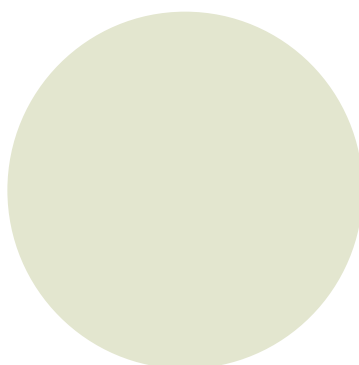
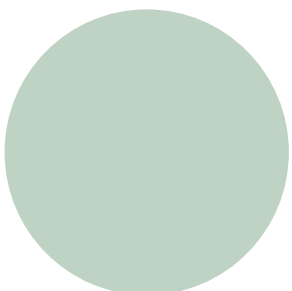
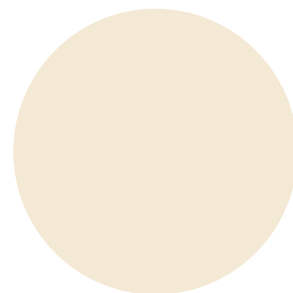
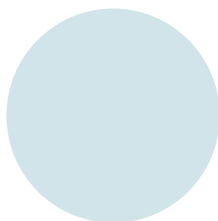
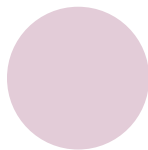
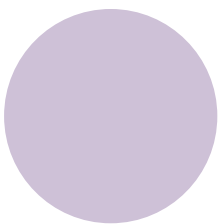




A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS IN SERBIA



# Imprint

## **Bibliographic information of the German National Library (DNB):**

This publication is listed in the German National Bibliography of the German National Library. Detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

## **Publisher:**

Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen e.V. (Association of German Foundations)

Karl-Liebknecht-Straße 34 | 10178 Berlin | Germany

Telephone +49 (0)30 897 947-0

[www.stiftungen.org](http://www.stiftungen.org)

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## **Photo and illustration credits:**

SDG logos, United Nations. All further photos and illustrations in this guide are owned by the respective community foundations or Trag Foundation. Special thanks go to photographers Bojana Ilić, Jovan Jevtić, Nemanja Knežević, Dragan Mujan and Jakov Simović.

ISBN 978-3-948796-13-6

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## PREFACE



During the previous two and a half decades, Trag Foundation has dedicated significant financial support, accompaniment and mentorship to the development of civil society and philanthropy in Serbia and across the Western Balkans region. This was done with a clear goal – to build and nurture the enabling environment and robust ecosystem for successful, sustainable and impactful civic activism. Trag believes that small changes can create a big difference and that a strong society, capable of growth, openness, compassion and solidarity can only derive from its strong communities.

In its quest to strengthen the infrastructure for wider citizen engagement, Trag Foundation identified that building the community foundations and their movement would come as the next logical step. Prior to 2019 and the launch of the program **“Our Local Foundation – Community Has a Say!”** Trag already supported the establishment of three community foundations in Serbia – *Step Forward Foundation* from Zaječar, *Obrenovac Youth Foundation* (from Obrenovac) and *Front Foundation* from Novi Pazar. By the end of

2019, the philanthropic landscape in Serbia was more than ready to welcome new actors to the local scene and Trag was excited to put all its knowledge and experience into this venture and lead the way.

Trag devised its approach based on successful examples of community foundation movement building from neighboring countries. After considering numerous models, Trag decided to invest its expertise into building community foundations that would be based in communities with over 50 000 inhabitants, primarily act as grantmakers and community fellow citizens philanthropy developers, serve as a connecting point to people and assets in their surroundings, be responsive to a variety of issues that their fellow-citizens show willingness to solve, be transparent, accountable and well-governed in their work and think long-term.

In order to achieve this, Trag launched an open Call, looking for initiative groups of a minimum of three people who would go through an approximate 12–18 month period of accompaniment, local resource

mobilization, team building and strategic planning, prior to registering as community foundations and stepping into the next stages of their independent work.

However, by the time the first generation of initiative groups became ready for their first steps, COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed the world, making the well-known and effective patterns of functioning impossible. Trag had to swiftly reimagine its approach and adapt it to the new context. Despite the grim circumstances, the physical distancing prescribed by the medical authorities managed to bring communities closer together. This enabled the three initiative groups that grew into community foundations in Niš, Stara Pazova and Pančevo to fully flourish and shine.

Despite numerous external obstacles, Trag Foundation, as a community foundation supporting organization, continues to work towards a strong community foundation movement in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. With the support of Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, funding the

program in Serbia, and Porticus Foundation, providing resources for the program implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, efforts of highly motivated members of the community, gathered in the form of informal initiative groups, are actualizing and growing each day.

This guide, developed with the support of the European Community Foundation Initiative, should depict the economic, political and cultural context in which community foundations in Serbia are developing and offer a perspective on specific conditions under which community foundations operate. It also provides valuable stories of solidarity, camaraderie and hard work that are embedded in the community foundation movement as it continues to grow across the country and the wider region.

Marija Mitrovic, Jana Saric, Vjekoslav Vukovic

## BABY STEPS TOWARDS STANDING TALL

Before COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the selected initiative groups from Niš, Stara Pazova and Pančevo were challenged by Trag to raise 15 000 Euro each, from citizens and businesses in their communities. These funds would be matched by Trag and used for their grantmaking purposes upon registration. In addition, Trag Foundation offered a comprehensive capacity building and mentorship program, technical and financial assistance, leaving the initiative groups to focus on community outreach and mobilization, donor engagement, team enlargement and consolidation, and strategic planning.

The new circumstances also prompted a change in approach. Initiative groups were faced with an additional challenge – to attract donors in a context that limited human contact, and raise funds for community development against a backdrop of other pressing issues. This required a lot of creativity and imagination, primarily tested on family and friends as default supporters of each group. In time, some fundraising techniques proved to be more successful than others and the circle of supporters slowly but steadily grew from “friends of friends” to unfamiliar names regularly appearing on groups’ bank statements.

