

Dimensions of Partnership in Cross-Sector Relationships

*A Multi-Case Study of Local Education Foundations*

by

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## ABSTRACT

Cross-sector interactions are regularly seen in healthcare, education, defense, public safety, and other social service contexts where the public interest and the private individual intersect. While interest in cross-sector relationships is neither new nor novel, the organizational dynamics and contexts continue to change and challenge our understanding of what is meant by partnership, alliance, collaboration, or cooperation between independent organizations from different sectors. One type of cooperative arrangement between nonprofits and government are affiliated foundations, which are part of the landscape of emerging organizational hybrids and expanding government-nonprofit relationships. Affiliated foundations are nonprofits designed to support a specific entity by generating charitable resources. This dissertation looks at one specific context for affiliated foundation/ “parent” relationships through a multi-case study of local education foundations in Florida. Specifically, this research examines how local education foundations carry out a partnering relationship with the school district. Through a combination of three instrumental case studies of local education foundations, and fifteen other purposely selected foundations, this dissertation presents the results of a cross-case analysis of the *partnership* between local education foundations and school districts. *Partnership* is conceptualized across four dimensions: 1) attention, 2) successive engagement, 3) resource infusion, and 4) positional identity. This research reveals that through the four dimensions of *partnership*, we can account for the variation across embedded, interdependent, or independent local education foundations in relation to the school district, or their “parent” organization. As a result, local education foundations reflect different relationships with school districts, which ultimately impacts their ability to carry out their work as charitable organizations, derived from the community in which

they operate, and designed to generate resources and support for public education. By looking at this specific context, we can consider the complexities of an affiliated relationship between two structurally separate but linked organizations assumed to act as partners, but working to achieve a partnership. Where cooperation, collaboration, and innovation are intended outcomes of affiliated foundation/government relationships, this research considers the role of affiliated foundations among more traditional cross-sector relationships where services and contracts tend to dominate.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The need to manage political uncertainty and economic opportunity that arises in a vibrant and shifting public domain demands that today's elected officials and public managers have numerous tools at their disposal to change the way in which the public interacts with and is served by government. Such tools include contracting-out services, public-private partnerships, hybrid organizations, and cross-sector, collaborative relationships with for- and nonprofit organizations. Many of these tools result in newer and emerging organizational relationships that have come to be associated initially with privatization and New Public Management and more recently with shifts in the public sector from government to governance and network governance. As a result, the space between government and citizens continues to reflect evolving and expanding cross-sector relationships.

While research interest in cross-sector interactions is neither new nor novel, the organizational dynamics and contexts continue to change and challenge our understanding of what is meant by partnership, alliance, collaboration, and cooperation between independent organizations traditionally attributed to a particular sector. Confounding the understanding of these organizational interactions is the manner and context in which they occur. Many sector interactions in healthcare, public education, public safety, workforce development, and social services take place on the basis of informal or non-contractual arrangements and through hybrid organizational forms or practices. In such cases, leaders of organizations endeavor to cooperate for the benefit of both organizations and their respective missions.

This research looks at a specific type of cooperative arrangement between government and the nonprofit sector through a study of affiliated foundations. No less a product of privatization and increased support for cross-sector relationships, affiliated foundations are charitable nonprofits established to support the needs and purposes of a specific governmental entity. In studying a type of government/nonprofit interaction based on generating resources, this research focuses on how affiliated foundations carry out their work for cooperation, collaboration, and/or innovation in the public sector. While affiliated foundations may be found across different contexts, this study focuses on local education foundations (LEFs) that generate private resources and support for K-12 public education.

### **Research Purpose**

Affiliated foundations are government-supporting charities (Gazley, 2013) that are part of the landscape of emerging organizational hybrids (Smith, 2010) and expanding government-nonprofit relationships (Gazley, 2008). Working alongside public organizations, affiliated foundations (also called direct-support organizations and institutional-support organizations) are typically created by and/or for a governmental entity to provide supplementary funding for public activities not necessarily supported by public will or financial resources in the legislative process (Young, 2006). Therefore, affiliated foundations exist within the U.S. across different sectors and contexts where budgets fall short, tax dollars are designated for other services, and private money can enhance existing or newer programs and initiatives.

As a newer, cooperative arrangement between two separate but linked organizations, one public and one somewhat less so, affiliated foundations depart from

the traditional role of a government/nonprofit contractual relationship in a number of ways. First, affiliated foundations engage in an organizational relationship with a “parent” organization based on a cooperative arrangement rather than a contract (Najam, 2000; Smith, 2010). Second, their primary purpose is to support the specific “parent” organization from which they were established. Third, affiliated foundations generate charitable resources rather than fees for services or contract dollars for services. Fourth, outside of “competition” for donations or grants in the broader market, they rarely compete or seek to compete with other nonprofits to carry out their role with their partner entity.

Well-established affiliated foundations include those found at community colleges (Jenkins & Glass, 1999) and public universities (Bass, 2010), created specifically to manage private funding, grants, and alumni support for institutions of post secondary public education. More recent, at the federal government level affiliated foundations include *The Reagan-Udall Foundation* for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the *National Foundation for the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention* (CDC) and the proposed nonprofit for the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), *Preparedness and Resilience Foundation* (Cohen, 2012). Affiliated foundations may also be created at the local level of government, including cities, counties, libraries, housing authorities, and police departments that establish a nonprofit foundation to attract and enable tax-exempt donations to public entities (Smith, 2010). Typically, the private donations are applied to organizational goals or interests left unmet or unrealized through public tax dollars. Although the structure of an affiliated foundation relationship may be found in the private sector (e.g. corporate foundations) and in the nonprofit sector (e.g. a

separate but charitable support organization), the focus in this research is on affiliated foundations serving a specific governmental entity where an affiliated organization is subject to a complex public/private relationship with its partner entity.

Given this public/private interaction, affiliated foundations are an example of the hybridity that has occurred within the public and nonprofit sectors in recent years (Skelcher, 2005). Hybridization includes organizations with a mixed mode of control (Smith, 2010), organizations that serve governmental partners and market-based clients (Joldersma & Winter, 2002), organizations that combine two different types of organizational missions (Minkoff, 2002), and organizations that contend with the competing logics of competition within a market for resources even though they serve one specific community (Smith, 2010). Affiliated foundations are a type of hybrid organization in that they contain “mixed sectoral, legal, structural, and/or mission related elements” (2010, p. 220). For example, affiliated foundations are nonprofit in structural and legal terms, but they use the label of a “foundation” rather than a “nonprofit.” They serve a single “parent” organization largely through private funding from individuals, foundations, and other private actors. Affiliated foundations derive their mission from the perception that donors are more willing to give to an affiliated entity than directly to the “parent” entity (Smith, 2010). As a result, affiliated foundations are associated with a public entity, but have structural and legal characteristics of a private entity. Finally, they have a mission to serve an organization that on its own is perceived incapable of attracting the same types of resources or trust from donors. Acting in a charitable role alongside government may confound the understanding of where and how private money

is used and shared between the foundation and “parent” organization. All together, affiliated foundations have elements of both public and private organizations.

Given the nature and characteristics of affiliated foundations, their role as government supporting nonprofits departs from much of the nonprofit research focus on managing commercial nonprofits with contracts from government (see Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Salamon, 1995), cross-sector partnerships with government in service provision (see Saidel, 2011; Saidel & Harlan, 1998; Shaw, 2003), and nonprofit competition in contracting with government given uncertain environments (see Smith & Lipsky, 1993; Suárez, 2011). In considering strategies they may employ to carry out their role with the “parent” organization, affiliated foundations also deviate from the even smaller subset of the literature focused on managerial efforts to develop a plan or strategy for differentiating an organization from other nonprofit service providers (Chew & Osborne, 2009; Frumkin & Kim, 2001). In carrying out their role, affiliated foundations have little need to differentiate their organization from another as they are typically the sole organization to serve the “parent” entity in this way. However, in working to attract private resources to carry out their role affiliated foundations may need to differentiate their work from that of the “parent” organization in order to establish a collaborative relationship (Paarlberg & Gen, 2009).

The intent of this dissertation research is to characterize a model of the affiliated foundation/partner relationship and its component parts. With the goal of contributing to the theoretical space that captures government and nonprofit collaborative relationships, I propose a model of affiliated foundations where charity and cooperation are explicit and stewardship and legitimacy are assumed. I apply this model to the context of local

education foundations in K-12 public education to develop a framework for studying the concepts associated with a *partnership* between an affiliated foundation and a “parent” organization.

### **Background on Local Education Foundations**

Within the last 20 to 30 years, a new type of collaboration has formed in public education with the advent of local education foundations (also called local education funds, education support organizations, and district education foundations). Modeled after foundations in higher education (Bass, 2010), local education foundations are “privately operated, nonprofit tax-exempt organizations positioned between schools and communities” (Brent, 2002, p. 31). In response to financial challenges and unmet expectations within public education (Sunderman, 2010), school districts have pursued the resources and counsel of corporations, local businesses, and community members to support greater excellence in education with financial donations and resources (Brent, 2002; Fleming, 2012; Longoria, 1999; Paarlberg & Gen, 2009; Raphael & Anderson, 2002; Zimmer, Krop, & Brewer, 2003). Through local education foundations (LEFs), school districts are able to strategically develop collaborative partnerships, relationships, and alliances with outside entities (Weisbrod, 1997; Zimmer, et al., 2003). Current estimates suggest that over 4,800 education foundations serve an individual school district across the U.S. (Else, 2013). However, this number may in fact be much larger when accounting for foundations that serve one or more schools or one or more school districts, as different partner arrangements exist between schools and local education foundations.



LEFs that are created to serve a single school district channel charitable resources to a school district as an affiliated foundation (Smith, 2010) or “government supporting charity” (Gazley, 2013). The focus of their work is resource mobilization (Bovaird, 2004), as they exist primarily to “marshal resources, broker relationships, and fund or provide services to schools and school districts,” where tax dollars are not available for programming beyond basic education services (Raphael & Anderson, 2001, p. 8). As affiliated foundations, LEFs may carry out several different roles with the school district. These roles include resource generation and financial support, programming, community engagement, advocacy, fundraising, and consulting services. In practice, LEFs reflect a “cooperative arrangement” of sorts (Gazley, 2008; Salamon, 1995; Smith, 2010) among government, nonprofits, and private actors. Similar to other nonprofits in their everyday and year-to-year activities, local education foundations engage with multiple stakeholders and different constituent groups to generate resources and carry out their mission.

As charitable nonprofits serving in a cooperative role in education, LEFs cultivate stakeholder relationships internal and external to their organization as the basis of their mission and work (Raphael & Anderson, 2001). This includes building a cooperative arrangement with the school district they serve and establishing collaborations with the communities in which they draw support and resources (Raphael & Anderson, 2002). At times, these organizational relationships are influenced by state and local education policies that impact schools within a district; therefore, LEFs may also have a role in policy awareness, responsiveness, or advocacy within the community (Raphael & Anderson, 2002). Through cooperative efforts and stakeholder engagement, LEFs carry out their mission, goals, and programming objectives as affiliated foundations. In this

way, LEFs neither replace nor take over the work of public education systems; instead, they supplement, complement, and sometimes innovate within existing structures of public schools and school districts. The extent of these types of activities varies across school district contexts, as well as state contexts, which will be further explored in the third chapter.

### **Significance of this Research**

Cross-sector collaborations are an increasingly common mechanism to address societal challenges and opportunities for improving the public provision of solutions and services (Austin, 2000; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Minow, 2002; Selsky & Parker, 2005). However, as much as collaborative efforts are encouraged, they are also problematized by their implementation challenges and sometimes ineffective outcomes (Acar, Guo, & Yang, 2008; Bryson, et al., 2006; Connor, Kadel-Taras, & Vinokur-Kaplan, 1999; Kapucu, 2006; Smith, 2004). Recognizing that collaborative efforts between sectors are variant and highly contextual, research on specific cross-sector arrangements provides insights on how to enhance the outcomes and benefits of their intended purpose. Affiliated foundations are one context for such cross-sector relationships that have yet to be extensively explored, explained, and framed for future research. In many ways, affiliated foundations are a response to forces in the public sector that reinforce the limits of government to serve and engage citizens. As a result, they operate in the nexus of cooperation, collaboration, and innovation between sectors.

Through the context of local education foundations, this study investigates how LEFs carry out their role as affiliated foundations with a public school district using a proposed model of affiliated foundations and “parent” organizations. To guide this

research, LEFs are first contextualized by their primary areas of stakeholder engagement: 1) with the school district, 2) in the community, and 3) within broader education policy. These categories are used to develop a spectrum of roles and relationships that shape the pursuit of partnership between an affiliated foundation and the school district.

Where LEFs are aligned most closely to or within the school district, the organization may readily address specific requests made by district superintendents or school board members. Situating the LEF within the school district may elevate the importance of cooperation with school district administration, while diminishing the need for strategic efforts to engage with the school district. On the other hand, local education foundations may also be situated outside the school district and in between the school district and community. Where an LEF is positioned outside the school district administrative structure, it may consider a broader perspective of how to carry out its role independent from but in partnership with the school district. This includes finding ways for the local education foundation to cultivate relationships within the community and between the school district and the community.

Finally, LEFs may perceive their role as promoting innovation or reform in public education, reflecting longer-term alignment. Therefore, the decision to engage in policy advocacy or awareness efforts for a specific purpose may encourage collaborative relationships among the LEF, school district, and different parts of the community. Emphasizing research on specific issues and policy awareness or advocacy impacting those issues also reflects a more intermediary role within the community. The purpose of serving in this capacity is intentional in trying to change or innovate within highly inflexible, institutionalized environments.

To characterize this relationship, my research first proposes a model of the interaction between the affiliated foundation and parent entity based on what is known about this cross-sector collaboration. Drawing on the context of public education, I then apply this model to local education foundations to answer the question: how do LEFs as affiliated foundations carry out their work in relation to the school district? Given the different relationships that can occur between LEFs and school districts, I examine how LEFs pursue a *partnership* with their parent organization. Using this context, my analysis conceptualizes the process, conditions, and structures of *partnership* between a single public entity and an affiliated foundation where stewardship and legitimacy are essential.

Nonprofits have multiple communities and interests in which to build relationships and position their work among other nonprofits (Bass, 2010; Chew, 2006; Smith, 2010). However, they tend to do so in the context of service provision and contracting rather than charitable efforts for a single entity. As a result, less is known about how affiliated foundations may carry out their work for cooperation, collaboration, and innovation when the basis of this work is relationship management for relevance (Longoria, 1999), legitimacy (Saidel, 1989), and identity (Sosin, 2012) with a primary partner entity.

Affiliated foundations exist in the space where private efforts meet the public interest. In this space are other types of partnership and collaborative efforts that challenge how we think about two organizations from different sectors working together, combining resources from public and private sources, and the accountability mechanisms that ensue (Acar, et al., 2008; Austin, 2000; Ostrander, 1987). It is often the case that

partnerships include a service component for a short or longer term project (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002) rather than establishing a government supporting nonprofit meant to exist as an on-going support organization (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002). Affiliated foundations therefore bring private engagement and resources directly to government through an institutionalized mechanism that can influence both current and future resource use, services, and programs. Therefore, this research also considers the implications of nonprofits and private resources supporting the work of government in this way.

