

THE EVOLVING SV SOLUTION SPACE: EMERGING IDEAS FOR ACTION

July 11, 2017

The “Hidden in Plain Sight” report contained an initial brainstorm of many possible actions that could be taken to address the challenges the report outlined. These included ways that individual charitable organizations might pursue excellence, new ways that organizations and community leaders might work together and further research that needed to be done before solutions are designed. The report’s aim was to stimulate the community to come up with its own solutions, as SVF itself has very limited capacity.

The good news is that that is exactly what is happening! As the report findings have been rolled out in the community, many new ideas are emerging (or re-emerging). Leaders across the community are beginning to think about the role they can play. This in turn should help SVF decide what role it can best play.

Different community leaders have different views as to the core problems—or actions that would make the most difference. Some think duplication of effort is the key issue. Others focus on the growing gaps. Still others believe that the existing organizations need much more help building their capabilities, especially in the use of data to improve impact.

The process is still early, but here is a glimpse of the many ideas we have been hearing. *If you have heard ideas in your outreach and informal conversations that are not yet reflected in this memo, please send them to Katherine and she will add them to this evolving “master list.”*

Improving Connection to Existing Government Processes and Policies

Making sure Sonoma Valley has its fair share of County resources. Susan Gorin said she really needs help raising the profile of the Valley with other county leaders (both elected and staff), so that the Valley doesn’t lose out. This is where the lack of capacity in the Valley across organizations really hurts; there isn’t anyone to organize the advocacy that is needed in Santa Rosa.

City of Sonoma planning processes. Sonoma’s 2020 General Plan was adopted in 2006, with an Urban Growth boundary being adopted in 2000. Our team is in the process of scheduling a meeting with the new City Manager, Cathy Capriola, to learn more about what is planned in the coming years for updating these master plans. This kind of engaged public process is a key venue to highlight evolving needs, such as economic development to deal with poverty, new housing options, parks and recreation and needs of seniors. A more coordinated approach from local nonprofits and donors could have a big effect on the outcome of this planning process, rather than defaulting (as the city mostly does) to the loudest and most active voices.

Sonoma Developmental Center. The fate of this entity and its property is obviously a big deal for the community, and the latest Impact100 grant to the Land Trust should catalyze new responses. Among the creative ideas in the works are how to house multiple nonprofits there together.

More public/private partnerships, such as the one that has saved Jack London State Park. If and when federal and state governments cut back, there may need to be more “hybrid” efforts, where private citizens and philanthropy step into new partnerships.

Meeting Needs of Nonprofits/Increasing their Visibility

Survey the EDs about their priorities and views. This is an idea that appeared in the report. The nonprofit ED roundtable clearly feels that we did not consult with them enough in the formation of the report. So this is possibly something still to be done. The idea is strongly advocated by Julie Diamond, a longtime Valley resident and professional foundation grants administrator. She attended our first public meeting and then met with us later to share her views. She has already drafted what in her view is a good set of questions for the EDs, based on her deep experience doing due diligence on nonprofits.

A volunteer clearinghouse. Volunteers come and go, and our local nonprofits have a constant need to attract new volunteers. The Santa Rosa Volunteer center has so far not provided much service to the Valley but could be approached to do so. There is a need for a matching service between nonprofits and volunteers looking for opportunities to work and serve.

A Giving Day. There are many varieties of this idea now being used around the country. Our nonprofit executive director roundtable has proposed that a Giving Day be established for Sonoma Valley—as a cooperative effort by some subset of organizations. And they have also proposed that SVF and CFSC organize this and raise the money to match whatever is raised on this day.

A Nonprofit Map. We have beautiful maps of wineries to visit in the Valley. How about an orienting tour of the Valley nonprofits, beautifully designed, that goes in real estate and newcomers packages and is given out in a variety of contexts? A complementary idea is to do regular open houses of nonprofits (like a garden tour).

Board recruitment and training. A perennial issue—how to help? La Luz is launching a Latino Leadership program, to recruit, mentor and train members of the Latino community to serve on Valley boards. Does that need more support, and what other efforts might help?

Capacity Building for existing NonProfits

Build on the Success of the first SVF/CFSC Nonprofit Learning Cohort. This group of six organizations raves about what has been accomplished in the past 18 months with professional guidance and dedicated (and funded) participation by the EDs and Board chairs—building trust,

relationships and coordination among agencies. There are many possibilities for how to build on this work, including extending the time frame for the initial group and starting an additional group. All have funding implications. Beth Brown has also suggested we might want to raise money to ask the consultants who staffed the cohort to write up the process used and the lessons from the work, with a specific eye to what is replicable by other groups so that the opportunity could be expanded, and money raised to support it.

Keep finding ways to help nonprofits better understand the needs of their constituencies, and how to best serve them. Mary Marcussen of Impact100 has many ideas (drawing from her own professional experience writing grants) about how to help nonprofits improve their impact by seeking more feedback and accessing national research about effectiveness of approaches, among other approaches. She believes nonprofits learn the most when they are helped to do their own self-evaluation rather than judged from the outside.

Addressing the Key Gaps/Rising Challenges

Create Task Forces to gather data, research what is happening and formulate solutions. Whit has proposed this approach for issues such as the housing crisis and the rising number of seniors. There would need to be multiple task forces and an overall advisory council to coordinate the process and ideas.

