the global scene (at conferences and other relevant events).
- ECFI should put more emphasis on ownership by CFs and CFSOs and to diversify the CF- and CFSO-related stakeholder groups that benefit from ECFI's work, "I would like for ECFI to become a more open organization, to apply to this idea, that it is our organization. Right now, it is more as a structure, hierarchy, oriented towards the executive directors, not many meetings for grantmakers. Let's build on that, making it our organization. That would mean for the knowledge not to be top down."

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS :::

The previous sections focused on presenting ECFI's activity, the perceptions and reflection of CF practitioners and recommendations from the evaluation team. Given that ECFI is about to embark on a strategic planning process, this section is providing further insights on topics that can be further explored in that process.

ECFI's engagement with CFs and CFSOs : :

ECFI finds itself in the middle of a complex CF ecosystem, composed of national CF movements, CFSOs, and CFs, all with various characteristics, understandings, values, and expectations. As such, the way ECFI connects to CFSOs and CFs becomes a key strategic topic for ECFI's present and future.

CFs have been established and are functioning in diverse ways in different communities, often presenting significant differences within one country. CFSOs are of multiple types, be it associations of CFs, support organizations, or foundations, with diverse perspectives and approaches. National movements also have different characteristics, some being established earlier, while others are now going through such a process; some are more in-ward looking, while others being open to exploring international engagements. Furthermore, civil society sectors, altogether, are exposing different characteristics, some being freer and more sustainable, others being more restricted and affected by relative deprivation of local economies. However, the co-existence of all these levels, makes it a complicated ecosystem to navigate, at times with diverging interests, "[i]f something [...] is offered either at a national level or at a European level, most people will prefer the first one (i.e., the national level)."

A first contribution of ECFI in this direction is to make the European dimension of the movement a reality, triggering more international engagement, "in UK we are great at looking inward but not great at looking outwards, and ECFI makes us look outwards." That impact is equally applicable at an individual level, "working for ECFI helped me to get a much better understanding to the different circumstances socially and economically in those wonderful countries, that I never saw before. Through ECFI we create connections between countries in a peaceful way." Another significant contribution of ECFI relates to making the CF Movement visible at a European level, "ECFI is our main reference for this sector."

CF and CFSO practitioners have diverging perspectives on what ECFI should primarily focus on. Some support the perspective that ECFI should work primarily with CFSOs, "in the last years it became very clear that ECFI works with CFSOs. I suggest that ECFI should keep it that way, if it has limited resources, and with limited resources it is easier to work with CFSO, if CFSOs are connected at a European level." Other voices call for more engagement with CFs directly, "ECFI should be connected way more with CFs directly." Nevertheless, there appears to be alignment on ECFI having a broader approach that is inclusive and often focuses on individual professionals.

ECFI is recognized as learning to navigate national environments and aiming to identify the appropriate partners in every case. Furthermore, ECFI is seen to build closer relations with CFSOs in supporting them and their capacity to further connect CFs at a European level.

Most CF and CFSO practitioners interviewed are acknowledging that the relationship with ECFI should be a two-way relationship, where CFs and CFSOs should also assume responsibilities, "[w]e have been quite poor at coordinating, as an organization that has grown quite a lot in the last 10 years, poor at coordinating learning and communication opportunities. ECFI is a good example of it. You know about ECFI if you happen to know about it. Nothing on our website, or in staff communication, no indication of ECFI. Part of the solution is not sitting with ECFI but with CFs – how do we share the knowledge and learning of the wider network and movement with our staff."

ECFI is seen as important in the relationship with both CFs and CFSOs, also for more specific
 aspects such as, engaging CFs in European activities and visiting CFs – therefore offering 'international recognition' which is perceived to be important on the local level. ECFI is asked for support letters and partnerships in European projects. Also, ECFI can facilitate connections among CFs that want to apply together for funding. ECFI is appreciated for providing resources for all, exposing inclusivity. ECFI can draw on both CF local knowledge and CFSO capacity to process and reflect on such local knowledge. Furthermore, ECFI can act as a channel for sharing good practices among CFs or CFSOs.

One such example could be UK's process of accreditation, "CFs, including UKCF, have to go through a process of accreditation to make sure we are transparent in the way that we work, reach a quality of delivery so that our donors, private, corporate, and state, know they are dealing with accredited organizations – a great thing we have to offer. It is quite a process to go through, a lot of hard work. Sharing that information with ECFI to spread out across CFs in Europe could be helpful."