While this study captures newer organizations in the landscape of private involvement in the public sector, and specifically public education, it also contributes to the research on local education foundations. To date, much of the study of LEFs has focused on cases within specific states or districts to gain an understanding of why these type of nonprofits have come about (Paarlberg & Gen, 2009); the substance and quantity of resources and funding generated by local education foundations (Brent, 2002; Zimmer, Krop, Kaganoff, Ross, & Brewer, 2001); organizational characteristics of LEFs (Deitrick, 2009) and the impact of executives and boards on donations and revenue (Carlson, 2011); the characteristics of LEF leadership and dynamics of change (Raphael & Anderson, 2002); and a multi-state study that looks at funding and programming across LEFs within different state contexts (Merz & Frankel, 1995). Research, however, has yet to explicitly focus on understanding local education foundations as a type of organization that carries out its work through cooperation and partnership with a governmental entity. By looking broadly at what local education foundations reflect in their hybrid

organizational structure and charitable role with government, we can characterize partnership in the affiliated foundation/government relationship.

### **Research Design, Data and Analysis**

My research is designed to draw data from multiple representative cases that reveal the intricacies and dynamics of the affiliated foundation and “parent” organization relationship within the context of local education foundations. The multi-case case study design (Shekedi, 2005) draws information from organizational websites, organizational-level survey data, in-depth interviews with 40 individuals, and documents or published written materials from a purposely selected sample of local education foundations in the state of Florida. Florida reflects not only a rich setting for the forces that motivate newer organizational structures in the public sector, but also organizational structures in public education that have developed over the past 30 years.

This study proceeds in a two part process of data collection, review, and analysis. The first part of the research includes a review of secondary data from a biennial membership survey of local education foundations identified as members of the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations (CFEF). The executive director of the Consortium provided the 2011 membership survey data for this research following a pilot interview she participated in about local education foundations in Florida. The survey consists of organizational characteristics, mission and focus, board composition and staffing patterns, and revenue, assets, and expenditures of the LEF. Where possible, LEF websites were reviewed alongside marketing materials, information packets, and annual reports or strategic planning documents to extend what is known publicly about LEF organizations. The survey data and publicly shared information were used to purposely

select LEFs to participate in in-depth, semi-structured interviews about their organizational relationship with the school district, their efforts to engage the community, and any existing or future efforts to engage in policy awareness or advocacy.

The second part of data collection consists of interviews with executive directors, CEOs, or presidents of 18 local education foundations in Florida. Three of the 18 foundations were purposely selected as instrumental cases (Stake, 1995) to demonstrate a position embedded with the school district, more aligned to the community, and focused on education policy and systemic change at the local level. Within the instrumental cases, executive directors, board members, a community representative, and a school district representative were interviewed. LEFs outside of the three case studies were selected based on innovations in programming compared to other foundations and the size and location of the organization in relation to the school district, with some consideration for geographic proximity to other foundations in the study. In Florida, school district size and type (rural vs. urban), and therefore foundation size and scope, vary extensively throughout the state. Efforts were made to seek participation from foundations that represent a diversity of organizational sizes and assets, geographic location, and school district characteristics.

Interviews were semi-structured by design to allow for in-depth accounts of the different areas of engagement for the local education foundation. Interviews were guided by approximately ten questions that asked about the LEFs' role in the community, relationship with the school district, and work within local or broader education policy or awareness (see the Appendix for interview protocol). All interviews were recorded and

transcribed. Detailed case selection, population characteristics, and data collection and analysis procedures are provided in the third chapter.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

This research intends to inform our understanding of government/nonprofit relationships in cooperative arrangements. One could argue that public education and school districts are a unique and specific context that has little applicability outside these institutional structures. However, two points can be made about the intent of this research. One, collaborative relationships between government and nonprofits are “best understood at the level of particular issues and organizations” rather than generalizations to entire populations or societies (Najam, 2000). Therefore, to look more deeply into nonprofit/government relationships it is helpful to study them in specific contexts and extend applications and dimensions to other areas of cross-sector interaction. Two, while LEFs serve within the context of public education, nonprofits that work with government tend to share some similarities in structure, regardless of content area. These similarities include an independent governing board that seeks to direct the organization, reliance on multiple funding sources to carry out the work, and the need for accountability and transparency in operations. Such a combination of structural characteristics results in a comparable institutional context of nonprofits that work alongside or in conjunction with government. By focusing on the primary distinction of affiliated foundations- charitable fundraising for a single organization- this research intends to contribute to the broader concepts used to understand and improve nonprofit and governmental cooperative relationships.



Finally, in a research study that draws on a specific population and policy context for local education foundations there may be interest in the applicability of these findings to other populations and contexts. While this study draws on a specific policy and educational context within the state of Florida, the institution of public education and school districts are similarly patterned across the U.S. (Sunderman, 2010). So while specific organizational relationships will vary across any context, we can expect the institutional contexts of school districts and their communities to be similar. Therefore, looking at local education foundations within the context of school district and community engagement, we are likely to find similar challenges and experiences given the similarities in the intent, goals, and services attributed to public school districts in the United States. Likewise, school districts as special purpose governmental entities also share similarities with other governmental entities in being taxpayer-funded, run by both public managers and elected officials, and being responsible and accountable to the public in how resources are used and services are provided.

### **Chapter Outline**

Local education foundations exist within a broader environment of private sector and nonprofit engagement in public education. However, cross-sector collaboration exists within other public sector activities. The shifts that have occurred over time as a result of sector interaction are detailed in the second chapter, *Review of Relevant Literature and Concepts*. The third chapter, *Research Context and Methods*, explains the research design of this study, including the methods used to analyze the secondary survey data and interviews across multiple, purposely selected cases. Chapter four, *Local Education Foundations: Down the Hall, Across Town, and Out to Sea*, provides the

description of the three instrumental case studies to establish the spectrum of local education foundation and school district relationships from embedded to independent. The fifth chapter, *Conceptual Dimensions of Partnership*, draws on the other 15 LEF cases in this study to expand the model of affiliated foundations by conceptualizing the dimensions of partnership in the LEF and school district relationship.

Finally, chapter six (*Conclusion*) concludes the dissertation with a discussion on local education foundations in public education, affiliated foundations and their role in supporting government in a charitable context, and cross-sector relationships absent a competitive, service-oriented approach.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS

In the public realm where governmental and non-governmental organizations can truly “go-it” alone or choose to utilize the resources, knowledge, and institutional characteristics in cross-sector relationships, it is important to understand how interactions take place for the purpose of collective activity (Bryson, et al., 2006; Kapucu, 2006; Selsky & Parker, 2005). While increased cross-sector interactions among public, private for-profit, and private nonprofit actors have come to define the privatization movement, these interactions are most often premised on contracts and service provision. However, cross-sector interactions take place through not only contracting relationships but also partnerships, networks, and through the creation of hybrid organizational forms. As a result, governmental responses to addressing social issues have given way to governance and network governance involving multiple actors from different sectors for cooperative efforts (Gray, 1985; Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002).

To that end, affiliated foundations are one example of an emerging organizational structure in the realm of public and private interactions outside of contracted services (Smith, 2010). I first argue that the theories and concepts used to explain and guide our understanding of cross-sector relationships are limited in application to the nature and context of affiliated foundations. Second, affiliated foundations are relatively unaccounted for in cross-sector research given their unique pairing of public and nonprofit efforts for primarily charitable resource generation and support rather than contracts for service provision. Given what is known about this emerging structural arrangement, I propose a primary relationship model between affiliated foundations and

their “parent” organization that is characterized by stewardship, mutual legitimation, and partnership. These elements are explained in a model of affiliated foundations used to guide this research.

### **Privatization**

Privatization is described as “the practice of delegating public duties to private organizations” (Donahue, 1991, p. 3) to pursue an overall goal of reducing the size and scope of government. The practices associated with privatization come out of the public sector’s struggle to maintain service levels, improve organizational efficiency, and shrink governmental structures (Box, 1999). To that end, privatization in the 1980s primarily involved engaging more frequently with private for-profit (Cheung, 1997) and nonprofit actors (Smith & Lipsky, 1993; Weisbrod, 1997) in the work of government through contracting out services (Starr, 1987). The intent of engaging with actors from different sectors was to help accomplish the task of reducing the role of government and alleviating fiscal constraints.

A strong impetus for the privatization movement was the growing perception of inefficiency and uncertainty in governmental structures and resources (Box, 1999) and the need to devolve services down to lower levels of government (Pack, 1987).

Privatization has also led to newer organizational forms and relationships as a logic has developed around how government can and will improve with greater competition, resources, and the incorporation of comparative advantages inherent to different sectors (J. Alexander, 2000; Saidel, 2011; Smith, 2010; Suárez, 2011; Van Slyke, 2003).

Initially, newer relationships were reflected in contracting out government services and activities to private for-profit entities that were perceived to be more efficient than

government (Domberger & Jensen, 1997; Megginson & Netter, 2001). Within the contracting relationship between government and private, nongovernmental entities, there is an inherent principal-agent relationship that is ultimately problematic for government as the principal (Lan & Rainey, 1992). As principals, government has the responsibility to ensure agents are acting according to the expectations laid out in their agreements.

While private businesses acting as agents of the government are argued to make decisions in their own best interest rather than in the interest of their principal, contracts are said to help alleviate this behavior by providing accountability and control (Dicke & Ott, 1999).

Perhaps not a remedy, but an alternative choice to contracting with businesses is contracting with nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits were perceived to be less motivated by their profit margin and would therefore share their commitment with government to serving clients and citizens (Steinberg, 1997). No less agents than private businesses, nonprofits gained relevance from being perceived as mission driven and volunteer driven rather than profit focused (Van Til, 1987). Regardless of which type of nongovernmental actor is better equipped to carry out government services or programs through contracting, organizational actors in both the private for-profit and private nonprofit sectors were increasingly engaged in the work of government through contracting (Boris, 1999).

Since the start of the privatization movement, however, contracting has made way for collaborative efforts through partnerships with entities outside of government. Private actors are engaged in the work of government through public-private partnerships.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are considered to be “loosely defined...co-operative institutional arrangements between public and private sector actors” (Hodge & Greve,

2007, p. 33). A public-private arrangement includes an element of both public and private sector actors, with perhaps a more formal, long-term, and explicit arrangement characterized by the term *partnership*. Scholars argue that the term public-private partnership is used in place of ‘privatization’ or ‘contracting out’ as a less contentious phrase that captures the same concept of traditionally public activities being performed, executed, or delivered by the private sector (Savas, 2000; Wettenhall, 2003). Like the practice of contracting out, in public-private partnerships regulation and control remain primarily with the public entity. Different from contracting out, public-private partnership connotes a more egalitarian relationship between the public and private actors involved (Boris, 1999; Peters & Pierre, 1998).

**Public-private partnerships.** While PPPs are often recognized as existing on the basis of a contract, Bovaird (2004) suggests PPPs reflect “working arrangements based on a mutual commitment (over and above that implied in any contract) between a public sector organization with any organization outside of the public sector” (p. 200). Through a higher level of commitment in a partnership, actors from different sectors are said to achieve greater effectiveness than they would on their own (Gazley, 2008; Van Til, 1987). Nevertheless, partnerships are not necessarily defined by a contract, and may be less formally structured as “public-private cooperative efforts” whereby public and private actors interact for not only goods or services, but also economic development initiatives, community activities, and infrastructure planning or projects (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002). Likewise, partnerships can include the “design of hybrid organizations for risk sharing and co-production between government and private agents” (Skelcher, 2005, p. 347). Hybridity is said to arise out of “an indistinct boundary between public

and private interests as a result of the close engagement of business and not-for-profits in the governmental process” (Skelcher, 2005, p. 348). Part of the “indistinct boundary” is the way in which organizations interact and borrow management practices to improve cooperative efforts.

Privatization, partnerships, and hybridity not only encourage the engagement of other actors for the means of achieving public goals, but also to “import private management ideas and practices into government” (Cheung, 1997, p. 2217) to innovate and/or improve existing programs or services. In other words, privatization has worked on two levels, not only through the incorporation of private actors and organizations into the work of government, but also through the incorporation of private practices into the public sector (Cheung, 1997; Eisinger, 1982; Hatcher, 2000). The combination of both private actors and management practices is captured in *New Public Management*, whereby administrative processes are streamlined through greater use of private sector management behaviors and practices (Box, 1999; Hood, 2007; Kettl, 2005). Scholars have suggested that the New Public Management (NPM) movement brings with it a new set of values to the public sector (Denhardt, 2008; Moon, 2000). These values typically reflect private sector techniques and initiatives such as a focus on customer service, efficiency, competition, and contracting out service delivery. At the same time that new values shape public sector practices, newer organizational actors and combinations of actors within public sector services challenged the public and private sector distinction. As a result, governing is said to have given way to governance and the practices involved in incorporating actors from different sectors or with intersectoral characteristics.

**Governance.** Given NPM's shift of emphasis from traditional public sector structures and processes of hierarchy and bureaucratic control to private sector structures of decentralized decision-making and competition, the NPM movement has coincided with the evolution of government to governance (Peters & Pierre, 1998) and even network governance. While there is no single definition of governance, scholars attribute it to a *relative* change in the traditional conception of governmental authority and action. Stoker suggests governance "is ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action...[and] governing mechanisms which do not rest on recourse to the authority and sanctions of government" (Stoker, 1998, p. 17). Peters and Pierre (1998) consider governance to be a combination of elements that "amount to a prescription for steering society through less direct means and weakening the power of the State to control policy" (p. 225). Rhodes (1996) considers governance to be a signal of "change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition of ordered rule; or the new method by which society is governed" (pp. 652-653). Within the particulars of these definitions, the authors suggest that governance encompasses a shift in processes and thinking on how government operates towards a more communal perspective. Underlying these definitions is an acknowledgement that "no one organization is able to produce all the services that individual clients need" (Milward & Provan, 2000, p. 359). As such, interdependent networks are formed to include combinations of public, private, and private- nonprofit organizations in the coordination of service delivery and governing society (Peters & Pierre, 1998; Rhodes, 1996; Sorensen, 2006). Further, these networks "permit the mutual leveraging of resources and the blending of public and private attributes in ways that might not be



possible in more conventional structural arrangements” (Peters & Pierre, 1998, p. 226). Thus, in theory, the citizen is expected to benefit from a broader, multi-dimensional, coordinated collective action process.

Governance therefore demonstrates a unique opportunity for further fulfillment of the public interest through citizen participation in networks as users and governors (Peters & Pierre, 1998; Rhodes, 1996, 2007). Governance and networks allow for a kind of “co-production” (Whitaker, 1980) of service delivery and governing, as public sector officials facilitate the execution of shared goals (Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998). In light of the public sector’s increased engagement of the private sector (Van Til, 1987), nowhere has governance and network governance been more present than in turning to nonprofits to engage in service delivery, advocacy, and support for collective action (Najam, 2000; Young, 2006).

While much of the account of government’s turn to nonprofits in the U.S. focuses on service provision and contracting out services (Boris, 1999; Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000; Saidel, 1989, 2011; Saidel & Harlan, 1998; Shaw, 2003; Smith & Lipsky, 1993; Van Slyke, 2003), funding uncertainty in the public sector has also led to interest in nonprofit resource generation (Smith, 2010; Young, 1999) and partnership type relationships to mobilize private funding (Bovaird, 2004). Increasingly, governmental agencies have engaged with nonprofit entities, and they have responded by organizing new ways to partner, collaborate, and combine resources from different sectors (Van Til, 1987).

