

**To: SVF Board**

**From: Katherine Fulton, chair, Programs, Partners and Content Committee**

**Briefing for data study discussion at July 14 Board Meeting**

### **Background**

After the winter retreat, we determined that I should meet with Barbara Hughes from the grants committee, to discuss her idea to commission a new, major data study as an aid to prioritizing SVF programs and grant making. I asked new board member Nancy Ramsey, from the programs committee, to assist me, given her background in research and strategic planning. We have done initial research and had several conversations and now need to seek the board's input and guidance before moving further.

Our first step was to think through some criteria to govern the work, and landed on two important guiding principles:

- That SVF could add real value, because we are best positioned to sponsor the research. At best, our work would be unique; at the very least it should not be duplicative.
- That the results could be put to action, sparking dialogue and ultimately influencing decision making by givers and community leaders.

With these principles in mind, we took a look at available research. The Appendix to this note takes a quick, illustrative look at some of the studies that Nancy found in the research she conducted. As you will see with even a cursory glance an incredible amount is already known about the nature of the problems the Valley faces, including from work that SVF and CFSC did to launch the Todd Trust.

One important thing we learned is that the work done to launch the Todd Trust is an amazing resource that remains very relevant. Five years ago, more than 75 interviews and meetings were held, amplifying the findings of a complementary data report compiled by the Sonoma County Economic Development Board. As new board members, neither Katherine nor Nancy had seen this, and we wonder how many others have not either (the full report is available to the public on our website!).

CFSC is currently in discussions with Ben Stone at the Economic Development Board about updating the data, as it undertakes its own planning process (and the assumption is that they would carve out data for the Valley, at our request).

### **Our Proposal**

We have concluded that SVF can provide the most value and original insight at this time by sponsoring a study of "the solution" spaces, rather than looking further at the problems/issues/challenges facing the Valley.

Joshua and Kimberly did a private study a few years ago to estimate annual philanthropic giving in the Valley, but this was not widely circulated, and is now several years old in any case. A professional study could update their work, and go a step further, attempting to map where the money goes to the

understanding of the problems, which is a first step before taking the much harder step of asking about the effectiveness of the work of the organizations using the money to address problems.

We all know that there is a lot of “donor fatigue” in the Valley, especially about the proliferation of fundraising events. But how much do we really know about the philanthropic capacity of the Valley, and how we are using it? How much money is being raised, and how does that compare to other communities like ours? Could more be raised? Are there further ways to assist nonprofits, who face the annual pressure to start from scratch and raise their budget? Are some nonprofits succeeding more than others, and why? Is the money being targeted at the most pressing issues? Are we making progress on these issues?

These are among the questions that we believe both donors and nonprofits would find it very helpful to understand much more deeply. No single study could answer them all, but we believe focusing on the “supply side”—painting a portrait of existing philanthropy—could be of great use to our core constituencies. Such a study—taking a view of the community as a whole, rather than any single organization—is exactly the type of value that SVF can uniquely provide.

We believe that SVF can use this study to advance understanding and sharpen action by several core constituencies, adding momentum to several work streams already under way. For instance:

- Imagine a well-designed short paper or brochure that outlines philanthropy and needs in the Valley that could be used to engage donors (either in small groups, or 1-1), to help them think about priorities and gaps. Such a tool could add real meat and value to what we offer donors and potential donors, and help them make ever better decisions.
- Imagine a capacity building forum or workshop for nonprofit staff and boards in the Valley, where the study’s findings challenged them to ask questions about effectiveness, focus and duplication of effort.
- Imagine the ways that the study might build on the Todd Trust grant making program, and provide fuel for fundraising for a second round on capacity building grants. Such work could provide a real model for how a legacy gift can lead to extending the legacy, beyond what the original donors provide.

Obviously, doing a study like this would be an experiment and we would learn many things. But looking longer term, and being ambitious, we like the idea of SVF providing this kind of mirror to the community at regular intervals, which would create very useful comparative data over time. For instance, we could do a study on problems/issues every 10 years after the census, and then one every 10 years on how philanthropy/solutions are shifting (producing one signature report every five years).

## **Design Issues for Board Input and then further Committee Work**

Should you give the go ahead to proceed, the committee has much more work to do to refine and develop the idea. But it would be great to get board initial input on two key questions, which may also influence how you assess the idea overall.