Trag also understood that, in this context of competing needs, the grantmaking component should be introduced as soon as possible. Initiative groups weren’t able to raise 15 000 Euro from individuals and businesses without results that would promptly tell a story of community foundations’ importance for the localities that they serve. Instead of

waiting for the entire sum to be raised in order to provide a matching grant, Trag decided to introduce milestones and to match every 3 000 Euro that the initiative groups raise on their way to the full sum, enabling them to become grantmakers as soon as the first stepping stone was reached.

This proved to be a game-changer, contributing to an increased self-confidence of the groups and readiness of donors and citizens to mobilize and engage. Collectively, the three now-registered community foundations raised more than 60 000 Euro, and received 45 000 Euro matching grants from Trag. With this sum, they supported 80 initiatives led by civil society organizations and informal citizens’ groups. These initiatives were all supported through regular open Calls for Projects and thematically ranged from revitalization of public spaces to arts and culture, informal education, recreation and sports. Final decisions about supported projects and initiatives are always made by an independent selection committee, consisting of appreciated members of the community, usually from civil society, business sector and media. The presence of selection committees allows community foundations to remain transparent and independent in their grantmaking process.

In 2020, Trag identified three initiative groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina who will soon register as community foundations in Sarajevo, Zenica and Bijeljina. At the beginning of 2023, Trag started working with three new initiative groups in Serbia and will be looking for two new groups towards the end of the year.

In all these processes Trag Foundation has been a partner and a backbone every step of the way. As a supporting organization, mentor and fiscal agent, Trag Foundation expands the capacities of initiative groups and navigates their development but, most importantly, listens to their opinions, experiences and expertise, ensuring that they have the full ownership of the process. That's how the community foundations in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are made – with hard work, mutual respect, exchange, persistence and a lot of fun along the way.

# WEAVING TIES OF CAMARADERIE AND GROWTH

From the get-go, Trag aimed to link all initiative groups into a comprehensive network for support and knowledge-sharing, ultimately building a movement across the region. At first, Trag created a digital space where the initiative groups could share and download each others' cases for support, donor mailings, promotional materials, media content and advice based on lessons learned. Initiative groups were looking up to each other, testing approaches and sharing their successes during regular online and offline meetings, enabling them to build very strong ties and a sense of belonging to something greater than their own story.

Soon, their connection surpassed the frame facilitated by Trag. The initiative group Niš donated items for the Stara Pazova fundraising raffle and, in return, received a free quartet performance from Stara Pazova for their own fundraising event. All initiative groups recommended each other to big corporate systems operating across Serbia, resulting in donations that all three benefited from. As soon as one successfully tested an approach, it was immediately shared with others and the groups became mutual mentors as well.

The cooperation and knowledge sharing went beyond Niš, Stara Pazova and Pančevo. They started building ties with the Obrenovac Youth Foundation and Tuzla Community Foundation, which is already a staple of the community foundation movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Trag organized numerous exchanges and a study visit to Romania where Serbian community

foundations had the opportunity to meet and build connections with the Federation of Romanian Community Foundations but also community foundations in eight other cities. Through Roots and Wings Foundation, Serbian community foundations also learned about the movement in Hungary. They were visited by movements in Colombia and Chile, spreading the word about their successes to other corners of the world.

Most essentially, they started being mentors and a resource for three initiative groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina with whom they keep regular contact with and had the chance to host and visit in 2022 and 2023. The same applies to new initiative groups in Serbia who have them on their speed dial. In this sense, Trag's efforts are complemented by the hands-on knowledge of the Community Foundations Niš, Stara Pazova and Pančevo. Jointly, Trag and the three community foundations facilitate learning and experience sharing across the region, enabling all relevant actors to strengthen their capacities to build trust within the community, inspire local philanthropy, joint action, build bridges between those who have the assets with those who have ideas on how those assets can be best put to use for the benefit of all. In addition, they also act as a voice of their surroundings, inspiring waves of action and enthusiasm across spaces that were previously characterized by apathy and a sense of powerlessness over issues of concern that is now slowly but steadily being overcome as the movement building progresses.



# SOLIDARITY REVIVAL: GENERAL CONTEXT OF SERBIAN SOCIETY

What are the specific circumstances – historical and social, in which community foundations in Serbia developed?

More than three decades since the beginning of the Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001), Serbia is still politically and economically struggling. Even though these constant crises damaged the society to the core, they didn't destroy the sense of helping those in need and the necessity of bottom-up action to improve public spaces, social services and the environment.

Serbia is part of the Western Balkans (WB6) region, which aspires to join the European Union. The region is still entangled in political instability emanating from the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The ruling elites across these countries tend to spin any internal criticism of poor governance and rising inequality into a national or, rather, nationalist issue, and they have a tendency to blame the troubles on the supposed influence of foreign powers. With perpetual campaigns of ethnic tensions and low-grade unrest, governments and other political forces in the region have essentially been maintaining the status quo for the last two decades.

Western Balkan countries are burdened by recurring instability fuelled by a combination of ethnic tensions, internal political strife and historical disputes. Human rights, the rule of law and environmental protection are kept sidelined as bilateral disputes spill over from one country to other parts of the Western Balkans. The rare catalysts of positive change are civil society organizations, regional networks and foundations providing support to multiple countries in the region

such as the Trag Foundation, with offices in Belgrade and Sarajevo, who have contributed to the constant revival and expansion of the long-forgotten values – solidarity, tolerance and trust, even in the discouraging environment.



## Economy Tucked In Drastic Inequality

Serbia enjoys relatively strong nominal economic growth rates, but large parts of the population miss out on any progress. In terms of inequality, poverty, corruption and human development, its scores are among the worst in the continent.