## Nonprofits in the Public Sector

Within the landscape of participants and practices attributed to privatization are a greater number of nonprofit and charitable organizations engaged in government service provision (J. Alexander, 2000; Salamon, 1995; Smith, 2004). Nonprofits are found in nearly all areas of public sector activity or services at different levels of government (Smith & Lipsky, 1993), including health, education, research, community development, and services to the poor or other marginalized groups (Feiock & Andrew, 2006). The Urban Institute report on *Contracts and Grants between Nonprofits and Government* estimates that \$137 billion was paid to close to 50,000 nonprofits that had contracts with or grants from government in 2012 (Pettijohn & Boris, 2013). Young (2006) suggests these nonprofit/government relationships exist by way of carrying out a complimentary, supplementary, and/or adversarial role alongside government. Although, these roles are often combined and conducted simultaneously in networks of nonprofit actors (Kapucu, 2006) or in hybrid structures where nonprofits combine different activities (Dees & Anderson, 2003).

Broadly, nonprofits engage with government for three purposes: 1) to compliment public services through contractual service provision, 2) to supplement government services through partnership arrangements or, 3) to co-opt, replace, or push government to improve or alter the existing provision of public services (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Kapucu, 2006; Najam, 2000; Salamon, 1995; Shaw, 2003; Young, 1999). Each of these characterizations relates to the logic of privatization, which suggests government cannot do well what it is charged with doing on its own (Milward & Provan, 2000); government may be overextended or ineffective at what it undertakes (Peters & Pierre, 1998); and that

entrepreneurship or other alternative modes of service can improve public sector activity (Henig, 1989). Within these three characterizations of nonprofit engagement in the public sector are theories that suggest why nonprofits exist, how they interact with government, and situations where they might take on hybrid characteristics as private actors engage in the public sector (Dees & Anderson, 2003; Van Til, 1987).

The government failure model may help explain the supplementary role of nonprofits in the public sector. This model suggests that voluntary organizations arise to increase or improve on what government currently undertakes given the median voter in a heterogeneous population (Weisbrod, 1977). Where demand does not match provision by government, nonprofits may arise to supplement governmental activities and fill in gaps in public provision or funding (Weisbrod, 1997). As nonprofits become more engaged in the public sector, specifically as service providers (Salamon, 1995), this may lead to complementary activities. Complementary engagement with government occurs when nonprofits work alongside the public sector to provide or extend existing services (Young, 2006). This relationship may turn into one of interdependence (Saidel, 1989), wherein government needs nonprofit providers and nonprofits in turn receive government support or funding (often through grants or contracts) that they also need for survival (Salamon, 1995). As service providers, therefore, government funding supports the work and existence of nonprofit organizations.

Nonprofits may also help with trust issues in the public sector, as they reduce concerns about information asymmetries that exist within market models by operating with a non-distribution clause (Young, 1999). In the market failure theory, nonprofits have little incentive to withhold information and are therefore perceived to have an

inherent trustworthiness since they are not beholden to shareholders for monetary returns (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000; Hansmann, 1980). Nonprofits may also express this trustworthiness through advocacy or co-optation, acting as an entity that is neither governmental nor private for-profit (Young, 1999). More recently, nonprofits have evolved their role to carry out their mission and goals by providing charitable funding for government to carry out public activity not readily aligned to public demand (Boris, 1999). In this case, nonprofits can respond to a deficit in funding or quality of services by providing charitable resources to improve or expand services carried out by government (Boris, 1999). This type of activity is often attributed to charitable nonprofits or grantmaking foundations that provide grants or donations to governmental entities to increase or sometimes improve services and programs.

Although these explanations and characterizations capture different perspectives on government/nonprofit interactions, they begin with a basic premise that when nonprofits interact with government, they are service providers, service enhancers, or service complements (Boris, 1999; Smith, 2004). In other words, interactions are based on a contract or grant funding that makes explicit the terms of the services and provision to be undertaken by the nonprofit on behalf of the governmental entity (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002). Further, there is also the expectation that as nonprofit service providers, they can choose to work alongside any entity. In other words, nonprofits are rarely designed to be exclusive in who they work for or with in carrying out their work. However, as has been suggested in the nonprofit literature, nonprofits often work with government on the basis of informal agreements for purposes other than contracts for services (Gazley, 2008; Grønbjerg, 1998; Kapucu, 2006) and through exclusive

arrangements (Shaw, 2003). To move beyond theories of nonprofits as non-exclusive service providers, we must consider other ways in which nonprofits exist alongside government and the organizational relationships that occur as a result.

**Other roles for nonprofits in the public sector.** As the nonprofit sector has expanded practically and theoretically, scholars have sought to understand different facets and challenges of nonprofit participation in the provision of public services (J. Alexander, 2000; V. Alexander, 1998; Barman, 2002; Boris, 1999; Brinkerhoff, 2002; Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998; Grønbjerg, 1998; Kapucu, 2006; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Saidel, 1989; Salamon, 1995; Shaw, 2003; Stone, Bigelow, & Crittenden, 1999). In light of the nonprofit role in the public sector, nonprofits have to balance their purpose as trustworthy service providers, advocates, or innovators, while also conforming to an environment that increasingly forces them to be competitive and performance driven (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). The trend in marketization of the nonprofit sector (Wilson, 1992), and the blurring of the lines between nonprofits, government, and the private sector (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Stoker, 1998) has driven nonprofits to be more focused on competition, strategy, and position. In fact, over time, nonprofits have been encouraged to pursue both strategy and position in differentiating their organization from other organizations (Barman, 2002; Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000).

However, government/nonprofit relationships have moved beyond service provision, contracts, and competition to include purposes and initiatives less structured than service provision (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002). For example, nonprofits “create networks and relationships that connect people to each other and to institutions quite apart from the organization’s primary purpose” (Boris, 1999, p. 18). In this way they

build social capital by engaging volunteers in working toward mutual or collective goals (Young, 1999). A byproduct of this is that nonprofits, through volunteers, encourage civic engagement and awareness of community needs within the populations they engage (Boris, 1999). Nonprofits often build social capital alongside government in the form of research, advocacy, and providing donations for alternative programs for societal problems. Through these types of efforts, nonprofits are often touted for providing local solutions to societal problems as a “powerful alternative to the ongoing search for uniform national solutions to public problems” (Frumkin, 2005, p. 19). In all, nonprofits can provide multiple benefits to public entities beyond commercial services or contracts that can come in different forms of public and private interaction (Gazley, 2008; Gazley & Brudney, 2007).

With the range of practices and processes that have come to define privatization, including public and nonprofit interaction, increased environmental and organizational uncertainty has followed for nonprofit organizations (V. Alexander, 1998; Bryson, et al., 2006). Nowhere has this been more evident than in the experiences of nonprofit service providers that were increasingly engaged in working with government to provide programs and services in the 1960s, but by the year 2000 were facing “serious threats to their survival” (J. Alexander, 2000, p. 287). Threats came in a variety of forms including a decline in overall governmental funding as the state retreated from service provision, an increase in funding from contracts rather than grants, competition for donor support outside of service dollars, and increased competition from service providers in the for-profit sector (J. Alexander, 2000; Smith, 2004). These threats have motivated innovations in organizational structures and arrangements within the public and nonprofit

sectors where goals, decisions, accountability, and control are shared between actors from different sectors (Austin, 2000; Bovaird, 2004; Bryson, et al., 2006). Cross-sector collaborations have therefore been motivated by the need to manage uncertainty (Gray, 1985).

Similar to studies on nonprofit/government relationships, cross-sector relationships have been largely explored on the basis of contracting or public and private collaborations to improve services (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000; Grønbjerg, 1998; Saidel, 1989, 2011; Snavely & Tracy, 2000). But one type of newer organizational form is the affiliated foundation, a nonprofit entity set up to provide funding to a governmental entity (Smith, 2010). To that end, affiliated foundations are seen as a tool to conduct organization-specific fundraising, providing a legal mechanism for charitable giving to public organizations. To date, the role and need for affiliated foundations have been explored within public university foundations or development offices (Bass, 2010), the establishment and growth of community college foundations (Jenkins & Glass, 1999), and in a related way, the rise of critical support organizations for nonprofits (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002). In other research, affiliated foundations are passively referenced as “nonprofit” arms or extensions of an organization (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). Given the focus on contracting out and service provision within nonprofit and public sector research on partnerships, networks, and collaborations (Van Slyke, 2003), little research exists in understanding the role and relationship of an affiliated foundation with a governmental entity based on an exclusive partnership for charitable purposes (Shaw, 2003).

## **Affiliated Foundations in the Public Sector**

In practice, affiliated foundations may resemble other service delivery nonprofits in that they are situated to support the work of a public entity as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit; however, their role tends to focus on resource generation for a “parent” organization rather than service provision (Smith, 2010). While scholarship on nonprofit and public/private partnerships has hinted at their existence in the broader landscape of cross-sector relationships (Bovaird, 2004; Bryson, et al., 2006; Connor, et al., 1999; Salamon & Anheier, 1992; Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002) and hybrid organizational structures (Skelcher, 2005), affiliated foundations are still considered a relatively emerging organizational form (Smith, 2010). Limited scholarship exists on affiliated foundations as a specific type of entity, in and of themselves. However, their formation has been some time in the making given the shifts that have occurred in the broader privatization movement with both formal (Smith, 2004) and informal interactions between public and nonprofit organizations (Gazley, 2008) for collective activity.

**Characteristics of affiliated foundations.** Affiliated foundations are not typically service providers; their missions tend to focus on bringing in additional financial resources that may not have otherwise been provided to the parent organization. The “parent” organization of an affiliated foundation tends to be a public entity that lacks the legal status or mechanism to accept tax-exempt donations and/or the goodwill and trust of those interested in providing additional resources (Smith, 2010). While affiliated foundations may have programs as part of their portfolio of work supporting the parent organization, service provision is not their primary purpose for existence.



Also unique, affiliated foundations serve to benefit a single entity, rather than seeking to serve multiple entities. This alleviates the need to pursue other “parent” organizations, expand a clientele, or compete to carry out their purpose. While affiliated foundations do not compete with other nonprofits in the commercial sense, they do focus on setting apart their work and role from their “parent” organization. Therefore, affiliated foundations may seek or gain greater independence from the “parent” organization (Smith, 2010) and pursue an identity of their own among outside stakeholders (Sosin, 2012). This makes the governance structures between the foundation and the parent organization an evolving and dynamic part of their relationship, as is the case with other nonprofits (Bovaird, 2004; Saidel, 2011; Salamon, 1995) and hybrid organizational forms (Skelcher, 2005).

How an affiliated foundation characterizes its relationship with its parent or partner organization is likely to influence other relationships or activities, including the means by which the nonprofit draws resources and support, outside donors, and other areas of advocacy and awareness. In this way, affiliated foundations may look similar to other nonprofits that build relationships with those in the communities where they serve (Connor, et al., 1999; Sosin, 2012), draw board members (Van Puyvelde, Caers, Du Bois, & Jegers, 2012), and attract donors (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). At the same time, affiliated foundations reverse the more traditionally observed relationship between government and nonprofits. Whereas nonprofits are typically contracted by government to provide a service or program and therefore gain funding and support from government contracts, affiliated foundations serve a charitable role as government-supporting nonprofits (Gazley, 2013).

While affiliated foundations are founded in partnership with a public or nonprofit entity, such as a public university or nonprofit hospital, in some cases other groups, organizations, and individuals may be involved in their creation as well (Smith, 2010). They may include business or community development groups working to support a municipal entity or special purpose district, such as a school district, port or airport authority, or water district. As a result, an affiliated foundation is designed to serve the needs, mission, or constituents of a single “parent” entity as a support organization. Acting to support another organization, the affiliated foundation relationship to its “parent” tends to include some shared decision-making and control. However, control is likely to vary depending on the nature of the relationship between the two organizations and the accountability structures in place.

**Structural model of the affiliated foundation relationship.** The primary relationship for the affiliated foundation is with the “parent”/partner organization. This relationship may be as basic as a nonprofit place-holder to accept donations to be passed along to the governmental entity or as dynamic as a public/nonprofit partnership, or collaboration. Since the affiliated foundation is a “sub” organization of sorts, we can hypothesize that the partnership is asymmetrical in terms of power, reputation, and resources (Galaskiewicz, 1985). First, the “parent” organization can continue to exist on its own without an affiliated foundation while the foundation has little purpose without the “parent” organization. Second, the “parent” organization is likely to initially be better known and perceived as having greater legitimacy in the eyes of external constituents. Third, the affiliated foundation will rarely be able to generate annual revenues on par with the “parent” organization (although affiliated foundation may develop assets that are

substantially larger than their annual revenue). Nevertheless, an affiliated foundation is established to support the “parent,” so we can predict that the parent organization will provide some initial legitimacy to the affiliated foundation in terms of resource support, public recognition, and a legal agreement or acceptance of the organization to connect the two entities within the existing institutional environment. The figure below illustrates the basic relationship between an affiliated foundation and its partner organization, reflecting the asymmetry between the two organizations and the ongoing process of mutual legitimation that occurs in an interorganizational relationship.

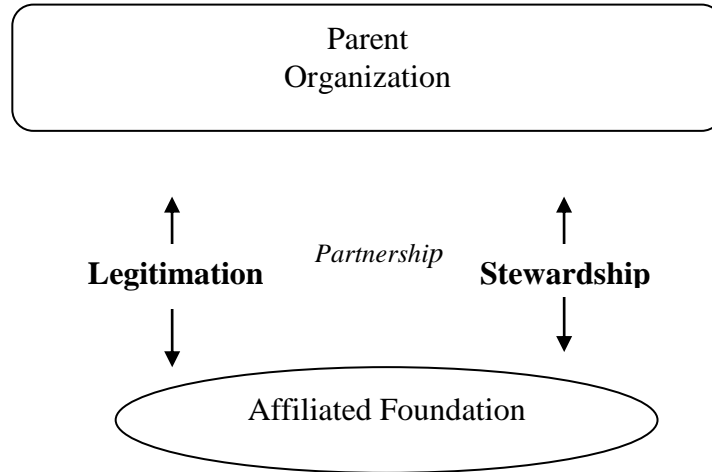


Figure 1. Model of affiliated foundations

To establish the role of an affiliated foundation with a larger entity requires that the “parent” organization make efforts to legitimize the foundation to stakeholders and donors. Legitimacy in the context of an institutionalized relationship with a nonprofit organization reflects “the approval that comes from producing socially approved goods and services or following socially approved procedures” (Sosin, 2012, p. 1234). Legitimacy not only serves to endorse the organization, but also serves to indicate

“ownership” of sorts by the “parent” organization, to signal the establishment of a public charity for the “parent” entity to outside stakeholders. As suggested above, affiliated foundations attract private resources where the “parent” entity may not have been able to given their legal status or relationships (or lack thereof) with potential donors. To that end, over time, the foundation may provide some legitimacy to the “parent” organization by encouraging donors to support the work, mission, or constituents of the “parent” entity.