- 1) The **first** and over-riding question is **study design**—how to bound and focus the work:
  - This could be done “top down,” using existing data sources (tax forms, web sites) and supplementing with interviews, to build an integrated portrait. Done this way, the report would take more of a “donor’s” point of view of the landscape.
  - To what extent would nonprofits be enlisted as full partners, asking them about their needs, and how they believe they are addressing the Valley’s needs, and asking them to share data that might not be publicly available? In this sense, it might become more of a nonprofits view of the landscape.
  - Would the study encompass all Valley nonprofits, or only a subset?
  - Would the study intentionally build upon the Todd Trust work, or start fresh? Perhaps using the same consultant?
  
- 2) The **second** key question is about **partnerships**. Would we want this to be our signature project, or would it be better to share costs, responsibility and dissemination with partners, such as Impact 100 or the Chamber of Commerce?

## **Our Asks of the Board Now**

SVF’s most recent strategy materials declare that “we exist to help individuals, families and the entire community build the resources and capabilities needed to shape the future of the place we love.” We want “to become a meaningful voice and a trusted advisor” to donors who want to give more effectively, to nonprofits who want to strengthen their performance and to the community as a whole as it wrestles with growing, interconnected challenges.

We are proposing a study of philanthropy in the Valley as a great way to “build the capability” of the Valley’s donors and nonprofits, while positioning SVF as a “meaningful voice and a trusted advisor.” We are also proposing that this be done professionally, with volunteer/board supervision; that means we can only undertake this with financial backing.

Therefore, two questions for the board at this juncture, which really go together:

- Do you agree that we should continue to refine this idea, toward making this study a priority for SVF for 2016-17?

- And if so, are you willing to consider options for funding this study, once you review a more specific proposal? Such funding could come from our operating funds, from special fundraising, or from a combination of the two. Our best hunch is that we should not undertake this idea unless we are willing to spend \$10,000-\$20,000, and the cost could be more.

We are obviously still at an early stage in developing this idea. This memo and the board discussion may stimulate more ideas and questions for you. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or Nancy if you want to give additional input, or would like to participate more actively in making this idea a reality (especially if you are unable to participate in the board meeting). We are totally open!

## **APPENDIX: Preliminary search of available data**

Much of the data is based on the last census in 2010 (raising the question of whether a new comprehensive data pull should await new census results after 2020). But many data sources exist, some more recent and some which could be updated.

The **Todd Trust Report** was done in 2011. Similarly, while the SVF **Youth Initiative Findings** of 2008 is dated it sets a baseline on many issues for youth and could be updated. Similarly dated (2006) but informative is the **City's Sonoma 2020 Plan**, which stands as a statement on long term goals and plans for the City in comprehensive categories.

Other information is current such as the **California Department of Finance Demographic Estimates** and Sonoma's **2015-2023 Housing Elements Study and Plan**, which was mandated by the State and just completed. The County of Sonoma Department of Health Services compiled **Portrait of Sonoma County** (2014) and has developed a new outreach on health for Santa Rosa. **Sustainable Sonoma's** presentation to the SVF Board last year demonstrated their comprehensive perspective on the Valley.

There is always more information particularly from in-house studies of organizations such as the SV Hospital, the Community Center and La Luz, as well as the findings of our own community conversation and survey in the spring of 2015.

There is little dispute about the Valley's "needs," including a complex array of environmental, economic and social issues that are intertwined. Over the past five years, the shortage of affordable housing has clearly grown more acute, as did the drought conditions that brought more attention to the environmental sustainability questions for the Valley. Similarly, the growing dependence on the wine industry and tourism raises longer term questions about the need to diversify the Valley's economic base.

The existing data reports, including the Todd Trust work, focus on poverty, and agree on key factors such as:

- The growing demographic skew (young and poor, older and richer), with poverty centered in the Springs.
- The number of individuals and families in need cannot be met by the existing structures and care providers, both government and non-profit. Moreover the barriers of language (lack of English), transportation and awareness of available services often make it difficult for individual and families to use even the existing services.
- Moreover, there is a persistent lack of familiarity and trust between Anglo and Latino communities.

Both government agencies and private organizations are aware of these problems and working to solve them. Examples of recent progress are the completion of the sidewalk installation on Hwy 12 (state, federal and county monies), the Mid-Peninsula affordable housing project in The Springs, the City

decision to mandate an increase in affordable units in all multi-unit construction, the new Community Health Center, growing education support to students for graduation and college.

As we look ahead, what should the priorities be? Are there key gaps? Is there duplication of effort? How can the work be even more effective?