The recent economic past of Serbian society shaped the current state of affairs. After the years of blocked post-socialist transformation into a market-oriented economy, the consequences are reflected in the high poverty rates, at-risk poverty rates (21.7 % for the year 2020) and continuously high Gini coefficient, measuring the income inequalities. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, the annual unemployment rate is 10.1% accompanied with an inflation rate of 15.1% for the year 2022.

The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia claims the average net salary to be around 735 Euro, but the country's strength, measured by gross domestic product per person in terms of purchasing power parity, PPP is only 44.1% of the EU average.

The remaining Western Balkan countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia – have similar social and economic rankings. Constant economic deprivation and challenging circumstances for the development and growth have impacted the political system, making the efforts for any type of change more complex.

### **Centralization Paralyzing Local Institutions and Communities**

The countries in this part of Southeastern Europe are predominantly politically centralized, as the jurisdiction of municipal authorities has been narrowed, from neighborhood councils and counties to the provincial administration in Vojvodina in Serbia's north. The WB6 turned to a neoliberal governance concept, opening the way for private initiative in social services such as education, mail and waste management. At the same time, state-owned utilities and public healthcare and education show a decline in quality.

In Serbia, perhaps even more than in the other Western Balkans countries, the ability to make decisions on the local level is undermined by the state government. Together with its allies, the ruling Serbian

Progressive Party is in power in virtually every city and municipality. Logically, poorer and smaller communities are more affected by the lack of political plurality than others. However, the centralization process began already in the late 1980s with the transition from a socialist, welfare state to a market-based economy. In the previous system, the state had a range of institutions regulating everyday life, and more importantly, there was much more trust in the government that it would satisfy the citizens' basic needs.

Today, municipal institutions have much less nominal authority. In practice, they rely on the central government even more than they are supposed to. For instance, neighborhood councils (the level below municipalities or cities) and the so-called administrative districts (counties) have little to say whatsoever. Moreover, they have lost their connection to citizens, social cohesion was notably weakened and the trust in municipal authorities disappeared for the most part.

The local councils are somewhat an exception in smaller towns or villages, however, the people there are usually well-known to each other anyway. All in all, the local authorities have largely turned into subsidiaries of the central government and left their people to fend for themselves one crisis after another – from parabolic inflation and supply shortages in the early 1990s to the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme air pollution, serial floods and the potentially devastating mining projects springing up throughout Serbia. The local cultural venues or community centres have been commercialized or abandoned and people started moving to larger cities or abroad.

## Civic Activism Still Lacks Access to Public Funding

As a silver lining, the administrative reforms opened the path for local activist groups and civil society organizations to act from the bottom up, compared to a time when social life was heavily regulated and somewhat controlled.

Each local budget contains funding available for the community work. In theory, local authorities are supposed to contribute to activities in the public interest. The caveat here is that municipalities and cities tend to support, on a political basis, groups known as nongovernmental organizations informally organized by the government (GONGO) and nongovernmental organizations informally set up by the political parties (PONGO). Such entities are established with a sole purpose of draining funds dedicated to civic activism and redirecting them towards political purposes. Nevertheless, authentic citizen-led initiatives managed to persevere and fill the vacuum opened by the political and economic transition. They also have the potential to take up the space that nationwide, donor-driven civil society organizations (CSO) create by failing to tackle place-specific needs or lack of citizen engagement.

Various types of civic initiatives are slowly emerging within the realms normally dominated by the municipal institutions and large CSOs. The bottom line is that Serbian citizens mostly distrust civil society organizations as such. In addition to the complacency observed in the established organizations' activities, the sense is overwhelmingly driven by many years of

smear campaigns directed at civil society actors, portraying them as foreign agents or national traitors. A few cases when the funds were actually misappropriated didn't help the image either, alongside a bad reputation of prominent individuals, whether earned or not. This also left more room for local activist groups – community foundations included – to listen, to be heard and involve more members of their communities, re-establishing relationships based on transparency and trust.

## Motivation Emerging from the Pandemic

For many years, citizens of Serbia have been raising money through SMS messages for the medical treatment of (mostly) children who suffer from life-threatening diseases. The campaigns are organized by two humanitarian foundations that have risen to prominence with their activities. Crowdfunding endeavors became mainstream, and it is fair to say that citizens became aware that they can resolve significant issues through joint action. On the other hand, this also made them fed up with having to cover for a failed healthcare system, one patient at a time.

Studies and statistics show a notable rise in solidarity action, more volunteering and an increase in donations in Serbia over the past several years, particularly during the times of crisis. For instance, alongside the corporate sector, citizens have rallied to support people from vulnerable groups and medical workers at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crowdfunding's share in philanthropic endeavors in Serbia is on an upward trajectory – the annual Giving Serbia 2022 report by Catalyst Balkans showed that mass donations accounted for 68.5 % of the total amount collected. Over the past few years, the overall sum surged by a stunning 171% to a record 50.9 million Euro in the 2020 pandemic year and then down to 42.54 million Euro in 2021. In 2022, a 34.3% share of the combined amount went to healthcare. Media reports on families struggling to make ends meet or at risk of homelessness are regularly followed up by crowdfunding and other efforts that benefit them. Global reports also measure a significant increase in giving in Serbia, by 28% in comparison to previous years, according to the Charities Aid Foundation World Giving Index. From 2017 to 2021, Serbia's rank improved from #132 to #27, placing the country into a flattering group of "biggest risers" when it comes to giving trends.

When it comes to types of giving, for a while, corporate giving was the most dominant type of giving in Serbia, in terms of sums donated. They are among the rare entities that can claim tax benefits for their philanthropic donations. The Legal Entity Tax Law allows companies to deduct up to 5% of income from the tax base, depending on the amount that they dedicated to activities for public good. This is among the highest percentages in the region.