On the right side of the model is stewardship, which is also central to interorganizational relations as resources are shared, missions are aligned, and impact is sought (Austin, 2000; Galaskiewicz, 1985). Therefore, we can hypothesize that the two organizations practice stewardship towards the other as each is meant to benefit from the work of the other. Stewardship theory suggests that rather than an agent pursuing its own motives and objectives, a steward will align with its principal organization and make decisions in its best interest (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997; Van Puyvelde, et al., 2012; Van Slyke, 2007). On the part of the “parent” entity, helping to establish and support the affiliated foundation will, in theory, result in the flow of resources and goodwill or stewardship. On the part of the affiliated foundation, practicing stewardship results in desired outcomes that include “attribution of organizational success [from the ‘parent’] to themselves” which “contributes to their self-image and self-concept” (Van Puyvelde, et al., 2012, p. 436). In other words, being good stewards of the other organization is mutually beneficial to both organizations.

Finally, as reflected in the middle of the model is *partnership*, which we might expect to have different facets depending on the structure and relationship of the two

organizations. In this study, *partnership* will be defined as a collaborative effort on the part of two independent organizations which “joins resources to identify and subsequently pursue a joint approach to solving one or more common problems” (Kapucu, 2006, p. 207). In other words, both organizations engage in the process of creating a *partnership*. In addition, a primary intent and outcome of a *partnership* between two different organizations is alignment. Alignment captures the ongoing process of matching resources and efforts toward a common objective, a parallel objective, or even an emerging objective not currently shared by both organizations (Van Slyke, 2007). We can hypothesize that alignment is influenced by how the two organizations focus their attention and efforts in developing their organizational *partnership*. As the “parent” organization and affiliated foundation pursue a partnering relationship, we can hypothesize that their work involves coping with changes in leadership in one or both organizations, managing or responding to shifts in the policy or social environment in which the organizations operate, and adjustments to organizational learning that takes place. In all, the model of the affiliated foundation/”parent” relationship reflects ongoing processes to build a *partnership* and pursue alignment between two organizations.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I argue that privatization led to newer organizational forms and relationships between the public, private for-profit, and private nonprofit sectors. As a result, both governance and network governance have come to characterize cross-sector activities in service to public issues or challenges. When considering the government/nonprofit relationship specifically, and public-private partnerships more

broadly, research focuses on a service-based relationship where contracting and competition are foremost. However, affiliated foundations are characterized by a different type of relationship between government and nonprofits based on exclusivity, charitable resource generation, and cooperative efforts. Drawing on existing research related to nonprofit structures and cooperation, this research conceptualizes the relationship between an affiliated foundation and the parent organization using the context of local education foundations. In chapter three, local education foundations and their existence within public education are explored in the context of the Florida education system.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODS

To extend our understanding of government/nonprofit relations outside of the context of contracting and competition, this research looks at organizational relationships on the basis of cooperation between an affiliated foundation and a partner, governmental organization. Specifically, my research considers how affiliated foundations carry out their work in the context of K-12 education, drawing on local education foundations and their organizational relationship with the school district. The primary focus of this research is how an independent but affiliated foundation engages with a public entity when cooperation and partnership comprise the basis of the relationship. In this chapter I will first provide an overview of the context of public education, privatization in education, and newer organizational relationships that have resulted. One newer organization includes the local education foundation, which has developed some specific qualities since being created in the early 1980s. The final sections provide a detailed account of my research design, context, and methods used to conduct interviews and data analysis.

#### **Privatization in Education**

Similar to other areas of government service and provision, environmental and budgetary constraints have motivated a greater degree of interorganizational relationships and structures (Bryson, et al., 2006) in public education (Sunderman, 2010). This section explores the different ways in which resource constraints and demand for excellence in public education motivated the proliferation of privatization practices within education. Through a review of privatization in public education, we are able to see how affiliated

foundations in education are a response to multiple environmental, political, and social challenges that have motivated partnerships, private resource generation, and cross-sector collaborations.

Public education became a useful context for illustrating how privatization extends beyond contracting out to include other practices and “logics” of privatizing services, resources, and decision making of public services. Since the initiation of the broader *privatization movement* in the 1980s, business and public education have been increasingly intertwined at the federal, state, and local levels of government (Sunderman, 2010). While this has usually taken the form of contracting out instructional and non-instructional services, management services for school district administration, and services related to testing and accountability, it has also included less traditional activities. For example, school districts have engaged in contracting for consulting services and establishing district advisory groups consisting of local or national vendors (Sunderman, 2010). Other examples include disinvestment (Donahue, 1991; Foglesong & Wolfe, 1989; Kahn & Minnich, 2005; Megginson & Netter, 2001; Self & Peacock, 1993); liberalization and opening competition (Starr, 1987); vouchers (Butler, 1991; Kahn & Minnich, 2005; Moe, 1987); incorporation of private sector management practices (Cheung, 1997; Kettl, 2005); public-private partnerships (Wettenhall, 2003); and nonprofit collaboration (Feiock & Andrew, 2006; Kapucu, 2006; Ostrander, 1987; Selsky & Parker, 2005). These practices came about in the early 1970s and 1980s when state education budgets were reduced while state-sponsored property tax limits were implemented, resulting in increased pressure on school systems to do more with less (De Luna, 1998). In line with the overall purpose of privatization to shrink government,



policies focused on reducing and restricting educational budgets resulted in a form of disinvestment in public education. The practice of disinvestment involves reducing or removing public funds from public services so that private entities can take over the service (Kahn & Minnich, 2005). As a result of funding retraction in education, other forms of privatization followed. School systems worked to rationally manage expectations for excellence while coping with a reduction in resources by turning to private and nonprofit actors (Sunderman, 2010) through increased liberalization.

Liberalization in education occurs through a combination of charter schools and vouchers that have facilitated increased competition for students. While liberalization tends to be associated with the practice of selling off assets and subjecting public services to competition in an open market, it may also include deregulating an industry to allow for greater competition (Starr, 1987). School vouchers are used to facilitate a more open market for education services (Sunderman, 2010), whereby parents and students can access either public or private education providers using public dollars. Vouchers allow students to use public dollars in other educational settings, therefore increasing competition among providers of education services. Charter schools are similarly argued to enhance a market for public education by being relieved of some accountability measures for students and administration required for traditional public schools. In being relieved of some regulations, charters provide an alternative option for public school students within the public education system (Chubb & Moe, 1991; Sunderman, 2010). The combination of disinvestment and liberalization has resulted in a greater number of private and nonprofit actors involved in the services of public education or the

alternatives to public education. At the same time, privatization has also made way for private sector management practices in public education.

With tighter educational budgets, a reduction in resources, and increased competition for students, public education has sought to improve administration and performance of schools through the incorporation of private-sector management practices. Through newer models of performance measurement for teachers, principals, superintendents, and students, public school systems have incorporated systematic evaluation and accountability measures (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). Part of measuring performance includes differentiating compensation for levels of performance (Apple, 2004) by designing systems of performance management, which are frequently seen in teacher/principal/superintendent pay-for-performance models designed and managed by contracted, private companies (Sunderman, 2010). As a form of privatization, managing performance through the incorporation of private sector management practices becomes a mechanism for operating schools and regulating student and teacher performance (Apple, 2004; Ball, 2007; Starr, 1987).

In addition, schools and districts have moved towards marketing practices within public education that encourage explicit communication of service differentiation from other nearby districts, service differentiation within a district (e.g. magnet, charter, and traditional public schools), and competition and marketing for substantial financial donations and grants from both other public and private entities (Lubienski, 2005). These practices have coincided with the “logic” of privatization seen in public education and other areas of the public sector.

## **The “Logic” of Privatization in Education**

To this point, privatization in education is reflected through a number of practices. However, the literature captures other dimensions of privatization that have taken place over time as part of the larger privatization movement within education. The different dimensions are characterized by “a fusion of public and private values, rhetoric and approaches” (Aman Jr, 2005), extending the “logic” of privatization to include influence, decision making, and resources.

In the context of privatization and reform in education, the conversation taking place is “increasingly, indeed perhaps exclusively, spoken of within policy in terms of its economic value and its contribution to international market competitiveness” (Ball, 2007, p. 185). In turn, educational failures are framed pragmatically as economic liabilities (Ball, 2007), drawing the attention of the private sector interested in shaping a future workforce (Fitz & Beers, 2002). The combination of underperforming schools, decreasing education budgets, and increased accountability mechanisms in public schools has increased motivation and rationale by private actors to provide financial support for public education (Addonizio, 2000). For better or worse, the desire for educational excellence is tied to the greater objective of economic stability and prosperity within the United States (Apple, 2004; Sunderman, 2010). School reform, therefore, has become a priority in both the public and private sphere, which has resulted in each having a stake in supporting or reforming the systems and processes of educating a nation (Ball, 2007; Greene, 2005; Sunderman, 2010).

By supporting public education, actors in the public and private sectors are progressively more connected in their efforts to educate students (Fitz & Beers, 2002).

The pressure for schools to perform better with fewer public resources creates a purposeful relationship between the public, private for-profit, and private nonprofit sectors (Addonizio, 2000). Financially constrained public school systems have sought and accepted private support for local education through partnerships with private corporations and local businesses, as well as through charitable giving from nonprofits and foundations (Addonizio, 2000; Hess, 2005). Independent and corporate foundations support public schools with financial resources, research, advocacy, and support for alternatives to public schools (Colvin, 2005; Marx, 1999; Saltman, 2010; Wulfson, 2001). The funding and engagement of private foundations (independent and corporate) and their financial resources in public education (Colvin, 2005) contribute to the private funding and influence within educational systems. Philanthropic foundations represent a subset of the nonprofit sector that is highly subsidized by government through substantial tax breaks (Fleishman, 2009), demonstrating government's belief in the ability of foundations to reinforce the goals of government through private financial support and programming initiatives (Brody & Tyler, 2009). In providing a tax break, there is public reinforcement of the value of private dollars and private engagement in public education. Therefore, when grantmaking foundations provide resources to public schools or school districts, this results in a merging of public and private values (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002).

Within the overall privatization movement, decision making may be privatized, whereby democratic processes for making collective decisions are replaced by market or other technical solutions and approaches (Ball, 2007; Jessop, 2002). Jessop suggests that as traditional public decision making power from citizens and legislative representatives

is diluted (through the use of market or technical solutions), a shift in governance “could enhance the state’s capacity to project its influence and secure its objectives by mobilizing knowledge and power resources from influential non-governmental partners and stakeholders” (2002, p. 199). Through charter schools, voucher programs, education management organizations, and school boards managed by elected or appointed officials, traditional governance structures in education are moving away from exclusively hierarchal, bureaucratic structures run by elected school boards (Roelofs, 2007; Sunderman, 2010). Structural changes that include private for-profit and private nonprofit actors reflect larger shifts in the governance of public sector services and administration (Farazmand, 1999; Starr, 1987) whereby increasingly nonpublic actors are charged with influencing and impacting decisions within public institutions.

Another dimension of privatized decision making within education exists in the *Race to the Top* grants that encourage innovative partnerships between state education agencies and private education contractors. In fact, the system of public education at the local, state, and federal levels increasingly mixes private for-profit actors, private non-profit actors, and public nonprofits actors into the everyday governance of public schools and instruction (Sunderman, 2010). For example, when private contractors are hired to collaborate with district officials on any number of school functions, then contractors obtain “more decision-making authority over regular district functions” and choices are made on what may be of greater emphasis (e.g. teacher performance measures, the content of supplemental education services) and how curriculum interventions are designed (Sunderman, 2010, p. 242). So while some interest intermediation gains traction from the awareness of engaged private actors, it also increasingly places the

impetus for control and decision making in the hands of essentially private actors, privatizing some aspects of decision making, control, and resources.

### **Newer Organizations in Public Education**

Within education, public-nonprofit partnerships include local education foundations, where public, private, and nonprofit sectors converge. While local education foundations may not fall into the traditional view of public-private partnerships where service-based arrangements are made between a public and private actor (Wettenhall, 2003), they do fall into the broader phenomenon of public and private cooperation for a shared goal (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002). Given their history in the U.S. and the development of local education foundations over time, their existence alongside school districts most closely reflects a public-nonprofit partnership (Kapucu, 2006) in the structure of an affiliated foundation. The next section explores the role of LEFs over time and across contexts to illustrate their characteristics as an affiliated foundation.

### **Local Education Foundations**

Privatization in public education is a response to the decline in school performance within public school systems across the country. Both public and nonprofit actors have more readily engaged in public education by providing additional services, resources, and innovations in how education is structured and delivered. The efforts of newer actors in education have not eclipsed or reduced the role of local nonprofit support for public schools that has occurred for some time through parent-teacher associations (PTAs), booster clubs, and individual fundraising organizations dedicated to one or more schools (Colvin, 2005).

At the same time, charitable support for public education continues to occur through corporate or business sponsorships of individual schools, one-time or ongoing donations from grantmaking foundations to school districts, and volunteer support from local groups, businesses, or nonprofit organizations. The traditional mechanisms for supporting public education through private and nonprofit actors tend to include some combination of funding, resources, or volunteers for individual schools or entire school districts. While school-based fundraising is one way to attract private resources and support for education, broader support for entire school districts is becoming more common as needs are more systematic across public education (Colvin, 2005). Local education foundations, being nonprofits that mediate private resources and partnerships in public education, provide one mechanism through which public and private interests can support the other, combine resources in programming, and extend the use of financial donations (Else, 2013).

Local education foundations are “nonprofit, independent, community-based school reform organizations that seek to improve student achievement for all children through partnerships with local school districts” (Raphael & Anderson, 2001, p. 8). Like most nonprofits, LEFs were established because of a perceived need within public education for additional resources and community support for public schools (Addonizio, 2000; De Luna, 1998). Many LEFs were started in the 1980s when public schools were faced with budget shortfalls at a time when overall public education was characterized by a decline in the quality of public schools (Bartlett, et al., 2002; De Luna, 1998). As vehicles for business and community engagement and resources in public education, local education foundations are often created and administered at the local level by those in the

immediate community (Brent & Pijanowski, 2003; Merz & Frankel, 1995). While LEFs may be created to serve one or several schools within a district, most local education foundations are created to serve an entire school district (Else, 2013) as an affiliated foundation (Smith, 2010).

Within many communities, LEFs are established by the school district as a department or employee function with some support from others outside school district leadership (McCormick, Bauer, & Ferguson, 2001). In other cases, business and community groups partner with school district representatives to create LEFs through cooperative efforts (Muro, 1995). LEFs may also be started independent of the school district by individuals and organizations (e.g. community foundation, Chamber of Commerce) interested in supporting the school district (Raphael & Anderson, 2002). Over time, local education foundations may develop their role in the communities they serve and foster relationships with newer stakeholders by forming partnerships and collaborations with schools, entire districts, communities, and other partner organizations. Therefore, as locally-based nonprofit collaborations between the school district and some facet(s) of the community (Raphael & Anderson, 2001), LEFs necessarily pursue organizational relationships with key stakeholder groups, including the school district leadership, members of the community, and donors.

In legal terms, LEFs are public charities that solicit and accept donations intended to improve or support schools, on behalf of or in service to a school district. In this way, they are affiliated foundations within public education. Their perceived advantage lies in the ability to garner private support and resources from within the community, to be used throughout the community served by the school district (Brent,



2002). In practice, however, LEFs may do more than attract and hold private donations. They generate funds for teaching awards and recognition programs, provide grants for classroom-based initiatives or innovations, and give out scholarships for students seeking post secondary education (Else, 2013; Havens, 2001). Another role that LEFs carryout is the establishment of partnerships with outside groups to work in local schools, provide consulting services to school districts seeking to make changes in district management practices, or carryout on-going initiatives for students (Fleming, 2012; Merz & Frankel, 1995). Partnership arrangements involve corporate philanthropic foundations, community foundations, and other donors that are interested in supporting schools in a specific community. Partnerships tend to result in financial resources, supplies and materials, or volunteer time on a regular or longer term basis for the purpose of advancing the goal to improve public schools. For charitable endeavors within public education, the local education foundation provides the institutional mechanism to cultivate relationships with outside private entities interested in philanthropy and giving back to the community. In this way they act as an intermediary of sorts, facilitating tax-deductible donations and outside engagement in public education at the local level.

