

Leveraging Funds: An Interview Series with Advocates and Funders

INTRODUCTION

As part of our work, Community Catalyst aims to connect state and local partners to funding opportunities as well as to current trends in fundraising and best practices relating to resource development and organizational sustainability. At the end of 2020, we released a toolkit, [Sustaining Your Fundraising in the Time of COVID-19](#). We are now pleased to share a new resource – one focused on the difficult task of not only raising funds to support your work, but leveraging them for long(er)-term sustainability. This collection of Leveraging Funds tools offers insights and suggestions from both advocates who successfully used Health Justice Fund (HJF) grants to secure matching funds for their work as well as an interview with a Georgia funder on how she works to leverage the capital of her foundation to the maximum benefit of her grantees.

Community Catalyst would like to thank [Dr. Laura Guerra-Cardus](#), [Scott Darius](#) and [Christine Reeves Strigaro](#) for having these conversations with us and sharing their perspectives with our community.

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINE REEVES STRIGARO, THE SAPELO FOUNDATION

The [Sapelo Foundation](#) is a 72-year-old Family Foundation based in Savannah, Georgia. In 2019, the Foundation released a new strategic plan and a new mission: To strive for a just Georgia, through partnerships and solutions that increase environmental protection, social prosperity, and civic power. In 2020, The Sapelo Foundation provided grants to support health advocates build power, particularly in rural areas and in communities of color, outside of Atlanta, expand Medicaid. The Foundation's support builds on the years of work done by partners in the Cover Georgia Coalition.

Community Catalyst's Southern Health Partner Project Manager, Amanda Ptashkin, interviewed The Sapelo Foundation's executive director, Christine Reeves Strigaro, to learn more about the Foundation's approach to grant-making and thoughts on how advocates can leverage funding investments in their state's advocacy infrastructure. We believe much of what Christine shared can be applied to other funders' approaches, and provide insight into how advocates can build these relationships with funders in their own states.

We sincerely appreciate Christine taking the time to share her insights.

How does The Sapelo Foundation approach grantmaking?

In 2019, The Sapelo Foundation unveiled our new strategic plan, with a new mission, vision and website. We have four grantmaking portfolios: social justice, environmental justice and protection, Macintosh county and Tools. Part of the thinking was to break down silos and firewalls that previously divided the foundation. We have also focused our investing in Albany, GA – where there is the 4th highest concentration of COVID-19, a large African American population and high poverty, even pre-COVID. We work through various strategies/supports to address systemic policy change, advance racial justice and build the muscle of key networks.



Leveraging Funds: An Interview Series

As a southern statewide funder, how do you help your grantees leverage their grants?

I see myself not as funder but a grantmaking partner. We believe in using 100% of every form of capital we can – when you think of foundations, you think of grantmaking but that's only 1/20th of our financial capital. You also have relationships, advocacy, and other capitals.

As I was building relationships with community-based organizations and potential partners [over] the last four years, I was asking questions about what other foundations fund their work and got to know those other foundations. I'd then be able to say, 'this is great work being done, would you continue investing if we [the Sapelo Foundation] did XYZ?' Leveraging our work has really pleased our board [and we believe that some] national foundations appreciate a peer foundation, with boots on the ground in Georgia, give some legitimacy or peace of mind to their strategies.

What advice would you have for advocates who are attempting to leverage existing grants to build out their programs and bring in additional financial resources from other funders?

Talk with the other foundations that currently support you. Go through [your] prospect list with them, asking 'Who do they know?' and 'How can they help position you and your organization for success?' I've even emailed grantee partners, asking "Don't you have a pending grant with X funder? I'm sitting with them at a conference – what can I say to talk up your work?"

When I talk to other foundations, we talk about the potential for matching grants. If two of my [grantee] partners are applying for a huge grant together, I encourage them to include my contact information in their grant application and say "The Sapelo Foundation would be interested in the results and may help with year two of the project."

Could you share some insights about how the Sapelo Foundation interacts with other Funders? Anything that could be beneficial for advocates to take into account as they are working to use existing funder relationships to broaden their own networks?

I serve on the board of the Funders Committee for Civic Participation, the public policy committee of Georgia Grantmakers Alliance, and the steering committee of the Georgia Funders Network for Racial Equity. The Sapelo Foundation loves people and we want to be that connective tissue if we can but not in a transactional way.

What does it mean to you when you see a national funder make a substantial investment to a state or locally-based organization?

Our best-case scenario is when our longer-term grantees get a national grant. I would like to spend more time advocating for our partners than doing grantmaking and reports. How do I get them in an article? How do I get them access? Who do I talk to sing their praises? How do we share their successes?

CONCLUSION

We once again thank Christine for taking the time to share her insights with us. [Please click here](#) to see an advocate's perspective of leveraging funding and building relationships with funders.

Interview conducted by Amanda Ptashkin, JD