On the downside, the municipal tax departments didn't have a harmonized calculation method for such activities so "up to 5%" could mean 0.1% in one municipality and 5% in another, even for the same activity.

In addition to this, the procedure is lengthy and complicated which explains why the companies are not using these benefits as much as they legally could. The Trag Foundation liaised with the government to issue a guide for tax authorities, making this procedure and percentage calculation unified across all municipalities. Still, corporate giving continues to be mostly claimed as an expenditure, which presents a constant challenge to relevant data collection.

Although the corporate giving is still high percentage-wise, it is now mostly directed towards particular needs, primarily those in the healthcare and education sectors. Moreover, their priorities are under constant review, given the rising inflation, the war in Ukraine and the gas crunch.

## Creating a New Culture of Giving

Crowdfunding is gaining momentum across the region and in a number of non-humanitarian fields. For example, the Elektropionir energy cooperative recently raised 15 500 Euro for two small community solar power installations in mountainous villages in eastern Serbia, mostly from individual donors.

In a 2020 public opinion poll, the Trag Foundation and Ipsos Strategic Marketing found that 45% of the general population is willing to donate to a foundation for philanthropic purposes. With that said, 35% of respondents stated that such funds are often misused and 6% believed this to be the case at all times. Aside from informal groups,

the term “civil society organizations” legally encompasses associations, foundations and endowments. According to the most recent Serbian Business Register Agency data, there are 37 239 registered citizen associations and 1 058 foundations and endowments.

According to a survey CSO Sector in Serbia in 2019, 57% of organizations never submitted a project proposal, citing lack of knowledge regarding prospective donors and their priorities. Another interesting point from the community perspective is that 58% didn't include citizens in their activities in the year preceding the survey. In 2021, in the research on needs and capacities of civil society organizations, Trag Foundation found that 43% of new CSOs had no income and that another 40% received under 5 000 Euro per year.

In this specific philanthropic scenery, initiative groups and later on, registered community foundations, navigated the circumstances and contributed to creating a new culture of giving, focused on the citizens, their voices, needs and drivers for change. In the following period, community foundations will have to keep on expanding their donor base and think of new ways to cover, not only their grantmaking activities which always generate attention, but also their operational costs and expenses so that the continuity of their mission is secured.

# MEETING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: NATIONAL AND LOCAL FRONTIERS

The progress toward meeting the Sustainable Development Goals in Serbia is considered steady though not very expeditious.

As it goes with numerous international initiatives, the government tends to get more passive and lean a lot on civil society, at least when it comes to development of strategies and action plans. But there is an important catch – none of the CSOs have actual decision making power, while the government and its institutions consider documents produced as mere guidelines and loose recommendations.

The pattern is similar on the local level – the weakened local jurisdiction and institutional malfunctioning leads to a vacuum. People are being left behind, despite the proclamatory “Leave No One Behind” slogan. These circumstances generated the space for citizens to develop and practice their own forms of solidarity. In that specific context, community foundations and their grantees have an opportunity to position themselves as contributors to SDGs that are within their reach.

In the SDG index, Serbia is graded 77.3 out of 100 as of June 2023. In relative terms, it ranks 36th among 166 countries. It is a fairly strong achievement, but 2030 is just a few breaths away. On a closer look, 53.6% of targets were achieved or on their way to achievement, while a decline was registered for 21.7%. The rest was filed under ‘limited progress’.

Just before the last global report, the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia issued an official publication for 2022. Out of 248 indicators, it shows information

on 125 or 18 more than a year previously. Serbia has a strong global ranking but also serious underlying issues. Concrete numbers are available for only 84 indicators and the aim was reached for six of them. There is significant progress recorded for 41 indicators and moderate progress for 13 of them. In total, it means that 71% of indicators are on the rise.

**Community foundations in Serbia have shown significant potential to make a difference in, at least, three relevant SDGs by the end of the decade.**

When it comes to the Sustainable Development Goal number 3, Good Health and Wellbeing, quantitatively, donors have provided the most funds for healthcare in the past years, mobilized by the Coronavirus woes. The cause resonates well with both individuals and the corporate sector. Community foundations in Serbia did emerge within the context of the pandemic, but have contributed to the Goal more indirectly – by supporting the initiatives and projects addressing the sexual and reproductive health of the youth (Community Foundation Pančevo), popularizing primary health protection amongst the children (Community Foundation Stara Pazova) or directly contributing to the improvement of the conditions in maternity wards, with donation of sleeping gowns and bedsheets (Community Foundation Niš).

Well-being, the other relevant focus of SDG 3, is also indirectly addressed through various other projects funded by community foundations – from sports to animal welfare to making public spaces in urban environments more pleasant.



# LOCAL ACTION FOR GLOBAL GOOD



» *“Community foundations and their grantees have an opportunity to position themselves as contributors to SDGs that are within their reach.”*



Sustainable Development Goal 5 stands for Gender Equality and Empowering Women and Girls. Serbia achieved relative progress in 2022, but conclusive results were registered only for four out of 12 tracked indicators.

The contribution community foundations made to the goal is measured mainly through supported projects and initiatives.

📍 **As the research *Community Foundations is Serbia: Bottom-Up Empowerment, the role, challenges, and prospects for the development* has shown, one third of the projects supported by community foundations in Serbia since 2021 is related to gender equality. The portion of this topic is only expected to enlarge in the near future, enabling community foundations to enhance their pledge to SDG 5 in the following years.**



Another Goal with a substantial perspective concerns cities and other human settlements. According to SDG 11, they need to become inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by the

end of the decade. The section includes 10 targets monitored against 15 indicators. Currently, the progress in Serbia can be monitored in relation to six targets that are further specified with ten indicators. Community foundations are all about the

improvement of life in urban areas, that can be seen in the highlighted examples. However, Serbia is faced with stronger rates of climate change and global warming than average, with an increasing number of extreme weather events and the communities have sensed that shift – more and more initiatives and programs are applying to community foundations’ open calls with innovative ideas on sustainable and eco-friendly cohabitation within the communities.