Another characteristic of LEFs is the opportunity to participate in education policy advocacy and awareness at the local and state level of policymaking. LEFs with a focus on policy and change within the systems of education may encourage financial giving that impacts local educational policies or outcomes, improves school district operations, or changes the culture or perception of public education within schools and the community. In this case, a local education foundation serves as a conduit for connecting those in the surrounding community interested in facilitating systemic change

with school district leadership. In all, local education foundations provide a rich example and context for studying affiliated foundations in the public sector.

### **Research Design**

To explore the concept of alignment in affiliated foundations, this research uses a multiple-case narrative design (Shkedi, 2005). The multiple-case narrative is similar to a collective case study in that it draws data from several cases to address a research question. However, it is different in that a purposeful selection of cases are identified with which to primarily conduct interviews, but also to gather observations and review relevant documents and other written or printed materials (Shkedi, 2005). The use of a multi-case narrative design is motivated by the need to include case narratives that are representative of organizational relationships based on differences across local education foundations in three areas of engagement: with the school district, in the community, and in relation to education policy. By purposely selecting cases, specific narratives provide a way to understand in-depth, organizational relationships, and dimensions of partnership. To that end, three specific LEF cases were identified based on initial indicators of engagement in the three areas to serve as instrumental cases (Shkedi, 2005) of relationship with the school district.

Instrumental case studies provide “some kind of generalization...based on their potential to be representative” of a type or group (Shkedi, 2005, p. 21), rather than the intrinsic case that serves the role of being informative about that specific case or individual (Stake, 1995). In other words, “by studying the uniqueness of the particular, we come to understand the universal” through an instrumental case (Simons, 1996, p. 229). Three in-depth case studies of local education foundations were conducted as a

way of illustrating a spectrum of relationships with the school district. Fifteen other LEFs were identified as intrinsic case studies (Stake, 1995) in order to account for differences in LEF and school district size, geographic location, and other substantive school district characteristics found across the population of LEFs (e.g. urban vs. rural). I selected cases from the population of local education foundations in Florida that serve a single school district. Florida has a rich environment for local education foundations, as well as dynamic state education policy reforms and geographically-bounded school districts that serve the communities where local education foundations carry out their missions.

### **Florida LEFs**

Local education foundations began forming across the country in the early 1980s in response to declining public funds and school finance equalization laws that imposed local property tax limits on school districts (De Luna, 1998). School and district level education foundations were primarily started in New York and California because of substantial changes to education finance formulas. However, other states also experienced a rise in the number of local education foundations due to overall shrinking budgets and increased pressure on schools to improve educational performance (Else, 2013). While local education foundations can serve individual schools or entire school districts, Florida lawmakers made a specific effort to encourage district-level foundations that would foster a broader perspective on the needs of schools within a district. In 1984 state representatives passed legislation that allowed for the establishment of a single direct-support nonprofit organization in each school district (FSS 1001.453). Through this legislation, all 67 county-wide school districts could, and most did, establish a local

education foundation modeled after foundations in higher education (e.g. university foundations or development offices).

Over time, LEFs in Florida began “raising funds to support and recognize students, teachers, and schools where budgets fall short and tax dollars don’t allow” (CFEF, 2011b, p. 1). In 1992, leaders of local foundations in Florida worked together to establish a *Consortium of Florida Education Foundations* (CFEF) to encourage sharing of ideas, hold annual conferences, and help lobby to pass a “support education” license plate that directed sales revenue to local education foundations throughout the state. In 2000, through the work of Consortium leaders, the School District Education Foundation Matching Grant Program was established by the Florida legislature to match dollar-for-dollar donations up to a specified amount for specific programs developed by local education foundations to support “low performing students” within school districts (Florida School Improvement & Academic Achievement Fund, FSS 236.1229). During the first year of the matching program, legislators approved an \$800,000 budget that over time has risen to as much as \$7 million, but is currently set at \$4 million (CFEF, 2014). Approved as a legislative line item, the funding amount can change year-to-year based on budget approval. Currently, there are approximately 60 active local education foundations in Florida serving a single school district through fundraising and other efforts to engage the community. While some LEFs are more active and visible than others, most are considered operating and active when they join the Consortium and/or work to participate in the Grants Matching Program.

In 2009, the CFEF created a separate, associated nonprofit entity called *The Voice of Florida Business in Education (The Voice)*. This group is comprised of one or more

representatives from each of the member education foundations whose purpose is to collectively weigh-in on “‘hot topics’ in K-12 education policy as a...group committed to increasing student achievement through increased private sector investment and involvement” (CFEF, 2011b). The Voice holds an annual meeting of members and conducts surveys of LEF board members that are shared with state education leaders and policymakers. By facilitating communication between businesses and lawmakers, this is another way LEFs in Florida connect both local and state-wide perspectives on public education.

My study focuses on 47 of the 56 local education foundations who were members of the CFEF in 2011 and completed the membership survey (CFEF, 2011a)<sup>1</sup>. One of the primary advantages of focusing on local education foundations in Florida is that they are easily identifiable in being associated with a single school district and having membership in the Consortium. In the past, research on local education foundations has been complicated by their status as 501(c)(3) nonprofits that could serve a school, group of schools, or entire school district (Brent, 2002). LEFs were difficult to identify, much less compare across the contexts of serving a single versus many schools or an entire school district. The local education foundations that comprise the population in Florida serve in a one-to-one relationship. Further, in Florida school districts are designated at the county level; therefore, each county has a school district and the majority of school districts have a designated local education foundation associated with the district. The local education foundations that are members of the Consortium serve nearly 2.6 million students and 295,000 educators throughout the state (CFEF, 2011a).

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<sup>1</sup> The membership survey completion rate was approximately 85 percent. Some members did not complete the survey due to organizational inactivity.

Finally, Florida is a state that has embraced a number of education policy reforms around school evaluations, charter school and on-line education alternatives to public schools, and, most recently in 2013 and 2014, the implementation of the Common Core Standards. There is also an increased focus on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education and training for students, as well as providing both college prep and career training programs for high school students in an effort to improve high school graduation rates. In other words, the Consortium and member LEFs have necessarily adapted to the changing needs in schools districts and schools as newer or changing policies have been implemented.

### **Population Characteristics**

Florida LEFs have diverse organizational characteristics, and operate in different school district contexts. The school districts served by local education foundations in Florida reside in counties that range in size from 240 square miles to a little over 2,000 square miles. Figure 2 shows school districts/counties in Florida as well as the presence of a local education foundation. Counties marked with an X did not have a local education foundation in 2011. Counties with a black line in them had a local education foundation, but it was not a member of the Consortium in 2012. All other counties have an LEF and they are members of the Consortium.

Organizational characteristics were identified through the 2011 membership survey of the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations (CFEF, 2011a). On average, LEFs in Florida have been in operation for 22 years, with some as long as 29 years and one as short as a year. LEFs serve anywhere from 1,000 to over 350,000 students within a

school district, and anywhere from 8,300 to nearly 2.5 million people within a single county.

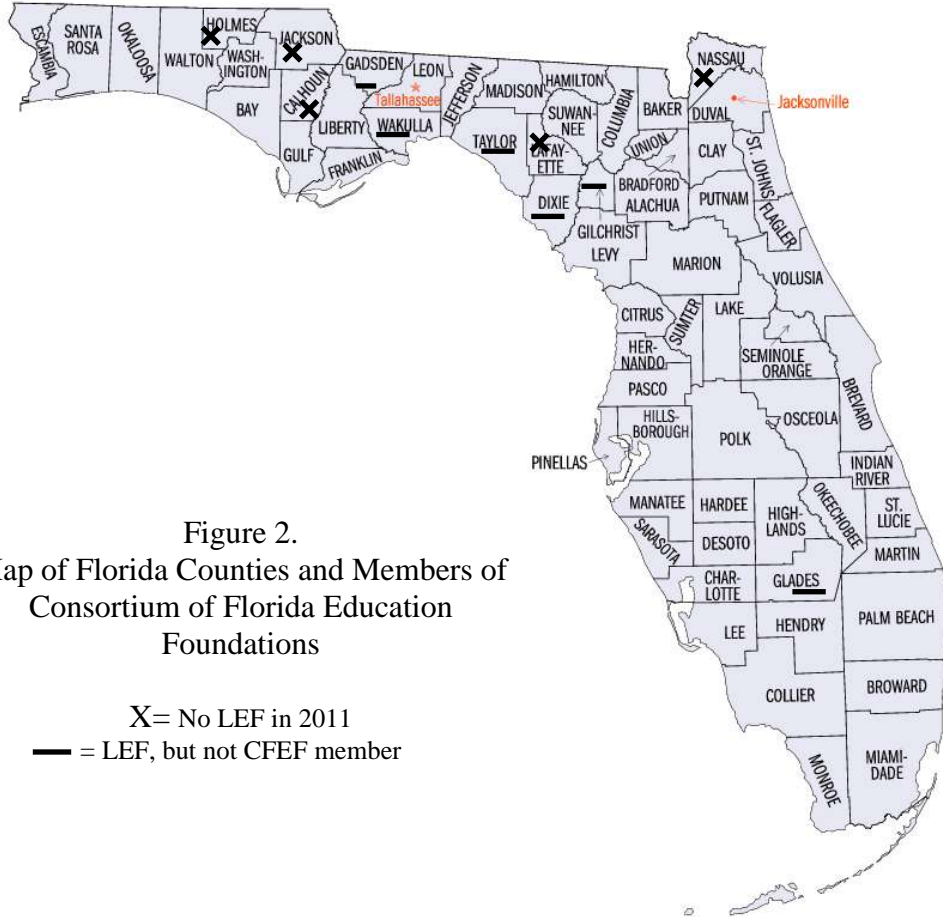


Figure 2.  
Map of Florida Counties and Members of Consortium of Florida Education Foundations

X= No LEF in 2011  
 — = LEF, but not CFEF member

LEFs have an average of 23 board members, the majority of whom are individuals from the private sector. This can, and often does, include representatives from school district vendors. Close to 75 percent of the local education foundations serve as a direct-support to the school district, which often means different things to each LEF. However, being a *direct-support* LEF generally characterizes the role in serving the school district with greater consideration for school district needs and the potential for more support from the district (e.g. financial, office space, in-kind benefits). Even though most LEFs

have a direct support designation and are therefore more closely associated with the school district, they still operate under the direction of a nonprofit board that maintains authority over resources and resource use.

For the school year of 2010-2011, LEFs reported median revenue of \$366,280, with the largest earning LEF reporting \$7 million in revenue. In total throughout the state, LEF revenues translate into a median of \$14.37 per student, and an average of \$20.28 per student. Overall, local education revenues represent on average one-third of a percent of total school district revenue (state and local dollars), and about half of one percent of total local revenues of the school district. Revenue numbers reported by LEFs include donations, grants, and where applicable, private grant dollars managed by the LEF and passed through to the school district. Corporations tend to be the largest revenue sources (25 percent on average), followed by government, individual donations, other private foundation support, and in-kind donations from multiple sources. The majority of program expenditures go to student scholarships and classroom or school grants for teachers. A few LEFs spend substantial program expenditures on teacher supply stores that benefit teachers in Title I schools with donated school supplies. Approximately 57 percent of foundations indicate that they do not currently serve charter schools directly. Of the foundations within this study, nearly 80 percent are in a school district where 50 percent or more of students are in the free and reduced lunch program.

When looking at mission statements, LEFs tend to emphasize serving students, supporting excellence in education, and encouraging community and business investment in education. The most common programs and services carried out by local education foundations include teacher grants, low-income student scholarships for post-secondary



education, and teacher school supply stores. Some of the more innovative foundations provide policy awareness and advocacy programs for parents, partner with the college access networks to address high schools with above average drop-out rates, plan and implement timely community lecture series, collect and organize homeless student clothing supplies, implement partnership programs with a local hospital district for student career shadowing, building and running a Biz Town for school field trips, and holding a charter for running multiple charter schools within the district. In all, the work and role of LEFs is quite varied and often reflects the type of engagement and relationship carried out with the school district and the broader community, as well as the influence of policy on their work.

### **Case Selection**

Based on the population of local education foundations in Florida it was important to have a case selection strategy to identify cases that would be representative of different relationships and positions relative to different stakeholders, as well as school district contexts. To begin, three pilot interviews were conducted with representatives from Florida's local education foundations. These interviews were exploratory and informal, and served the purpose of introducing this study to the leadership of the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations and gaining some understanding of the context of local education foundations in Florida. Interviews were conducted by phone in early December of 2012, and included the existing and former executive director of the Consortium and the Chair of the Board of the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations for 2012, an executive director of a local education foundation. Based on these interviews some initial research propositions were developed around the different

types of education foundations throughout Florida. Further, interviewees detailed the different types of LEFs that could be found in Florida, those closer to and further from the school district they serve. With this in mind, I sought to determine those foundations with rich contexts for understanding relationships based on the three areas of engagement, as well as those LEFs that could be representative of different foundation contexts (e.g. rural vs. urban, large vs. small school districts, wealthier vs. lower income school districts).

As a follow-up to the pilot interviews, I consulted survey data from the 2011 Consortium of Florida Education Foundations (CFEF) Membership Survey. The survey consists of 62 questions broken into six sections: 1) an overview of the LEF, 2) organizational characteristics, 3) board make-up and structure, 4) staffing patterns, 5) revenue and assets, and 6) questions on the value of CFEF membership. Additional school district characteristics were added to membership survey data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the U.S. Census report on Federal, State, and Local Government: Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data (2011), the Great Schools website ([greatschools.org](http://greatschools.org)), as well as county-level data from the American Community Survey from 2012. This allowed me to consider variation across school districts and counties in terms of school district size, revenue, student demographics, and within-county income disparity. By using these data to select cases, I was able to consider representativeness of cases beyond the relationship to the school district. Using these data, LEFs were assessed for position in the three areas based on a number of criteria in the survey as well as reviews of foundation websites. Cases were therefore selected with consideration for survey, school district, and county characteristics.

In all, 47 local education foundations responded to the CFEF annual membership survey. From these 47, I identified “ideal-type” cases to represent a foundation embedded in the school district, a foundation well-established in the community, and a foundation focused on education policy advocacy and awareness.

Instrumental Case Selection Criteria	Rationale
Direct-support	Direct support LEFs work exclusively for the district and are considered much less autonomous. Non direct-support LEFs have greater independence from school district decision-making and control.
In-kind benefits	In-kind support from the school district suggests a closer relationship between the two organizations and support for the work of the LEF.
Program expenditures	Program expenditures spent on programs within the school district are compared to programs that reach out to the community, including policy awareness or information, and programs for those outside the school district.
Office location	LEFs with offices inside the school district may work more closely with the school district, while those with separate offices have greater connection to the community or other organizations.
Website	LEFs with websites originating from the school district website suggest great connection to the district, compared to those foundations that have independent websites not accessed through the school district website.
Programming/outreach	Websites were reviewed for information on special events and current or future programs geared towards stakeholders outside the school district. Those foundations focused on engaging others are less embedded with the school district.
Community mindedness	Websites were reviewed for ease of accessibility, including ways for those outside the school district to get information on the foundation, participate in foundation events, provide donations, and gain access to information about schools and performance. In other words, was the website also a tool for those in the community?