ECFI's governance and raison d'être

The above discussion depicts multiple expectations from a program like ECFI that, at the moment, has limited resources. Furthermore, the discussions with practitioners show the complexity of the European CF Movement and many of the particularities of its key stakeholders, CFs and CFSOs. Within this complex ecosystem, what should ECFI's raison d'être be?

Practitioners reflected on a few strategic areas about ECFI's existence as an initiative. First and foremost, discussions revolving around whether ECFI should register as a formal organization or remain a program bring diverging perspectives from practitioners. In addition, ECFI's host organization is also central to ECFI's way of functioning. Multiple practitioners have also mentioned ownership of CFs and CFSOs over ECFI and ECFI's work in relation to ECFI's governance model and funding model.

ECFI's raison d'être

A key strategic direction that ECFI can pursue is related to community philanthropy in Europe. ECFI is seen as "an open platform for all people, CFSOs and CFs", that should stand up for community philanthropy. Community philanthropy is portrayed as in need of champions in Europe, and in a relatively weak position in relation to mainstream philanthropy.

A further area to potentially capitalize on relates to the SDGs, especially as the SDGs are in their early stages of being adopted in most countries. ECFI, CFSOs, and CFs can position themselves as key champions of strategic sustainability thinking in local communities. Such a position would create a context for engaging communities, donors, grantees, and public authorities in a discussion on the future of their communities and strengthen the leadership of CFs in relation to various local stakeholders.

Furthermore, ECFI can relate to and address current crises such as the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The type of violence perpetrated in Ukraine reminds us that the security of our communities must be continuously reconstructed, "we should not lose the idea of being a very important player who contributes to keeping Europe together, we work with Russia, Ukraine, East and West, South and North, we connect Europe, and we don't promote it often enough."

Program organization and ... its governance process

The organizational form of ECFI has attracted maybe the most attention of all topics in our discussion. The perspectives are, as expected, varied, and highlight the difficulty of bringing together the robustness needed for consolidating community philanthropy as a sector, with the agility for addressing the different needs of all actors in the European CF Movement. Expectations are articulated at all levels – field, European Movement, national movements, CFSOs, and CFs. At a field level, ECFI is expected to be a 'catalyst' that "empowers the field to act."

CF professionals were even surprised that ECFI manages to accomplish so much without a formal structure, "the fact of ECFI existing at all with the current structure is quite a miracle", or "I did not know ECFI was a program. I could only imagine what they could do if it were an organization."

Perspectives are divided between those who see the necessity of an established entity versus a program part of a larger organization. A part of the practitioners see ECFI established as an organization that is dedicated to community foundations and to community philanthropy more broadly, "from my point of view they would benefit greatly from being more institutionalized, as they could raise membership fees." The other position insists on the need for agility and flexibility, "we should remain light and not become established as an organization, because of inertia and overhead costs."

Perspectives are relative. Some practitioners indicate that if there is a good host, it is a good option to continue as a program. Examples from the national level, e.g., Belgium, Germany, etc., are highlighting that CF networks can be part of broader networks of foundations, as long as they can follow through with their mission.

Perspectives focusing on institutionalization indicate that a more solid structure also impacts ECFI's ability to exert leadership and underpins its vision for the field. The long-term impact is to be considered, as a program is heavily dependent on the agenda of the host organization, therefore the aspect of long-term sustainability should be analysed and contrasted with that of establishing an organization.

Some practitioners have also highlighted risks related to an institutionalization of ECFI. They indicate that a focus put on institutionalization and on advocacy may divert the attention of ECFI from serving CFSOs and CFs, "[t]he ticket to independence can be challenging and it may divert focus. First you have to develop your organization, to build the independence of the organization." And that such capacity should rather be located at a national level.

Several CF practitioners also highlight the need for creating a space for broader discussions on this topic. Everyone's input is seen as relevant as each contributor is playing a role in shaping ECFI and, also, should contribute to its development, "if you become a member, then you are also a part of the decision-making and strategies. [...] we did not really offer much to ECFI at this point." ECFI's future is seen as a result of the engagement of CFs and CFSOs, "[i]t is up to us to shape ECFI, to make ECFI grow, and that does not mean it has to be an organization with 20 staff, but contributions from the field are important, making it grow organically, rather than looking at the external funding."