As time passes, community foundations are addressing more and more SDGs through their direct or indirect activities and supported initiatives – more attention is directed to climate action (SDG 13) through various projects about recycling, cleaning and planting trees, accompanied with education about waste management and the importance of “thinking and acting green”.



A notable contribution to SDG 10 is also made, through various measures and procedures implemented by community foundations, assuring equal access to their activities for every organization and member of the community.



Last, but not the least, community foundations contribute to SDGs by connecting corporations willing to participate in the development of responsible and sustainable business models and civil society organizations who have been the baseline and foundation for such efforts for decades.

# COMMUNITY FOUNDATION NIŠ: AN EMERGING FACTOR OF SOCIAL COHESION IN THE COMMUNITY



**Lokalna  
Fondacija  
Niš**

Niš is a city located in the country's south, with a quarter of a million people living in the territory administered by the local authority.

People active in the civic sector came up with the idea of establishing a community foundation a long time ago. Trag Foundation's assistance helped the concept come to fruition, as one of the founders and current executive director Filip Jovanović pointed out. The initiative group was connected through their common love for Niš, including a personal desire to help people pursue their interests, help talent development and foster sports and cultural activities.

Proud of their city, the management and board members want healthy and safe public spaces. They saw their opportunity to achieve that when they saw Trag Foundation's call related to establishing community foundations. It was the missing element that could link activists and innovative ideas for local development with the resources and potentials within Niš.

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» *"We wanted to leave a stronger mark in our community. We decided it was best to launch the initiative ourselves, rather than sit and wait. People here think that someone should come from elsewhere and make something happen. We wanted to show them it was possible to introduce gradual changes in the local community if we unite and present creative ideas. It turned out we were right," Jovanović said.*

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Community Foundation Niš conducted four public calls since March 2021 – three with the support of Trag Foundation and one conducted independently. The foundation was formally registered in August 2022, two years after its founders entered the program. The new organization is emerging as a catalyst for improving social ties within Serbia's third-largest city and regional centre. The core team consists of four people, tasked with day-to-day work. A five-member managing board is responsible for utilizing its connections and expanding the donor pool.

Community Foundation Niš raised funds through numerous activities, but their fundraising trademarks are most certainly online auctions. Auctioning vinyl records of local prominent punk rock band Novembar and a basketball signed by all the players from Belgrade's Partizan club brought the Community Foundation Niš to the centre of attention. The success continued with an auction of jerseys and sneakers signed by famous sportspersons, and with the promotion of a limited edition of special local unfiltered and unpasteurized Niško beer.



Until mid-2023, Community Foundation Niš had contributed 36 000 Euro to 35 initiatives, associations and informal groups. Jovanović emphasized that informal groups mostly have no other opportunities to apply for funding. Community Foundation Niš enabled them to gain the necessary financial support, alongside other kinds of support such as capacity building and mentorship.

Jovanović acknowledged that it isn't easy for a community foundation to make a name for itself when it's starting from scratch.

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» *"However, through several campaigns, we managed to make a connection with citizens. For instance, Community Foundation Niš recently raised funds for the maternity hospital, engaging a lot of people in the process" Jovanović stated.*

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While pushing to boost their distinctiveness in the city, the Community Foundation Niš team is using every opportunity to meet with similar initiatives in the Balkans and beyond, and share experiences.

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» *"It is hugely important for us to borrow some expertise, so to say, from our peers elsewhere. It is still a new concept for us and the community. There are ways to go here. During the exchanges and visits, we learned a little from everyone. We all face the same challenges," Jovanović underscored.*

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The group's visibility is indeed rising. Community Foundation Niš actually achieved nation-wide reach with one of its earliest achievements – supporting the creation of two murals carrying positive messages, in the city centre. The events were covered by various media outlets, both small and independent news websites and radio stations to Serbia's public broadcaster RTS.

Raising money is one thing, but the Community Foundation Niš has set the primary goal – to nurture the community and make it more solid. The people from the Niš Community Foundation are pleased that entire families are joining the effort and offering support for various endeavors.

Community Foundation Niš has supported many projects related to sports, culture, art, and informal education and helped revitalize numerous public spaces by refurbishing parks and painting murals.

The team is reluctant to single out any favourite projects. However, including some of the aforementioned ones, Community Foundation Niš is fond of small calls to action within neighborhoods, where people clean up and decorate common areas, like playgrounds, or gather to plant trees. Groups that benefited from funds from the foundation's calls have set up and renewed public spaces for sports and cultural purposes including a street gallery and promoted various artists. They also organized creative workshops and other forms of informal educational programs.

The latest fundraising initiative was organized together with Žitopek, the biggest bakery chain in the area. A part of the proceeds from the sales of savory scones is directed to the fund to revitalize two neighborhood playgrounds.

The campaign kicked off in April. One neighborhood sports ground underwent a makeover and was open for the public and another opening took place in August.

Another goal was to pressure the local authorities and institutions to do their part, and it worked! The city paved the courts and helped repair benches. People from the surrounding buildings chipped in and rolled up their sleeves. More importantly, it solidified the position of Community Foundation Niš as the most active stakeholder of its kind in Serbia. The campaign was pursued in line with its determination to support initiatives increasing the quality of life and healthy lifestyle.

Several hundred individuals have responded to the calls for funding and the list is getting bigger. As for the corporate sector, the foundation mostly cooperates with IT companies and the Science and Technology Park Niš, a hub for innovations and startups.

