

DRIVING CHANGE: A New Foundation's Early Efforts

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The Foundation for a Healthy High Point is a new health legacy foundation that was established by the merger of UNC Health Care and High Point Regional Health System. The foundation was funded with \$50 million in assets and was established specifically to improve health and wellness in the Greater High Point area, a community of approximately 110,000 individuals in central North Carolina.

Our foundation's journey is still in its early stages—in fact, we have just gotten the car out of the garage and are getting it on the road.

The foundation is fortunate to have a dedicated group of founding board members who care deeply about the community and our organization. Their vision for the foundation is to serve as a catalyst to effect change in a profound and lasting way to make a positive impact on individuals and the community. The foundation's funding efforts and approach are intended to be different from how funding has historically been done in the community. The board underscored its desire to be data-driven and to use a disciplined and strategic approach to address issues and to apply evidence-based practices to drive progress.

STARTING THE ENGINE

Our foundation is truly a start-from-scratch effort. We started a new organization with a focus on fundamental efforts such as establishing an office, hiring staff, purchasing equipment and supplies, developing a brand, establishing banking services, and investing the foundation's assets. Our board began its education and created a universe in which the foundation would operate, looking toward progressive activities to spark the community in partnering with the foundation and other community partners to effect change in a positive way.

PUMPING GAS

As a new funding entity, the foundation knew that it was imperative to understand the history, issues, and opportunities affecting the community. We began our efforts by understanding the current community as well as its history-rich past. High Point is known as the “furniture capital of the world,” and its past includes success in furniture manufacturing as well as textiles. But as with many communities, this historic past likely will not be the community's future.

Understanding High Point began with many conversations—with leaders and residents throughout the community to understand the environment, health issues, resources, challenges, opportunities, aspirations, and other matters. These discussions allowed the foundation to begin to understand the macro and micro issues.

In addition to these “one-on-ones,” the foundation also researched health issues affecting the community. With the health department's assistance, the foundation was able to review various geo-maps related to different parts of the service area and specific health issues. Quickly it became clear that specific segments of our service area carried a greater disease burden and that these segments also reflected a concentration of community members with limited financial, educational, and health resources. Place truly is a predictor not only of health, but also of many other facets of life. The board recognizes that to make lasting change, the foundation must consider root causes.

GETTING ON THE ROAD

The board held a retreat last January during which it identified topics to research. Teen pregnancy prevention and early childhood intervention was one of the areas selected. The foundation began with its

clear eyes to “deep dive” into the issue to understand trends; the magnitude of the problem; existing community resources; gaps and opportunities; ongoing evidence-informed practices; and potential metrics on which to move the collective community needle.

We began by commissioning a white paper to scan the service-area landscape. Faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill assisted the foundation with this work. Results of the white paper were presented to our board and to a group of community partners to validate the findings. From this starting point, the foundation convened a series of discussions facilitated by faculty at High Point University to go deeper into issues and practices. Through this process, longstanding nonprofit organizations that do not have a history of working together began to develop relationships, which will benefit the broader community in the future. One community partner stated, “The foundation is clearly taking seriously its role of an informed action planner, and the process for getting there has been well planned. The commitment to bring many voices to the table is also evident. It is exciting to anticipate the action steps that will result from this process, but the process itself is creating relationships and expanding networks in a way that will create its own rewards.” The foundation debuted during these convening sessions, seeking to earn its place within the community by applying fresh eyes and bringing new experiences to the table.

Currently, the foundation is in the process of synthesizing learnings that will be shared with the community and ultimately presented to the board as a formal proposed funding initiative.

ROADBLOCKS

Although early in its journey, the foundation has already encountered its share of roadblocks:

► Data

- Our Greater High Point community is unique in that the service area straddles four counties. To truly obtain data specific to the service area poses challenges. While much of the service area lies in one county, it would be inaccurate to use the county data to reflect local trends.

► Local Nonprofit Community

- Greater High Point has been blessed with a generous philanthropic community, which has primarily been supported by individuals. As such, area nonprofits are more experienced with private donor interactions and less familiar with a private foundation model that seeks to make investments through grantmaking activities to achieve specific quantifiable outcomes.

BREAKTHROUGHS

Through its preliminary convening efforts, the foundation has offered a unique and different approach for understanding complex and challenging issues and establishing a manner in which to create action for positive change. The approach is inclusive, data-driven, and collaborative. Through this process the community is using a holistic approach and one that includes many voices and perspectives.

In parallel to this early work, the foundation’s board has supported efforts for capacity building for High Point nonprofits, recognizing that without a strong nonprofit sector, a community will be unable to tackle complex, multifaceted issues.

DISCOVERIES

Each day brings discoveries for our new foundation. Since its establishment, the foundation has learned much, including the following:

- High Point is a generous and caring community that is committed to serving its residents.
- The community is faced with numerous complex health-related issues, which are grounded in root causes that have implications for today and for the future.

- The foundation is a new ingredient in the community and offers many new things—new perspectives, new eyes, new resources—which, when combined with the existing resources within the community, offer infinite potential.

The journey for The Foundation for a Healthy High Point is just beginning. As we create our roadmap, we recognize that the road ahead is long, curvy, and unknown. It is likely that on occasions, we will take long routes, and on others, shortcuts; but ultimately, this road will lead the community and the foundation to an amazing destination.