The perspectives presented by CF and CFSO practitioners who see ECFI as a less institutionalized initiative are aligning with the views of the ECFI team, who envisages ECFI as "a very agile entity. As an initiative we are not an organization, not an institution, we are a set of consultants working freelance as part of this initiative. We are innovative, we bringing ideas and knowledge about the field and the practice within the field. Something that has evolved recently. When we started ECFI, it was a facilitator of peer learning and peer exchange. As we have grown, we are able to play more of a leadership role, to define the agenda, to bring expertise to bring knowledge, there is the connecting role, to make connections, between countries, CFs, and between people."

The different perspectives on ECFI's institutionalization, including the strong position of the ECFI team indicate the need for an alignment process among CFs, CFSOs, and the ECFI team. A good conclusion for this debate is captured in the words of a practitioner, that "ECFI will be what we make of it."

ECFI's host organization

Practitioners also touch upon the dynamic between ECFI and its host organization. The situation is unclear for most of those who make a point on this topic, but there is a general assumption that the relationship is not as good as it could be, "I also don't know the relationship with the BVDS and whether it is good or not. It may be good to have a rotating host from time to time, to shuffle the cards. BVDS went through challenges that also affected ECFI."

Further perspectives regarding the host organization, draw attention that locating ECFI in Brussels may be more convenient for engaging with European actors – as several other relevant organizations and European institutions are located there.

A key question about ECFI's relationship with The Association of German Foundations is whether the dynamic allows ECFI to carry out with its mission and grow in a direction consistent with the perspectives of CFs and CFSOs, so that ownership can emerge.

CF and CFSO ownership :::

As ECFI is an initiative, it is only natural that CFs and CFSOs do not feel they own ECFI, "the field does not feel that they own the ECFI process." The ECFI team is aware of this current context, "[t]he ownership of ECFI by the field is hard to communicate; not only belonging to the movement but owning the movement." A suggested solution for ECFI to raise engagement and the feeling of ownership among CFs and CFSOs is to create regional committees, that would "connect ECFI more to the ground."

There are differences among the different CF movements, depending on their level of development, which also translates in the way they ask for ECFI's engagement. In the middle of these dynamics, ECFI sees its role to "try to both understand demands and share the knowledge and resources we have so that they are accessible by all."

Many of the recommendations put forth in this report are aimed at contributing to gradually increase the ownership of ECFI by CFs and CFSOs. In a nutshell, increasing the agency of CFs and CFSOs in ECFI-related processes (learning, research, visibility, advocacy, capacity building, etc.) is a key recommendation.

ECFI's funding model

Another significant topic raised by many professionals is related to ECFI's funding model and its sustainability. On that aspect, ECFI is perceived to be significantly vulnerable as it relies on one funder and the prospects for institutionalization are reduced. Furthermore, the current business model is also limited by the fact that ECFI offers its services broadly for free for CFs and CFSOs.

The lack of contribution by CFs and CFSOs is acknowledged and highlighted by a few practitioners, "I think it is the time when some of us that use ECFI as beneficiaries, should be confronted with what we are getting and what we are contributing." Such suggestions raise questions for other participants as well, potentially opening a space for more discussion on this topic.

While ECFI is exploring alternative partners and funding streams, its ability to arrive at concrete partnerships has been limited. Furthermore, being part of a host organization also comes with potential limitations in terms of accessing various funding streams that are not pursued by the host organization, as for example is the case of EU funding.

CFs and CFSOs are aware their contribution is essential for ECFI's future, and are ready to contribute in different ways. Some areas of potential support include membership fees, local knowledge and experience, CF-/CFSO-generated content to be used in ECFI's work with other countries, influence and direct contribution to different stakeholders.

ECFI and its external environment :::

In addition to catering for the European CF movement, ECFI is expected to connect to diverse field-related entities. In doing so, ECFI is seen to have the possibility to position itself as assuming a leadership role in the field of community philanthropy. The level of capacity needed to thoroughly engage with third partners is seen as needing to be increased.