Founder and board member Nenad Stojanović is driven by the belief that lots of activism combined with some funding can make big improvements. He has a message for people who don't believe Niš can become better and cleaner:

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» *"Always when I'm told it is impossible, I am motivated to prove otherwise!"*

*Nenad Stojanović*

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## COMMUNITY FOUNDATION STARA PAZOVA: PUTTING FUN IN FUNDRAISING



A dedicated crew can make meaningful positive changes even in a small area. Community Foundation Stara Pazova evolved from an ad hoc group of parents who launched several initiatives, mostly directed towards children in need. They took a funny name – Tatamate, loosely translated as super dads, but their quest was more than serious.

» *“Our motivating force was to inspire humanity and activate the people around us. As a community foundation, we are able to turn to social well-being in general and increase the quality of life here,” said Nikola Rajković, director and one of the founders.*

Seeing the call from Trag Foundation for the “Our Local Foundation – Community Has a Say!” program, the group grasped the opportunity to scale up their long-time idea to engage individual and corporate donors into community development and to streamline their funding into initiatives aiming to improve neighbourhoods across the Stara Pazova municipality.

### Playing the personal connection card

Stara Pazova is located just west of Belgrade in the lowland of Sylvania or Srem. The town is the centre of a mostly urban municipality of approximately sixty thousand people.

The upside in fundraising in a small community is that donors are aware of local issues and often have a personal connection to the initiative at hand, Rajković explained. Additionally, the foundation can count on friends and family members to participate in its activities, especially the humanitarian bazaars, events, auctions and raffles that became the foundation’s trademark. Community Foundation Stara Pazova is known for its humanitarian bazaars, parties, auctions and raffles.

Within the three open Calls for projects that the community foundation organized so far, it distributed over 30 000 Euro towards projects of formal and informal citizen groups. The small projects that they supported strengthened the community by improving public spaces or focusing on youth and non-formal education. The Calls are always thematically open, practically enabling the community to map its needs with every application.

One of the latest projects was the introduction of musical spaces in children’s clinics in the municipality. Kids and youth remain as one of the central points of interest in neighbourhood initiatives in Stara Pazova. Townsfolk rallied in 2021 to make a playground in front of the elementary school in Nova Pazova, the second-biggest town in the municipality.



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- » *“Each of us has our own favourites, but I guess we are proudest of the trail alongside the Danube, which used to be neglected. Now, it’s marked in line with hiking standards. At present, there is also an oasis next to the river. An absolute hit was turning a dilapidated field behind our secondary schools into a park, upon an initiative from former students, which was also supported by the student parliament. Many companies stepped in, as everyone attended the same schools here except for those who attended high school education in Belgrade or other towns. In any case, this endeavor had the widest reach,” Nikola Rajković stressed.*
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### No local firm ever said no

The works included planting twenty or so tree saplings. When Community Foundation Stara Pazova held a FUNdraising night, even a real estate contractor showed up and got involved.

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- » *“So to say, he was an opposing stakeholder, but still decided to take part in upgrading the public space. When we’re at it, our approach is to circumvent confrontation: we need to stimulate the people who normally aren’t active in social matters. They can both achieve their profits and help the community. Actually, no one ever said no, and we also get contributions in services and other nonmaterial assistance,” Rajković recalls.*
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Another important element at the event was that students from the music school, which got new instruments through a project supported by the community foundation, came and played. There is also important cooperation with the local TV station, which covers the project development and fundraising efforts.

### Kid you not, videos are the hit

Video content turns out to be the best for outreach, Rajković underscored. He acknowledged that there is still a lot to be done to increase visibility as there are still people who aren’t aware of the new social media campaigns. The community foundation is preparing a promotional documentary. It is scheduled to be shown in December, at the traditional annual fundraiser.

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- » *“We are not yet satisfied with the perception on the local level. There is always more to be done, although we have come a long way since the kick-off tree planting event in late 2020, with support from the handball club,” Nikola Rajković adds.*
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## Don't forget to get celebs and corporate hotshots on board

The team at Community Foundation Stara Pazova and their associates were pleasantly surprised when the families in a residential building made their enclosed yard a comfortable all-ages hangout with some money that they raised.

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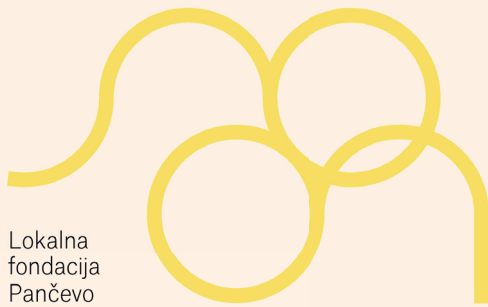
» *"It is unbelievable how much difference can be made inside a few square metres," Rajković concluded.*

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As for the donor structure's biggest contributions come from large companies including banks. Individual entrepreneurs also make a mark, while the townspeople mostly chip in at the fundraising gatherings. They also donate items and vouchers for the raffle which is a very popular and highly anticipated set of events in the community. Looking up to the Community Foundation Niš, Stara Pazova also tried their luck in auctions. Pazova native, a former player of the national football team Aleksandar Kolarov, donated a jersey for their fundraising auction. Even the local celebrities took part – pop-folk superstar Seka Aleksić threw in a glamorous dress to boost the sum raised using this fundraising approach.

Finally, community foundations are a community of their own. The Stara Pazova team is exchanging experiences with the peers from Niš and Pančevo and beyond in neighbouring countries, especially through study visits. Mutual support and cooperation between community foundations generated one of the most fruitful collaborations – Community Foundation Stara Pazova managed to get Erste Bank and retail chain Delhaize on board as major donors after mutual recommendations by community foundations in Pančevo in Niš. Community Foundation Stara Pazova is all about boosting civic activism and motivating local entrepreneurs to dedicate funding to their community and enhance their standing as socially responsible companies.

# COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PANČEVO: CHERISHING INCLUSION, PROMOTING SOCIAL CONSENSUS



Lokalna  
fondacija  
Pančevo

Within Serbia's budding community foundation scene, the Pančevo team is perhaps the most dedicated to inclusion and diversity. Judging by the swift spreading of the concept across the city, another one of their traits is renewing activism.