Table 1. Case Selection Criteria

In order to identify local education foundations that would represent these categories, I considered the indicators in Table 1 that were gleaned from a combination of survey data and website review, with some consideration for geography and school

district characteristics. After the three primary cases were identified, I sought additional cases that would also be representative of LEFs across the state. These choices were made with some consideration to geography and proximity to the three primary cases allow for in-person visits to LEF offices and conduct as many interviews in person as time and resources permitted.

### **Recruitment and Interviews**

After cases were identified, I solicited participation from LEFs for interviews to be conducted in-person during the months of June and July, 2013. In order to introduce myself and this research, I asked the Board Chair of the CFEF to send out an initial email that I composed about my research to the executive directors of the member organizations. For the instrumental case study sites, I followed up with a personal email to the executive directors, asking for a phone meeting to explain in greater detail my research and interest in interviewing multiple individuals associated with the LEF. Following the phone meetings, one of the case study sites helped to set up meetings for me with several LEF board members, a school district representative, and a member of the community associated with the foundation but not on the board. The other two case study sites set up a meeting time for me with the executive director and some board members when possible, while making suggestions on board members, school district representatives, and a community member that I could request an interview with through personal email.

After setting up the three instrumental cases, I sent individual emails to the executive directors of the other LEFs identified. I requested a time to meet with them on specific dates I planned to be in their area. In the email, I included a general overview of

the research and interviews. I included an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved information letter in all emails that indicated the interviews would take approximately 45 to 50 minutes and would be recorded for transcription, unless they preferred not to be recorded. The ten-question interview protocol was shared with participants who asked for the questions ahead of time; however, most individuals did not see the questions beforehand. My intent was for interviews to be semi-structured, in-depth accounts of relationships and position in the three areas; therefore, I wanted to ensure that I could follow-up on answers as needed. By not sharing the questions ahead of time, I felt that I could be more responsive to what individuals were sharing in their accounts as they would feel less bounded by the questions I posed. Shortly after I began conducting in person interviews in June 2013, I participated in the annual meeting of the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations, where I presented a brief overview of my study to member LEFs in attendance.

My interviews were gathered from a total of 18 different local education foundations and 40 total individuals that included LEF executive directors, LEF board members, school district representatives (school board member or superintendent), community members, LEF staff, and Consortium of Florida Education Foundation leaders. Most interviews were with a single person; however, three interviews were with two or more individuals. The majority of the 36 interviews conducted were between 50 to 60 minutes long; however, the longest interview was approximately 130 minutes and the shortest was 24 minutes. When interviews could not be scheduled in person, phone interviews were conducted. A total of eight phone interviews were conducted.

When possible, I made notes during the interviews, but since all but one interview was recorded, I typically took any pertinent notes immediately after the interview ended. I relied on the digital recordings of the interviews to review participant answers as well as to make additional notes about interviewees. All interviews were transcribed by a third-party service that allowed for coding, analysis, and comparisons across cases.

### **Case Study Data and Analysis**

Interviews served as the primary source of data for my cases analysis, but other written and marketing materials were gathered at case study sites that were used alongside website reviews and survey data to enhance the narratives and provide some triangulation of data. After the interviews were completed, digital recordings were transcribed and used in the online qualitative analysis software program *Dedoose*.

Although my analysis began with the survey data (which informed my case selection) the interviews served as the primary source of data for analysis. My interview questions were designed to capture three areas of engagement that are primary for local education foundations. These areas were derived from existing research on LEFs and the pilot interviews where individuals spoke about the work and relationships of local education foundations. Some interviews closely followed the interview protocol as designed, while others moved around among questions or skipped questions entirely if the answer was provided within another answer. The most common way interviewees answered questions was by first describing their perceptions and using stories or specific examples to illustrate their meaning. In other words, the majority of participants communicated using detailed examples, making the interview content quite varied and interview-specific. While the interview protocol content was consistent, answers were

sometimes given at different points throughout the interview, consistent with the semi-structured interview method.

My case analysis made use of a three part strategy to understand LEF and school district relationships in my case studies first, then among like cases relative to position area (closer to the school district, within the community, engage in policy), and then across all cases regardless of position area. Given the in-depth content of the interviews and my need to understand different types of relationships, I first focused on the interviews within each of my instrumental case studies. My coding strategy within the case studies was motivated by my need to understand the nature of the relationships being described across the different people describing them. In other words, I derived qualitative codes based on the content of interviews to determine the characteristics and consistency of the descriptions provided by different interviewees.

For initial coding and analysis of the interviews with other foundation directors, I loosely categorized foundations by engagement area to compare codes with the coding used in the instrumental case positioned in the same area. This was done to first compare like cases with the instrumental case chosen to illustrate the area of engagement to identify any meaningful patterns that emerged across the grouped cases. In the process of coding the like cases in each area, I noticed patterns of coding that were applicable across foundations, regardless of where I had categorized them. In other words, I was repeating my codes even in different position areas. It was at this point that I moved away from the three position areas to look across all cases and interviews to start my first round of cross-case coding (Meyer, 2001).

I began my first round of coding (Saldaña, 2013) and analysis of all cases with some consideration for concepts related to government/nonprofit relations, public-private partnerships, and cross-sector collaborations. This included concepts such as *alignment*, *cooperation*, *tension*, *trust*, *communication*, and *implementation*. However, I also used in-vivo coding where interviewees provided useful descriptions of common themes, such as interdependence, interference, moving target, change is hard, and provide cover. While some codes may be standalone concepts found in other research on government/nonprofit relations, as used in my study, they were inductively generated from the interview data rather than a specific orientation, theory, or framework (Creswell, 2009).

Second round coding (Saldaña, 2013) resulted from patterns that emerged in first round coding where interviewees tended to focus on five major categories to characterize their relationship with the school district: the role of the LEF in serving the school district, the mission and values of the organization, characterizations of the activities and programs carried out by the LEF, the description of the relationship to the school district, community, and other specific stakeholders, and the use of resources and assets related to the LEFs current and future work. The second round coding was an iterative process of refining codes from narrower descriptions to broader categories as meaningful patterns were identified (Yin, 2009). Some codes were combined and some were not used as much during second round coding. The categories and codes that were used during the second round of the analysis were also inductively derived using Creswell's (2009) recommendations for "building patterns, categories, and themes" from the bottom up (p. 175). Using the five categorical structures in place during second round coding, my



analysis focused on the broader themes derived from within the categories. Based on these themes, I reorganized codes into the concepts related to the dimensions of partnership in affiliated foundations. In other words, in the final stages of analysis, cases were examined thematically without concern for their position area or school district contexts. Yin (Yin, 2009) characterizes this process as iterative explanation building by coding, recoding, and grouping codes into more meaningful categories.

Table 2 provides the primary results of the coding process around the dimensions of partnership. The table shows the four dimensions and list of codes that contributed to these dimensions from the analysis of interviews across the 18 cases.

Dimensions of Partnership	Associated Codes
Attention	School district relationship, focus, attention, cooperation, disconnected, LEF role, meet needs, funding, resources, intermediary
Successive Engagement	School district relationship, strategy, position, entrepreneurial, partnership, proactive, activities moving forward, one time initiative, collaboration
Resource Infusion	LEF role, engagement, funding, conduit, goodwill, intermediary, opportunity, mediating, partnerships
Positional Identity	Identity, interdependence, governance, schools, teachers, principals business community, evolution of foundation, beliefs, philosophy/approach

Table 2. Dimensions of Partnership

These dimensions are illustrated in greater detail in Chapter Five. Where applicable in Chapter Five, specific coding patterns will be referenced to validate the use of the code in relation to a specific dimension. In the next chapter, I present the three instrumental cases that illustrate the spectrum of LEF relationships with the school district that were also used as primary reference points in initial coding and

categorization. Through these cases I am able to characterize different roles and relationships across LEFs and school districts.

## CHAPTER 4

### LOCAL EDUCATION FOUNDATIONS:

#### DOWN THE HALL, ACROSS TOWN, AND OUT TO SEA

I began this research with some initial understanding of local education foundations and the areas where they most often interact with those outside the organization. Some of my considerations came out of the pilot interviews with foundation directors, while others came out of studies that describe local education foundations or investigate specific characteristics of local education foundations. As affiliated foundations, LEFs' natural partner, primary organizational relationship, and foremost area of engagement are with the school district. Similar to other nonprofits, LEFs also engage with the community in which they draw resources and support. Oftentimes, this includes different facets of the community, including local businesses, corporate leaders, and philanthropists. Less common, but still relevant, is how local education foundations engage or respond to educational issues at the local or state level. With these three areas being central to local education foundations, this chapter details representative case studies to illustrate organizational relationships in these areas.

As described in the third chapter, the cases were selected for their ability to be instrumental in understanding how LEFs position in the areas of focus. I use five categories that come out of the interview analysis and coding process to characterize the cases. Interviewees reflect their relative area of engagement based on their work and relationship with the "parent" organization. The categories include: 1) the role of the LEF within that particular district and community, 2) the mission and values of the organization expressed by representatives, 3) the activities and programs undertaken by

the LEF, 4) the context and nature of relationships with different stakeholders, and 5) the resources and assets of the organization. To begin, I start this chapter with some perspectives on education foundations based on interviews with statewide leadership and representatives of the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations.

### **Affiliated Foundations in Public Education**

The role of education foundations is often defined programmatically by the initiatives they undertake, such as student scholarships, classroom grants, and teacher awards. However, the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations (CFEF) supports an ongoing effort to move past the specifics of programs to communicate the higher-level value of education foundations to a school district. One CFEF representative commented, “I prefer to think of it as local education foundations exist to foster and facilitate private sector investment and involvement in their local classrooms and schools...it is about the community’s interest and involvement in *their* schools.” A common perspective across LEFs is that local schools belong to the whole community and not just the individuals or families who access the schools. The Consortium also works hard to communicate to school district superintendents that an LEF’s ideal role involves “listening to business and community people about what they want in their schools, getting feedback from them,” and not just having an LEF that is an “ATM” and “cheerleader.”

An ATM is an automated teller machine from which individuals can withdraw money from a bank without having to actually interact with a cashier or bank teller. It is typically a faster transaction that requires very little engagement on the part of the individual withdrawing funds. A local education foundation that acts as an ATM for its

partner essentially manages donations through mostly positive messages about the school district while the school district is able to ask for funds without substantive interaction with the LEF. In this type of role, an LEF is perceived to be less likely to engage those in the community for the purpose of investing their interest, time, and constructive support for public schools because they have little need to connect the community back to the district. In other words, the relationship is merely transactional. For those who work with LEFs across the state, treating an LEF as an ATM is considered to be a missed opportunity by the school district to engage needed social capital by individuals and groups outside public education systems. CFEF leaders recognize that some LEFs still exist in school districts as ATMs, which has longer-term impacts on the perceived role and benefits of local education foundations throughout the state.

For example, an LEF that serves in more of an “ATM” or “cheerleader” role lacks something more “altruistic...[or] not quite so self-serving” as when LEFs work to engage “time, talents, and treasures in the school district.” In other words, a local education foundation can be entirely “transactional” by accepting tax-exempt donations. Such donations may be used by the superintendent and school board for specific purposes without substantive interaction with the community outside of what already takes place in the school district. However, many LEFs may be seen as more instrumental in thinking long-term about the needs of the school district and the direction the community would like to take in supporting local schools. This involves developing a specific mission and value proposition to the school district and community. It may also involve greater attention to education policy issues, as they arise at the local level, and impact the school

district. An LEF may therefore define itself not only by programs but also through the issues it chooses to engage within the school district and schools.

Issues that have captured the attention of LEFs in Florida include lower graduation rates; limited reading proficiency in early grades; science, math, and engineering technology (STEM) curriculum; and access to college readiness or certification programs. When combining issues such as these with programs meant to address them within a school district, an LEF may characterize its role as a “critical friend” or “critical partner” of the district. As a “critical friend,” the LEF may be seen as “part of the solutions” to challenges within the school district as they point to specific opportunities for partnering with the school district and providing resources. This type of effort has a critical dimension, in that the LEF may seek out and gain information on student indicators that justify certain programs or actions on the part of the school district. In pointing these out, the LEF may be seen as critical. However, in carrying out the relationship with the school district as a “critical friend,” LEFs typically bring resources to bear on the issues they identify.

Therefore, depending on the role and nature of the relationship to the school district, LEFs may define their purpose as an issue-specific focus and/or by relevant programs put in place to address those issues or a facet of those issues. For example, the majority of LEFs offer classroom grants to teachers meant to assist with innovation in the classroom. While these grants may not directly address the challenges of new or expanding curriculum and educational standards, they are meant to support teachers looking for ways to modify or develop their classroom instruction.

The role of a local education foundation can change over time based on any number of internal and external shifts or changes, such as superintendent turnover, school board elections, LEF board member terms, LEF executive director turnover, and changes to funding or resources. That is to say, several factors can impact the work and direction of the LEF without having a “bigger vision” to guide the organization beyond basic programs and serving as an “ATM.” While student scholarships and teacher grants are the most common programs carried out by local education foundations, LEFs are encouraged to support the district in ways that result in greater social investment by the community and through programs that can outlast school district leadership changes. However, identifying the mission and values of the LEF and their connection to the long-term initiatives of the organization, beyond charitable resources, necessitates a strong and representative LEF board.

A “strong board” is considered to be one where high level decision makers from geographically representative businesses, corporations, or community organizations serve. A board is also considered strong when individuals have access to other decision makers and/or elected officials to help communicate the role and mission of a local education foundation as well as broader local education issues. Building a strong board allows an LEF “to stand up to...[or] speak for what you really think is right” for the students, teachers, and the broader community. Through the credibility of the board LEFs are enabled to set their path in working with the school district. As CFEF leadership continues to encourage greater autonomy on the part of LEFs across the state, they emphasize the benefits that may come from having an increased ability to be responsive to changing issues in education.

This is perhaps the area where LEFs are perceived to contribute more to public education beyond financial support. By differentiating themselves from the school district enough to attract the interest and support of others, LEFs can bring greater awareness and attention to public education. One CFEF representative commented that

We don't have the political clout in the sense of the way politics work, such as people writing big checks to people who are running for office. We don't do that. That's not us [LEFs], but we are doing good work. We do have some decent people on our boards that legislators pay attention to.

Another former CFEF leader suggested that LEF boards are comprised of “nontraditional” people engaged in and communicating about public education with legislators. The board membership of local education foundations is seen as a tool for purposely engaging different stakeholders in public education to build relationships with those outside the traditional institutions of public education. A common recognition by leaders of local education foundations is that public education should have the support and engagement of those outside schools and district administration who are not seen as “self-interested” or self-serving. LEFs provide a mechanism to do that. A CFEF representative describes how Florida LEFs have positioned themselves over time “as business and community people, who are going to be at the table and involved, who are watching what happens with the money, who are working in partnership with their school districts and networks.” While some foundation boards have worked with school districts to provide such support as analysis and consulting on the use of school district funds, other boards are focused on how the LEF funds are utilized within the school district. In either case, LEFs are encouraged to have a board that is seen as third-party representatives of community interests and perspectives for public education.