Stronger relationships are envisaged with other key philanthropy stakeholders in Europe, "CFs are not present at conferences or at the Philanthropy House. Do we know the reasons for that? We need to invest in getting CFs in those structures and strategy, and if EFC and DAFNE are to merge, my belief is that we have to join that movement and be there [...] I don't think such a small movement has the resources to go on its own way." While ECFI is already engaged in the European infrastructure organizations on philanthropy in various capacities, this area of networking and engagement can be further explored for strengthening the position of CFs and community philanthropy in Europe.

Furthermore, significant transformation takes place at a global level as trends in security, climate change, and technology, among others, reshape the world we live in. ECFI could explore the impact of that transformation on community philanthropy in general and on CFs in particular, and offer them as part of the solution.

A general recommendation is for ECFI to conduct an assessment of its external environment and the transformations of the fields of philanthropy and community philanthropy in developing its new strategy, in order to identify the best ways to increase ECFI's positioning in these fields, finding natural allies, and, also, highlight ECFI's options in making CFs more visible both within the philanthropy field and more widely.

CONCLUSION :::

ECFI's peer-evaluation created the space for open and frank discussions among practitioners from the CF field. These exploratory discussions revealed multiple perspectives on both strategic and practical aspects in ECFI's life. This report aimed to capture such perspectives and present them in a way conducive to both an understanding of where ECFI is at the moment, and insightful perspectives for ECFI's future.

The peer-evolution itself became a part of the process of taking ECFI further and creating stronger connections among participants and ECFI, "I am learning a huge amount about ECFI as part of this discussion. [...] Just subscribed to the newsletter."

As we wrote in the beginning of this report, ECFI weaves a more connected and consolidated CF Movement in Europe, and is today the only and irreplaceable actor assuming this task, which seems to be even more vital as the current circumstances shake our whole continent. The continuity of this project, whatever its future form, is crucial in the mission of opening new and sustainable spaces for civil society in Europe in the years to come.

^[1] ECFI webpage, https://www.communityfoundations.eu/, accessed on April 25, 2022.

^[2] All quotations from the report are presented as transcribed with minimal editing to retain the voice of interviewed practitioners. The identity of the participants at the interviews and focus groups will not be revealed. Where it is essential for the presented argument, the country of the professional interviewed will be listed.

About ECFI

European Community Foundation Initiative ...

The European Community Foundation Initiative (ECFI) is a collaborative initiative hosted by the German Association of Foundations (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen) committed to strengthening and promoting the community foundation movement in Europe.

ECFI'S THEORY OF CHANGE

ECFI believes in order to achieve long-term change in local communities (in relation to building trust and collaboration; enhancing the potential for self-determination and empowerment; and achieving social cohesion), that community foundations have an important role to play by building and utilising resources; convening and connecting people and organisations; and adding value through local knowledge and expertise. The development of the CF movement requires building capacity, capability, connections and credibility of CFs and CFSOs through creating spaces and opportunities for cross-national dialogues, relationship-building and sharing experiences and practices of CFs and other philanthropy practitioners. ECFI works with community foundations (CFs) and community foundation support organisations (CFSOs) primarily through facilitating and stimulating interactions to enable learning, knowledge-building and empowerment. ECFI is also engaged in the mapping and analysis of CF activities and in disseminating information that will facilitate development of the field, and is a point of contact and information for the field in Europe.

Specifically, ECFI will:

- facilitate individual and organisational learning and expertise;
- inspire individuals and organisations to leadership and joint action;
- produce practice-based knowledge;
- empower CFs in dealing with difficult issues in their communities and own development trajectories;
- grow mutual solidarity and strengthen the CF field overall;
- complement face-to-face interactions with virtual spaces and online tools and resources.

ECFI's STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 1. Facilitate interaction and learning, share new knowledge and fostering collaboration among CFSOs in Europe to strengthen the support infrastructure;
- Inspire and facilitate growth in the CF field in Europe;
- 3. Stimulate CFs in Europe to exercise their community leadership role and collaborate on pressing issues, including inequality, migration and climate change;
- 4. Build and share knowledge about the CF field in Europe;
- 5. Lever financial resources and other support for the development of the CF field in Europe;
- 6. Increase awareness and understanding of the SDGs and their relevance to the work of community foundations in Europe.

CONTACT

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About FRI :::

The Făgăraș Research Institute (FRI) envisages communities that are well informed and that understands both – the challenges they confront and their own potential. Therefore, the Institute supports the development of innovation, knowledge, and science in the Țara Făgărașului area by conducting interdisciplinary research, policy analysis and delivering educational programs. We rely in our work a network of researchers and practitioners who are dedicated to innovation and are open to experimenting inter-disciplinary and cross-field work.