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» *"The lack of funding and support brought numerous groups in Pančevo to a standstill. We all knew each other from activist circles and we realized that this approach can get things going. The new model of fundraising has motivated people to step up and mobilize others,"* says Marina Balaž, a member of the Community Foundation Pančevo team.

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Community Foundation Pančevo has distributed 18 000 Euro through three public calls so far; the last round of projects is scheduled to be completed by mid-November. The activities are estimated to have already affected more than 10 000 people in the city territory, with 115 000 inhabitants.

## Conventional media is silent

Pančevo is administratively separate from nearby Belgrade, but it is so well connected that local matters tend to dissolve in the news related to the nation's capital. This, however, did not discourage people from trying to build and position the community foundation on the local level.

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» *"We present our work through social media and have a substantial reach in the community through our personal networks. However, while we are visible online, there is no cooperation with the traditional media in Pančevo. On the other hand, we hope they will eventually start to cover our activities,"* Balaž pointed out.

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Pančevo has a TV station, radio outlets and one weekly printed publication. Political turbulence has largely cut off genuine activist groups from the mainstream media. In the meantime, the community foundation has established ties with everyone willing to make a difference locally, from formal and informal organizations to individuals and small entrepreneurs.

## Sharing fairly

From their early beginnings, the team has placed inclusion at the top of its grantmaking priorities.

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» *“In line with our background in activism and the civil sector, we are committed to distributing funds in a balanced way between genders, the young and elderly, the urban and rural parts of Pančevo. There are several organizations helping inclusion that responded to our calls for projects, which created a special bond between us”, Marina Balaž underscored.*

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Eligible proposals must be drafted through a wider social consensus and with inputs from underprivileged and marginalized populations. It is among the top motives for the community foundation, as some groups and individuals with great potential have little possibilities or resources to materialize their ideas.

One of the beneficiaries is the Self-advocacy Group, which organizes creative workshops to enhance the skills of people with disabilities and involve the citizens of Pančevo in inclusion efforts. The organization invites kids, representatives of local institutions and the business community to small events where they hang out and sew and decorate tote bags for sale to contribute to its activities.

## Kids Designing Their Future Parks

As mentioned before, all community foundations involve independent selection committees in their work and in Pančevo, the committee’s decisions have highly ranked proposals related to public spaces, education and knowledge-sharing as well as those related to inclusion and promotion of human rights. Just like in Community Foundation Pančevo’s mode of operation, emphasis is also put on being present in the digital space.

Similar to the examples in Niš and Stara Pazova, Pančevo donated around 900 Euro to an informal artist group who revived the first in a series of green pockets around town. This pocket was placed in an otherwise devastated park and playground located between a number of buildings. However, before the makeover took place, children and their parents sat down to decide what they wanted it to be.

During the work that lasted a week, many volunteers joined, including neighbours, which is becoming the norm for the network of Community Foundation Pančevo.

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» *“In implementation, we can have thirty or as many as fifty people showing up, some of them are actually other grantees that want to do something for a cause. You know, in the beginning, it was mostly a small bunch of friends, but the circle has spread,” Balaž stressed.*

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## Firms are out of touch with corporate social responsibility

On the fundraising front, individuals are the strongest supporters of the Community Foundation Pančevo. Nevertheless, there is a wide space for improvement in the corporate segment. Aside from a couple of banks, most donors are micro businesses.

There are not that many large companies in the city and they are usually unfamiliar with the corporate philanthropy culture. This does not devalue the effort of the new generation of entrepreneurs. People flocked to the Gentleman Style Barber Shop and made their donation by using haircutting services. Others went to a local burger shop Republika FUD and brought a delicious meal to benefit the Community Foundation Pančevo. Local bars donated bar crawls, dart tournaments, pub quizzes and gigs thus adding to the stack.

The direction remains the same: from building solid ties within the community towards enabling it to fulfill its potential and lean on its own resources.

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» *"Given the setbacks from the coronavirus times and other circumstances, we are partly pleased with the outcome. The pace and possible acceleration depend on a range of factors. Let me just note the impact of inflation and poverty. Community Foundation Pančevo will also need assistance from institutions and foundations like the Trag Foundation," Marina Balaž said.*

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# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The precise recipe for building a successful and fruitful community foundation movement on a national or regional level does not exist – every path is different, dependent on the context and the approach. But some guidelines can make the journey a bit easier, but not less exciting.

A tailor-made approach to the community foundation movement building in Serbia has led the Trag Foundation team to several important conclusions which greatly impacted the program results.

## 1. Early Grantmaking

One of the most important steps in the adjustment process is most certainly enabling the grantmaking to take place early on – a practice community foundations in Serbia adopted from the beginning of the program. Once they reached the first milestone of their fundraising campaigns and collected 3 000 Euro that Trag matched with an additional 3 000 Euro, they opened their first call and supported the first initiatives from their communities. This approach helped them gain more trust from their community and prove their credibility to existing donors. The results of the successful round of project implementation promoted the values and showed the community the foundation is not only successful but also necessary. Visible results also contributed to community foundation promotion and helped them acquire new donors.

## 2. Matching Grants

Initiative groups are always highly motivated for fundraising, but assuring them that every collected Euro or US dollar is worth double will additionally motivate them to perfect their fundraising campaigns and reach their milestones faster. Matching grants also increase the budget for open calls, enabling community foundations to support more initiatives with additional funds. Last but not least, matching grants are also increasing the motivation of the donors – when people are aware that their donation will be worth double because of the matching grants, they are more eager to make their own contributions to the cause.