Finally, LEFs have access to and raise funds for initiatives beyond what the school district has in place and for which school district resources are not currently allocated. Part of carrying out this role involves not only making clear to donors how the LEF operates in relation to the school district, but also taking into consideration how resources are exchanged between the school district and LEF. For example, those LEFs “totally aligned” with the school district tend to also receive in-kind gifts and benefits such as salaries, office space and materials, and services or employee benefits provided to other school district employees. In exchange for these types of in-kind donations, a CFEF representative suggested that these foundations are “beholden” to the school district and the school district leadership in place. Given the shifts that can occur in district leadership, the CFEF representative suggests that subsidies of this kind are believed to put LEF leaders and their boards in a weaker position to decide on “initiatives you think are important with a long view [rather] than a flash in the pan kind of thing.” In other words, school district support in the form of resources and in-kind benefits can shift with changes in school district administration, which tends to limit the leadership and board of a local education foundation in deciding on the initiatives, work, and programs carried out by the LEF.

In order to overcome the challenges of an LEF being dependent on the school district, some LEFs in Florida are trying to pick up more of their own operational expenses. Even when this occurs, it “takes a while to wear big pants” and feel bold enough to seek and assert greater autonomy from the school district. In the last several years, CFEF leaders indicated a noticeable increase in the trend towards autonomy and independence from the school district in terms of resources and control. However, such

changes are not undertaken without consideration for the changing relationship between LEFs and school districts, LEFs and the community, and LEF work in light of changes in education policy.

In the next section, one LEF considered to be closely aligned to the school district, characterizes the challenges of being a legally separate but essentially embedded organization within a larger bureaucratic structure.

### **Case 1: LEF Down the Hall<sup>2</sup>**

Many local education foundations start as departments or part of a department within the administrative structure of a school district. Some move away from this structure, both physically and administratively by moving out of school district offices and gaining more autonomy from the school district. Others maintain their organizational structure within the school district's administration and offices. This is the case of *LEF Down the Hall*, a direct support organization to one of the largest school districts in the country with nearly 260,000 students and over 300 schools in a diverse, urban community. In the 30 years the foundation has existed, it has been part of the administrative structure of the school district and currently operates out of the school district administrative offices. In the past three years, the LEF has grown from five to nine staff members to build capacity for increased development in donor relationships and financial donations.

As a direct support organization, *LEF Down the Hall* is a legally separate public charity that works specifically for the school district. This type of exclusive organizational relationship has some unique characteristics. As a nonprofit entity, *LEF*

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<sup>2</sup> The names of local education foundations were changed to respect the confidentiality of LEFs and staff.

*Down the Hall* has a separate board that approves the budget and makes budgetary decisions concerning the LEF. These decisions are carried out by an executive director who reports to the board. However, in the case of *LEF Down the Hall*, the executive director is considered a school district employee and is included within the administrative reporting structure of the school district. The school district also provides a small support budget as well as in-kind benefits in the form of office space, facility maintenance services, technology support, and equipment. Due to its status as a direct support organization, *LEF Down the Hall* has to follow public meeting laws by providing notice of a meeting and prohibiting board members from discussing board topics outside a public meeting.

A little over two years ago, the executive director of *LEF Down the Hall* began reporting to a direct report of the chief of staff, rather than directly to the chief of staff or superintendent. Not uncommon, the executive director may be moved around on the organizational chart depending on the superintendent. In a way, this most recent change sent a message not only to the LEF leadership and board, but also to outside stakeholders. One board member commented that being a third level below the superintendent “relegates our foundation to a department of the school district, and that's not what we are. It's not what big buck donors are going to deliver their dollars to.” While some donors see closeness to the school district as valuable for understanding the needs of schools, others see it as a disadvantage because donations are harder to follow and determine impact within district structures. Even though *LEF Down the Hall* is embedded within school district offices and organizational structures, LEF board

members tend to emphasize its separateness in controlling and allocating the charitable resources that come into the foundation.

Despite the shift in reporting structure, *LEF Down the Hall* is still one of the highest earning foundations in Florida, bringing in more than \$2.5 million of revenue in 2011. However, the practical implications of the change in reporting structure are reflected in other areas of LEF operations and school district relations with the foundation. Within each area detailed below, I draw on interviews with the executive director, six current LEF board members, and one elected school board member who is also a former district teacher. Using interview data, marketing materials, and website information I characterize the position of *LEF Down the Hall* in relation to the school district, illustrating a foundation closely embedded.

### **LEF Role**

The role of *LEF Down the Hall* is described similarly by those most closely associated with its work. Typically board members describe the role in the context of bringing in additional financial resources to support the work of the district, which is educating students. A long-time LEF board member and former school board member stated: “as a foundation we are looked to use our knowledge and abilities to raise money for a number of resources to add to the opportunity that we provide to the children.” Another board member, and former board chair, broadened this characterization in describing the role, “to be the foundation that solicits, gathers, and manages the private funds to help support the initiatives of the school district.” Still another board member, who is also currently a school board member, commented:

It's really been the focus of the foundation to increase their financial aid to the school system. We're able to do that by all the money we collect and the

partnerships that we have with corporations and others throughout the community to be able to enhance the education.

Board members and the executive director also characterize the foundation's functional purpose in terms of the programs it carries out. For most of its history, the LEF has focused on three primary initiatives: low-income student scholarships for post-secondary education, classroom teacher grants, and now a school supply store for teachers in low-income schools. These programs are a response to challenges in the school district where according to the district's website over 60 percent of school district students qualify for free and reduced lunch prices. One board member suggested that in this context, "we [the LEF] are there to provide support, services and assistance to students and teachers within the public education system." Given the prevailing socio-economic status of students in the school district, current board members and the executive director indicated that growing and funding these staple programs are the foremost priorities for the LEF in terms of carrying out its purpose.

Beyond attracting resources for specific programs, every board member interviewed acknowledged their individual roles in communicating the work of the LEF and the "good things" happening within the school district. Board members see themselves as ambassadors for public education, helping to "shine a light" on the importance of public schools for the community. This includes specifically reaching out to the business community and keeping them informed of what is going well in schools across the district. At the same time, board members see the importance of sharing the realities of the needs of students within the district to emphasize the benefits of providing private, external resources to students and teachers. One board member described the

connection between schools and businesses in the community, suggesting that “as we reach out to our corporate leaders...they're reaching out to us too, because we are the workforce supply for their companies.” LEF board members argue that as school budgets throughout the state decline, business support and resources are becoming critical for anything above and beyond basic education services.

The strategic plan of the school district is changing to reflect new and emerging priorities of the superintendent, including changing the negative image of the school district. The LEF board is considering a reorientation of its role in supporting the district by focusing strategically on changing the perception of the school district within the community. While this newer focus is somewhat embedded in its current work, the LEF struggles to align its mission with its values in taking on the task of changing the image of schools in the community.

### **Mission and Values**

Not uncommon, LEFs tend to have a fairly broad mission in supporting student growth and development, especially when the foundation is established as a direct support organization to the school district. *LEF Down the Hall*, for example, has a mission to serve as a “catalyst for educational excellence” by carrying out initiatives or programs “that provide opportunities for individuals to develop their potential skills.” In some ways, this leaves open the possibility to change and shift programs depending on the needs of the school district or nature and origin of donor interests/funding. For *LEF Down the Hall*, there is on-going tension between its mission as a direct support organization to the school district (i.e. they exist to support the school district and its needs as an organization) and its values as a charitable nonprofit in funding core

programs that support teachers and students. This tension has played out most recently with the new superintendent's goal to change the "image" of the school district.

Within the past five years, the school district has dealt with school board members that misused or misallocated public funds for personal gain. As a result, the school district's reputation has suffered, leaving the community distrustful of the public school system. While *LEF Down the Hall* does not see itself as particularly suited to carry out the role of building community trust in schools, one board member commented, "but the superintendent asked" and another suggested that for "selfish" reasons, "for us to be the best fundraisers that we can be, and that is our number one job, then we need to make sure that people know and perceive that the money's going to be well spent." In other words, improving the district's image also benefits the foundation's image and ability to raise funds for teachers and students.

*LEF Down the Hall* recognizes that it cannot continue its work as effectively without gaining more positive support for the school district. Since donors and those not familiar with *LEF Down the Hall* may see the foundation and school district as one and the same, the board and executive director try to communicate the distinctiveness of the initiatives carried out by the LEF. Given the growth in staff from five to nine employees, it has gained some capacity to fundraise and bring greater attention to the organization and the goals for supporting schools. However, in adding "messaging" about the school district to its marketing and communication efforts, the LEF has the added responsibility of talking about and differentiating the two organizations.

At the time the interviews were conducted, four months had passed since the superintendent and the leadership of *LEF Down the Hall* committed to working to change

the image of the school district. Staff from both organizations had yet to agree on the content and substance of the messaging to be taken out to the community. Board members suggested that even though the school district asked for this help, the messaging was not made a priority by school district communication staff given their other administrative tasks. Board members do not blame the delay on district staff, but they do feel a sense of frustration. The board chair captures the challenge of working through district avenues:

We have a message that we have to send out that the school district pretty much wants to send out. So, we should have some agreement there that these are the good things. We also have a message that we want to get out about us [*LEF Down the Hall*], and the things about us are not necessarily connected directly to that other message, so we have to figure out exactly how we're going to combine the message that the district needs to get out and that we need to get out.

The delay in working with the school district has driven the LEF back to its core values of raising funds for the programs that impact students and teachers while still going out into the community to represent the foundation.

### **Activities and Programs**

As described, the foundation carries out fundraising events and programs focused on increasing funds for three areas of focus: student scholarships, teacher grants, and the teacher school supply store. This is reflected in both its website and marketing materials where individuals can find out more information on these programs and make donations. However, opportunities often arise for the LEF to support the school district on other initiatives undertaken by district administration. Besides changing the school district image, the LEF has been asked to help with fundraising for select school district projects. These projects typically support students and teachers, which are within the core focus of



the foundation, but they also tend to be outside the scope of the foundation's existing budget. For example, the school district requested that funds be raised for a technology initiative that requires new furniture in specific schools throughout the district. Even though the funding would eventually reach students and teachers (a foundation priority) it was not readily available within the foundation's budget. To raise the funds, either the executive director would need to reallocate time to help fundraise or the foundation would need to reallocate existing funds. Neither choice was considered a viable option to the LEF, so the executive director recalled, "I tried to give them leads [on fundraising], but I said I can't go out and fundraise for you, because we have our own goals that have to be met, and this was outside my scope of work for the year." Even though the executive director is technically a school district employee, the scope of work is outlined by the LEF board and not the school district.

The executive director and board members noticed one time requests from the school district happening more often as the school district looks for additional resources that are neither part of the long-term planning of the foundation nor captured in their current budgets. The executive director observed that when possible the board tries to accommodate unplanned requests by the school district, but sometimes it is not possible.

The board chair of *LEF Down the Hall* said,

We try to reach in, to be honest with you, and say, what do you want? What do you need? There's typically not much that comes back, to be perfectly honest. Every once in a while you'll get this phone call [from the school district]. So typically, it's really up to us as a board to drive what are the different things that we're going to try to do.

Part of the issue, according to the executive director, is that the "school district is not organized for fundraising" so when they need to raise resources for a specific project,

they are neither equipped nor knowledgeable about how fundraising works. For example, other school district employees often solicit funds from individuals or companies already donating to the school district through the foundation. Likewise, school district employees may unknowingly apply for grants for which other departments have likewise applied. As a result, fundraising is an area where the school district and foundation are less aligned in terms of expectations and management.

Despite the disconnect in the areas of resources and fundraising, the school district is encouraging greater alignment with the foundation in some existing areas. For example, in efforts to align teacher grants with school district changes, the superintendent has asked the foundation to collaborate more with district staff on reviewing teacher grant announcements and proposals to ensure they match the new curriculum standards. This is an on-going effort to ensure proposals meet new Common Core Curriculum standards.

Another example is student scholarships for post-secondary education that are need-based, and beyond the scope of anything the school district can provide. Most recently, the school board member that serves on the LEF board began working in the community to expand the resources of the scholarship program. Since *LEF Down the Hall* has access to purchasing state pre-paid scholarships, local municipalities that provide higher education scholarships can partner with the foundation to increase the number of students who receive funding. In practice, therefore, pockets of alignment exist in the work of *LEF Down the Hall* and school district administrators. Although these areas of alignment are not necessarily becoming harder to find, the executive director and board indicate they are becoming more strategic about looking for them from within the school district.

## Stakeholder Relationships

*LEF Down the Hall* is characterized as being an example of a foundation that is closely “aligned” with the school district. From the outside, alignment is often assumed when the foundation is in school district offices and is given money or in-kind benefits from the school district. Alignment therefore implies a tradeoff of independence for the foundation. However, both alignment and independence are continuously redefined as the foundation changes in response to district leadership and perceptions of the foundation. For example, on the question of independence the foundation board chair described their current perspective:

We're not sure if we need more independence. It's been a very big question. There is a symbiotic relationship that we need to have. We think that we're about as far out as we're going to be able to get. So, the answer is yes about independence but not any further than we are now. We are very much more independent than we were 10 years ago.

In the case of *LEF Down the Hall*, board members suggest that the foundation in the past was given much less attention by the school district, depending on the superintendent and the perception of the value of the foundation. However, with a new superintendent in place, who “gets the role of the foundation” these perceptions are changing, motivating a reconsideration of both how to align and the practical implications of independence.

Board members describe the superintendent as being “very supportive” of the foundation, willing to do and support most of anything they ask. The superintendent participates in LEF fundraising events, encourages and participates in the fundraising campaign targeted at school district employees, and attends the foundation’s annual planning meeting. In turn, the executive director indicated that the superintendent’s

presentation of the district's strategic plan was made a priority at the annual LEF strategic planning meeting. At times, however, the executive director and some board members feel the superintendent sees the LEF as "doing what it does" and being somewhat limited to take on more without bringing in more money.

On behalf of the foundation, the executive director attends the school board meetings once a month to share information on the activities of the foundation. The foundation also has a school board member on its board to bring information back to the rest of the school board. From the foundation's perspective, alignment occurs when it receives feedback, public support, and acknowledgement from the school district. One area of concern for LEF board members is the expiring lease on its teacher supply store. LEF board members acknowledge that they have no indication that the school district will renew the building lease at the \$1 a year rate they have had for the past several years. Although the executive director and board members of *LEF Down the Hall* are trying to make the case for the value of the supply store, they believe the approval is not guaranteed. The school board member on the LEF board is considered an advocate for the foundation in working with the school board to secure a lease renewal.

The board and executive director indicated that greater alignment tends to occur when the executive director and other staff work with "middle management" in the school district. The executive director described these efforts: "one of the things I've tried to do -and it's taken a while because the bureaucracy is so big- is to find people in those levels [middle management] that are doers and are creative and innovative." The foundation board and staff recognize the frustration of being one part of a very large bureaucracy, but *LEF Down the Hall* staff and board members have found ways to make

cooperation work in spite of the frustrations of the process. By singling out specific people within their administrative structure, the foundation finds ways to work more effectively with the school district.

At the same time, the school district perceives alignment when the LEF is able to meet its requests for additional resources that support the strategic vision of the school district. One of the possible future visions for the school district is the potential for seeking a voter-approved tax bond to support construction costs for new or renovated school buildings. While the superintendent shared this with the LEF board as a long term strategy, the LEF board feels that “right now our focus is not necessarily helping [the superintendent] pass that bond issue but changing that perception out in the public that the schools aren’t good.” This focus may be a result of the relationships the board members have with community stakeholders outside the school district.