About C-GAP:::

The International Center for Global Affairs and Postdevelopment, in short C-GAP, is a part of the Făgăraș Research Institute that focuses on the many facets of international, peacebuilding and development phenomena. The Center contributes with knowledge, analysis, and action to the increasingly complicated and intertwined global, regional and local dynamics that expose growing instability, challenges to our wellbeing, climate, security, rights, and freedoms. The attention of the Center cuts across levels of analysis, aiming to analyze phenomena that generate consequences at global, regional, national and local levels. C-GAP values highly interdisciplinary research and aims to connect academia, practice, and communities. A key topic the Center focuses on is philanthropy, civil society, and democratization.

BIOGRAPHIES :::

Alejandro Hernández Renner

Alejandro Hernández Renner, Ph.D. is the acting CEO of Fundación Maimona, a community foundation in south-western Spain. Alejandro has combined 31 year-long professional experience with research and teaching, mainly at university. He is a member of the Club of Rome Spanish Chapter, part of Boards at the regional and national associations of foundations, and trustee in two foundations. Previously, he was the Director at the Extremadura Region's Office in Brussels, the founder of his own companies, a CEO of a foreign trade promotion public company, CKO at technology and science foundation FUNDECYT, and General Director of Innovation in the regional Government of Extremadura. Alejandro was born in Cáceres, Spain. He is married and has two children. He holds a PhD degree in business science, a Master in Law at Universidad de Extremadura, and postgraduate studies at Solvay Business School and Université Libre de Bruxelles.

Ansis Bērzinš

Ansis Bērziņš has been involved with local philanthropy in Latvia since 2005. He was the CEO of Valmiera Region Community Foundation for 15 years, and still remains in a voluntary position as the coordinator of Community Foundation Movement, an informal network of community foundations in Latvia. Ansis has actively brought international experience to Latvia and represented Latvian peers in European and international community foundations networks as well as in the global WINGS network. Currently Ansis is the director of Active Citizens Fund, the programme that provides EEA grants for NGOs that promote democracy culture and human rights in Latvia. In free time he practices Latvian folk dances, enjoys geocaching and strategic board games and takes care of his three kids.

Rachel McGrath

Rachel McGrath has over 18 years of experience of working within the community foundation movement at an international, national and local level. In her 22 years as a charitable professional she places an importance in creating and sustaining relationships with people from all walks of life helping to ensure the journey of building civil society and effecting positive social change is one of collaboration and building connections. Rachel is currently the CEO of Northamptonshire Community Foundation. She has also previously worked for the University of Leicester tutoring on a Foundation Degree in Managing Voluntary and Community Organisations. In her spare time she is a columnist for a local newspaper in Northamptonshire writing about community and social issues and campaigns on local concerns such as food poverty. Rachel has an enthusiastic interest in running and regularly takes part in runs and treks to help raise funds for charity. She is also a donor for Medecins Sans Frontieres and a member of the Natural History Museum.

Stefan Cibian

Stefan Cibian, Ph.D. is co-founder and executive director of the Făgăraș Research Institute, where he is leading the Center of Global Affairs and Postdevelopment. Hie is also an Associate Fellow with the Africa Programme at Chatham House - The Royal Institute of International Relations. Stefan is teaching courses related to global affairs and international development at Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca and the University of Bucharest, Romania. In his research and teaching, he is focusing on development and statehood in Sub-Saharan Africa and CEE, CEE and EU – Africa relations, international relations theory, peacebuilding, democratization, civil society and philanthropy, migration, and human rights. Stefan is the President of FOND, the Romanian NGDO Platform; GRASP, the Global Romanian Society of Young Professionals; ARCADIA, the Romanian Association for International Cooperation and Development; and the Treasurer of CONCORD Europe. He is also a board member with the following organizations: Tara Făgărasului Community Foundation, Romanian Federation of Community Foundations, and UiPath Foundation. Stefan received his Ph.D. degree in political science (2012) and his M.A. in public policy (2006) from the Central European University. He also studied or conducted research at the 1st of December University in Alba Iulia, Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Salzburg University, University of Ljubljana, and UCLA.