Create a research fund. Impact100 at its upcoming strategy retreat is considering a number of ideas for ways they might shift their grantmaking in the years to come. One need that received a lot of discussion was to put together an “R&D” fund for Sonoma Valley.

Susan Gorin urged us to look closely at whether there are ***nonprofits operating in other parts of Sonoma that should be funded to expand into the Valley*** (as 10,000 Degrees has done). One barrier is that SV donors haven’t wanted to fund efforts located elsewhere; she urged that we get over this, and start thinking about how services are provided in SV in a more wholistic way. Many aging and health services, for instance, are coordinated at the county level.

Organize employers to respond to the growing employment crisis. The combination of many forces not fully understood (Latinos leaving, housing crisis etc) is making it increasingly difficult to staff local businesses. What can be done?

Increasing Collaboration/Coordination—Lighter touch ideas

Re-instating the nonprofit board “President’s Council. Lorraine Ashton and Elsa Nelson came together after our second community briefing around their shared concern about ongoing issues with “turfism” in the nonprofit community. One idea is to encourage board presidents to meet, as EDs now do (something that Kimberly got going when she was at La Luz, but which has stopped). They are in the early stages of planning a fall convening to launch this idea, and Kimberly is working with them on this.

Launching a “Re-grantor’s Roundtable.” This is an idea that emerged at the Impact100 session. As we look at the growth of this kind of collective giving, the idea emerged that Impact, SVF, Rotary, the wine fundraising operations and the like might need to coordinate and share ideas among themselves much more often. Impact is going to consider a number of changes as it reaches its 10th anniversary in 2019, and those changes in turn could influence what others choose to do.

Create a “Men’s Giving Circle.” This is an idea some of the leaders of Impact100 are considering, responding to interest from their husbands. One possibility is to focus this group on funding some of the new research that needs to be done before solutions are formulated.

Funding use of a nonprofit excellence/performance framework, with the idea that multiple Sonoma nonprofits would use the same framework and collect similar data. In the past 20 years, much work has gone into creating new tools nationwide. A donor collaborative could fund the research, with input from nonprofits, to select one and then fund nonprofits working in the same areas to use the same performance framework and collect similar data. Over time, this would create common language, common goals and shared data to accelerate progress meeting goals. This would also build on the work already underway in the Todd Trust capacity building cohort.

More ambitious ideas for Increasing Collaboration/Coordination/Capacity at the Community Level

When it comes to the larger and more complex challenges now facing the nonprofit sector, a number of people are starting to realize that Sonoma Valley is at the limit of what can be accomplished by volunteers or by already overburdened nonprofit EDs and boards. Some communities have professional “intermediary” staffing to meet more complex needs, such as: connecting organizations working on similar issues to reduce duplication and amplify impact, building public support, researching emerging gaps, convening leaders, coordinating data collection, coordinating major fundraising efforts and the like. Existing nonprofit EDs are clear that they have no capacity to do these things currently. There are two flavors of what this could look like:

- **Building connecting capacity at existing nonprofits.** In this situation, a few nonprofits would be funded to play a more active “hub” role. The Education Foundation, for instance, could be funded to convene and coordinate the many youth serving organizations—seeking funding for joint evaluations, for instance, to figure out what is working best and refine it. The Sonoma Valley Museum of Art might play a similar role for visual arts organizations among the various efforts to fund arts in the schools. And La Luz might do the same for poverty-fighting efforts in the Springs.
- **Creating new capacity at the community level.** In this second scenario, full-time skilled professional staff would be located at an entity looking across the community as a whole, providing the same types of services described above across organizations. This is the type of effort envisioned by the leaders of Sustainable Sonoma, though they are still at an early stage in their development. And some nonprofit leaders have urged that

the Sonoma Valley Fund and Community Foundation ought to raise money to staff this type of role.

Build Bridges across Sonoma's Divides

It is clear that there are at least three kinds of divides in Sonoma:

- Anglo/Latino and wealthy and poor. Roughly the Springs and the Eastside/Glen Ellen.
- Oldtimers and newcomers. People who have lived here a long time can be resentful that their beautiful little town has been taken over and transformed in negative ways by all the newcomers and tourists. Some of the hostility could be seen in the hospital battle, as well as in the ongoing development battles.
- Permanent residents and part-time residents.

Any lasting solutions to some of Sonoma's issues will have to build bridges, so that the community owns solutions. In the dialogues now taking place people are starting to speculate about what it will take to build relationships and engagement. No actionable ideas have yet emerged.

Learning from Others

Hold a conference on "The Distress of Success." One of the core problems of Sonoma is that there is no real crisis or urgency, because so many in the community are so prosperous and the town is currently riding a wave of attention and success. So tactics that have worked in small towns in decline to mobilize efforts won't necessarily work here.

What have other places similar to Sonoma done or are doing? The idea would be: invite people from other successful smaller towns, such as Aspen, or Santa Fe, or our neighbors in Healdsburg, Napa and Marin, to exchange ideas about how to anticipate and mitigate the worst effects of the success Sonoma is now enjoying such as the housing crisis.

Capture the Imagination about the Future

Scenarios of the Future of Sonoma. Help *Valley of the Moon* magazine to pull together a small team of citizens to create scenarios of the future of Sonoma in 2030 or 2035, helping us see what could happen if current trends continue, and identify what can be influenced if we act soon to create the best possible future. Use this work as an input to the city's Master Planning process, and as an input to all strategic planning exercises by nonprofit boards.