## 3. Postponed Registration

Another program distinction is related to the official registration of the community foundations – even though initiative groups are grantmakers and local donors from the beginning of the program, more precisely, from the first milestone reached, initiative groups are officially registered only after the completion of their fundraising campaign and the final, 15 000 Euro milestone. Working with the first generation of initiative groups within the "Our Local Foundation – Community Has a Say!" program, the project team soon realized it would be more productive to allow the registration of community foundations once the total of 10 000 Euro was raised from individuals, corporations and entrepreneurs.

The initiative groups showed the team they were ready for the next step – they showed a high level of independence, already gained experience in grantmaking as well as monitoring the supported projects and acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to administer and manage the work of the foundation. The registration has also allowed the community foundations to apply for various grants as an independent entity and collaborate with other foundations, organisations, businesses and institutions as partners or mentors.

#### 4. Without “One Size Fits All” Approach When It Comes to Fundraising

Every beginning is hard, but the first steps on the fundraising path can be even more challenging. Each community foundation needs to explore their own capacities and feel the pulse of the community. In order to find just the right approach and fundraising technique, it is crucial for community foundation to try them all. In the initial stage, every input is valuable, which means that failing is a learning opportunity as well. Donors from one community will be drawn to fundraising events, others will prefer one on one meetings. Some people will gladly buy a product if they know a part of that money will be brought back to the community, others would rather make a direct donation to a bank account. Lottery tickets, Easter egg hunts, online auctions or collaborations with

local entrepreneurs – every single approach is tested and perfected with the feedback of the community. In order to succeed, community foundations have to think outside the (donation) box, enter the community and seize every opportunity for fundraising. After all, you never know when a simple test can become your fundraising trademark.



These recommendations will be used in the second round of the program, with initiative groups from Smederevo, a small town in the vicinity of Belgrade, in Podunavlje County, and others from Rasina County in the central Serbia, consisting of members from various towns and municipalities like Kruševac, Trstenik, Brus, Čičevac and Aleksandrovac as well as Zrenjanin, a town in the north, in Vojvodina. New initiative groups have gone through the inception phase of the program, expanded their team and initiated their fundraising campaigns.

Another lesson learned from the program implementation is about the importance of an active movement, peer-to-peer education and constant collaboration between, not only community foundations, but also the initiative groups from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Study visits proved to be the most successful learning method – they enable not only the vertical learning from the more developed foundations but also the horizontal learning from groups that are at their very beginning. Every story is unique, so the obstacles and challenges that occur are much more related to the economic, political and legal context than to the stage of development of a particular community foundation.

# COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS AND INITIATIVE GROUPS IN SERBIA

## Formally registered community foundations:

- **COMMUNITY FOUNDATION NIŠ**  
*Lokalna fondacija Niš* in Niš, Serbia  
 Official website: <https://fondacijanis.rs/>  
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LokalnaFondacijaNis>  
 Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/lokalna\\_fondacija\\_nis/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/lokalna_fondacija_nis/?hl=en)
- **COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PANČEVO**  
*Lokalna fondacija Pančevo* in Pančevo, Serbia  
 Official website: <https://lokalnafondacijapancevo.org>  
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lokalna.fondacija.pancevo>  
 Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/lokalna.fondacija.pancevo/?hl=en>
- **COMMUNITY FOUNDATION STARA PAZOVA**  
*Lokalna fondacija Stara Pazova* in Stara Pazova, Serbia  
 Official website: <https://fondacijapazova.rs/>  
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lokalnafondacijaSP>  
 Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/lokalnafondacijasp/>
- **FOUNDATION "FRONT"**  
*Fondacija Front* in Novi Pazar, Serbia  
 Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/frontfondacija/>
- **FOUNDATION "STEP FORWARD"**  
*Fondacija Iskorak* in Zaječar, Serbia  
 Official website: <https://fondacijaiskorak.rs/>
- **OBRENOVAC YOUTH FOUNDATION**  
*Fondacija za mlade Obrenovca* in Obrenovac, Serbia  
 Official website: <https://oyf.rs/sr/home/>

**Informal initiative groups supported by the Trag Foundation:**

- **COMMUNITY FOUNDATION RASINA COUNTY**

*Lokalna fondacija Rasinskog okruga* in Rasina County, Serbia

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lokalnafondacijarasinskogokruga>

- **COMMUNITY FOUNDATION SMEDEREVO**

*Lokalna fondacija Smederevo* in Smederevo, Serbia

Official website: <https://www.fondacija1430.rs/>

**Additional literature including statistic data and comprehensive references:**

Radovanović, Bojana; Vasiljević, Jelena (2022) COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS IN SERBIA: Bottom-Up Empowerment. The role, challenges, and prospects for the development. Trag Foundation Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrad [online] <https://tragfondacija.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Community-foundations-in-Serbia.pdf>.

- **TRAG FOUNDATION**

Official website: <https://tragfondacija.org/>

# ABOUT ECFI – EUROPEAN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION INITIATIVE

ECFI is an initiative committed to strengthening and promoting the community foundation movement in Europe. The initiative, hosted by the German Association of Foundations (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen), collaborates with a range of partners inside and outside of the community philanthropy ecosystem to achieve this goal.

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. ECFI strives to be a central point of contact for wider engagement within the global community foundation movement.

## 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.

## ECFI's APPROACH

ECFI's approach is to empower those operating in the community foundation field – community foundations themselves


and the array of support organisations that operate at national and regional level. We aim to add value to their work through providing a European dimension, consistent with values of promoting local democracy and civic participation; fostering the establishment of productive international relationships and knowledge exchange; helping bring financial and non-financial resources into to field; inspiring and driving momentum for development of practice.

## ECFI's STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. Facilitate interaction and learning, and share new knowledge and fostering collaboration among CFSOs in Europe to strengthen the support infrastructure;
2. 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. Leverage 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.

<https://www.communityfoundations.eu/>





The work of the European Community Foundation Initiative has been supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Porticus Foundation, the Mercator Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation, the Körber Foundation and the Lipoid Foundation.



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