Most of the interviews with *LEF Down the Hall* recounted anecdotes and experiences of navigating the organizational and personal relationships with the school district administration and within the school district bureaucracy. Other stakeholders outside the school district include LEF board members, community partners, individuals in the community, and donors. By and large, the foundation struggles with the reality that only about one-third of the LEF board is actually engaged in the work of the foundation, including and especially in fundraising. This explains part of the reason for hiring additional staff members. Very few partners out in the community were identified outside the local community foundation. Again, this may be due to the fact that the foundation board does not have the “movers and shakers” of the county serving on its board to attract the attention and interest of other groups. Further, one board member

described shortcomings with engaging those outside the school district who should be interested in supporting the foundation:

We have a lot of bridging in our public-private partnerships to do because you have some of these companies that are here and there is a total disconnect between ‘Hey...we have to care about this school district? Well, yea, you're a big company. Who do you think your future employees are going to come from? Who are going to be the innovators of the future?’ So, I find that to be part of the challenge with what the foundation is trying to communicate.

Businesses and corporations were often brought up as important stakeholders within the community that can and should have an interest in the foundation. For board members, capturing the attention and favor of businesses not only has the potential to bring in additional resources, but also helps other companies feel comfortable relocating their offices within the county that the school district serves. In other words, the LEF board members recognize the importance of a strong school system for economic development reasons. At the same time, the school board member on the foundation board suggested some ongoing changes in working to engage with businesses:

So, again, we're developing a relationship with them. They come in. They talk about what are the qualities of people they want. They're willing to work with us. They've had workshops. They come into our schools. We've had the buy-in from so many different large corporations.

Beyond the business community, one other area where the foundation is working to engage community stakeholders is through prominent school district alumni. This is not uncommon among foundations across the state, which is recognizing the individual as a donor, and especially those who have benefitted in the past from the resources of the district. This is a donor model borrowed from university foundations that seeks alumni

support, modified somewhat to account for alumni who are still involved in the community around the school district.

### **Resources and Assets**

As a direct support organization, *LEF Down the Hall* is provided a number of benefits and resources provided by the school district. These include not only technology and equipment, but also salaries and health benefits to employees. In the 2011 CFEF membership survey, *LEF Down the Hall* reported 44 percent of its \$2.68 million in revenue from in-kind support (the value of donations and other resource support from the school district), followed by 14 percent of revenue from government, 12 percent from investments, and 7 percent from corporations. Based on the number of students in the district, it brought in about \$10.40 per student. The foundation spends approximately 40 percent of its expenditures on managing, funding, and distributing student scholarships; 23 percent goes to staffing and equipping the teacher supply store; and 10 percent goes to teacher grants. Overall, its revenue and expenditures align with its primary programmatic areas. As well, the LEF reflects the support of the school district by keeping its operating expenditures low and funneling most of its resources to students and teachers.

### **Summary**

Taken together, these areas illustrate how *LEF Down the Hall* is positioned closely within the school district. Based on how the school district works with the LEF, it is treated more like a department within the school district that has relatively more autonomy than most departments. In other words, the LEF executive director is still expected to engage with the district in the way other department heads are required when placed within the district's organizational chart. However, the LEF board and executive

director work hard to demonstrate that the LEF's work, programs, and efforts toward school district needs are as a partnering entity rather than a department. At times school district needs are brought to light too late for the LEF to be effectively responsive; but both organizations are trying to bridge that communication gap. Where possible, the foundation makes inroads in working with the school district, but this is strategic on the part of the executive director to seek out and engage the "doers" within the school district administrative structure.

### **Case 2: LEF Across Town**

Like most nonprofits, local education foundations regularly interact with the community in the geographic areas they serve. For LEFs, this includes individuals in the community who directly engage with school district services and those within the broader community who are impacted by or can support the work of schools. In pursuing community engagement, LEFs are in a unique position to promote collaboration between the district and outside stakeholders (Brent, 2002). However, to do so, LEFs often have to pursue greater autonomy from its school district partner while still managing its role as stewards of school district resources and goodwill.

In the case of *LEF Across Town* the foundation board and president are navigating an independent path with the school district while broadening the role of the foundation in the community. Independence for *LEF Across Town* allows for new goals within the foundation and opportunities for the organization to be better known across the community. In this it is seeking to reflect its mission and values as an organization in support of education "in the broader sense." This case details how *LEF Across Town* works with the school district as a separate but collaborative organization, asserting some



distance between the foundation and school district. In considering the position of *LEF Across Town* in relation to the school district, I characterize how it is working to connect different groups in the community with the intent of serving students, teachers, and schools.

Currently, more than 20 staff members of *LEF Across Town* operate out of a rather large, artfully refurbished building in the heart of an historic section of the school district's largest city. In its beginnings, *LEF Across Town* offices were located in the school district administration building and considered "joined at the hip." However, based on accounts from the president and board members, *LEF Across Town* is now separate from and respectfully treading its path of independence in relation to the school district. This renewed path of sorts began over four years ago when the organization moved its offices out of the school district administration building and into its own site. The building was previously used by a prominent community organization and is in many ways still a community building. The first floor houses a fully automated teacher resource store for teachers in high needs schools to shop for school supplies at no cost to them. Across from the store is an auditorium for both LEF and community events/programs. While the foundation staff makes use of one floor, the other floors are intended to be used by the community.

According to the LEF president, this move was seen as an important milestone for the organization. Today, *LEF Across Town* is navigating its identity as a partner of one of the largest school districts in the state with close to 300 schools and nearly 200,000 students. Rather than a cooperative, fundraising-based relationship with the school district, *LEF Across Town* is working to coordinate broader efforts to engage the

community in schools, education, and the school district. The LEF is also carving out new areas to enhance its partnership with the district. The characterizations that follow come from interviews with the president of *LEF Across Town*, three current board members, and one member of the community who serves on a committee of the foundation.

### **Role of the LEF**

Like most local education foundations, *LEF Across Town* has a functional role to provide “support for the school district in those areas where the school financial picture for budgetary reasons cannot support, and where we can fill in some of the gaps in different things.” This includes student scholarships, teacher grants, a supply store for teachers at Title I schools, and professional development funding for schools and teachers. However, it is not considered to be a direct support organization where the school district has tighter control over the organization. The President of *LEF Across Town* recalled the different perspectives of the school district and the foundation in terms of its role in bringing in financial resources: “you get kind of mixed reviews on why it was started. Some of the old timers say it was started to do scholarships, but I’m sure if you talked to the superintendents, they would say it was done to be ‘my fundraising arm,’ which is the tension that’s been there ever since.” This tension comes out of the different visions of supporting education versus supporting a school district. The president summed it up in this way:

I think our major role is to garner public support- the public at large support -for public education in particular and maybe education in general. Support can take the form of dollars and cents or it can take the form of support for legislative actions and initiatives to help public education. Our job is to make sure that the community really understands the things we’re doing well in public education in this district. So we’re also a little bit of a cheerleader or advocate.

As a non-direct support organization, the foundation is “not the school district” and has the ability to pursue a vision that moves beyond just funding for the superintendent and specific programs at the request of the district. In fact they aim to serve students, teachers, and schools and not necessarily the school system itself. According to their information packet, *LEF Across Town* “focuses its efforts on enhancing public education through the development of community partnerships.” An LEF board member, who is also a school board member and former principal, described the foundation’s distinctive role over the years:

Initially, it was to support the school district in ways to provide resources and funding as a way to expand its programs. I would describe our relationship now as one of a partnership with reciprocal relationship. It's not just a foundation providing support to the district...but working together, one, to be advocates for public education, two, to work and provide opportunities and special programs and scholarships for our students, three, to recognize our teachers and other personnel.

Although they are seen as a primary partner to the school district, the foundation considers a broader role than serving the needs of the school district specifically. *LEF Across Town* is looking to engage in partnerships with other entities in order to serve the needs of students, teachers, and schools throughout the community. The board chair described this shift in thinking about its work outside the school district:

We've realized over the years with help, certainly, that no organization, no one institution can solve the problems alone within the foundation as far as the educational system is concerned...part of our strategic planning is looking at further partnering and becoming more involved and hopefully being kind of the catalyst to get other nonprofits to work together.

In seeking a broader role in supporting education throughout the county, board members are quick to describe their mission and values as an organization. While board members are proud of the programs they have created over the years and provided to students and teachers, they value their ability as an organization to be different and do different things from the school district. The LEF board chair suggested:

Our goals are not meant to be totally aligned with the school district. We have set our own strategic plan. We work very closely with the school district. We consider them, certainly, our primary client, but there are areas that they may focus on where we can't — our resources are already committed to other things, and we cannot really become directly involved with them.

In other words, the LEF president and board members do not consider the foundation to be defined exclusively by school district needs; however, its mission and values serve the interests of the school district and community by focusing on supporting education more broadly. Areas in need of support may be identified by the school district, board members, or leadership of *LEF Across Town*. Regardless of how needs are identified, the foundation strives to be driven by its mission and values as an organization.

### **Mission and Values**

Part of clarifying its values as a local education foundation is motivated by the commitment of the foundation's president to all forms of education. Having been in this role for a little over a year, the president and the board are working to refine their overall programs and services to students, and teachers more specifically. That is, the foundation's values as an organization are geared toward supporting the school district by reaching out to the community. Two stories reflect efforts to see past the school system

and reach the broader community. To do so, *LEF Across Town* works collaboratively with the school district on carrying out its mission.

For the first time, *LEF Across Town* helped to organize and fund the STEM (science, technology, engineering, & math) fair traditionally put on by the school district. It worked with the district by raising funds and organizing different parts of the county-wide science fair. Traditionally open to school district students, the LEF committee working with the district on the fair encouraged student participation from across the district regardless of the type of school a student attended. Since the LEF had a greater stake in carrying out this program given the resources it provided, board members were committed to supporting educational opportunities for all students. While the school district and superintendent considered the fair to be for students attending public schools in the district, the president and committee of the LEF intended the fair to be more inclusive of all students.

One of the LEF board members characterized the situation: “So, it was a very firm view of the [STEM fair] committee that we need to be inclusive. So, it was conveyed to the school district that here we are working hard to raise money and support them, so it's a two-way street, you know.” The president recounted, “I was able to convince the superintendent to open the STEM fair to every child in the county. So not only was it public schools and public charter schools, but private schools, parochial schools, home schools, and virtual.” Through this initiative the LEF was not only successful in supporting the school district’s STEM fair with financial resources, but they were also able to signal to the school district and the community their goal in being seen as the education foundation for all students within the county. In this way, *LEF Across*

*Town* supported the district to “raise funds where they didn’t have dedicated funding,” and provided an opportunity for county-wide students to participate.

By bringing the resources to bear for school district initiatives, and supporting an important part of the school district’s efforts to encourage STEM education, *LEF Across Town* exerts its position as a partner wherein each side brings something to the table. This involved give-and-take between the school district and the LEF and reflected a time where the LEF influenced the work of the school district, or at the very least, helped the school district to rethink its perspective on non-traditional student populations. In this example, *LEF Across Town* served as an advocate for all students, a role it is increasingly embracing. The president described the intention to lead the foundation to be more inclusive in future events as well, pointing out “we’re the education foundation; we’re not the *public school* education foundation.”

In another illustration, *LEF Across Town* held a focus group session with teachers in the district about how the LEF could better serve and engage them in their work. Unknown to the LEF, teachers commented that they did not consider the foundation to be *their* foundation because the teachers were not readily engaged or listened to in the past. From the teachers’ perspective, the foundation was an administrative office of sorts for the superintendent or school district administration. Board members were surprised by this perception, as the foundation felt that with the teacher classroom grants, the supply store, and teacher recognition it was able to demonstrate their commitment to serving teachers as well. However, the president characterized the school district and past LEF leadership as having a “pro-management” mindset which translated into less attention to teachers and more attention to school district leadership and their needs. As a result,

efforts to do more to engage, support, and develop teachers are becoming more important to *LEF Across Town*.

In an effort to do so, the LEF held the first of several “community lecture series” targeted at supporting educators in the community. The lecture included a prominent author on an education-related topic and resulted in more than 500 people in attendance from across the community. One committee member described the planning that took place for the first lecture:

The planning meetings involved thinking about how are we going to get all of the elements of the community that we want to get at this lecture. We want teachers, but we want parents as well and other members of the community...they [the LEF] decided to hold it in a high school that would have fairly easy access to the interstate and to whatever direction people were coming traffic wise...we went to the superintendent's office and talked to their public relations person and talked about all of the ways we could get the word out. The superintendent was incredibly supportive and responsive and helpful and sent out many email messages and pop-ups reminding people of this first lecture.

The planning and execution of the lecture was a joint effort on the part of the district and foundation, which included a breakfast event on the day of the lecture with the superintendent and other community leaders. The president of the foundation had done something similar in their past role at another education foundation and considered this a valuable investment in teachers and the community by engaging them in conversations about education. The lecture series is a way for the LEF to bring together individuals within the district and outside the district, signaling another role it is actively developing as a grassroots organizer. In thinking about the future of the foundation, the president suggested:

The other thing we're after is to do grass root organizing, for us to be able to develop a communication network to endorse and support initiatives the school district might have to get our community more and more aware of how good our

school district is; but also having their input to make it even better. You can't just get the good stuff; you're going to have to get the stuff that they tell you that they want better. I think that's going to be important for the future of the way our foundation relates to the community, and that's a pretty major initiative on my part.

This is one way the LEF is shifting its identity in the community, becoming another voice for education. The president is supportive of the foundation becoming more of a "facilitator of community discussion on the issues we face in education." However, to do this effectively, the foundation needs to be-and be-seen as independent of the school district through its activities and programs.

### **Activities and Programs**

Although *LEF Across Town* has staple programs similar to other foundations, one area they are committed to is finding ways to reduce disparities across schools in the district. The president is looking at how the LEF can expand the resource store for teachers in Title I schools, increase student scholarships for low-income students, and expand financial support for teacher grants and National Board Certification costs for teachers. The LEF board chair also sees the foundation as continuing to support programs that bring dollars and information to students and parents within the district that may struggle to engage with the school system:

There is always a gap between certain levels of students, and if we can do anything to minimize that gap or help some of the people that are in lower income levels or families that haven't been given the opportunity to succeed in education. If we can help them with something in that way, that's a big positive for us. That's what makes us happy all the time.

In addition, the foundation regularly implements and shifts programs based on how beneficial they are for students and teachers. *LEF Across Town* manages a network



of volunteers who work with students in lower grades on reading and in upper grades on preparing for college or career programs. The foundation is also intentional about its fundraising efforts. One committee member observed, “I think the goal when you're raising funds to support various initiatives that benefit education is to involve as many aspects of the community as possible when doing that.” To that end, the LEF has worked to engage the community through a “run” for education, a fishing tournament, and a major teacher of the year awards banquet. Through these efforts, the foundation is able to provide “avenues” for the community to be involved in education that the school district does not provide. From this perspective, “the foundation is there to support education in the community, not solely to support that school district.”

Finally, charting a new path for *LEF Across Town* includes recommitting to what is being done well. It also means finding new ways to engage and respond to the needs of students. The school board member on the LEF board summarizes this sentiment: “we have been asked the question: is this project, initiative or program still relevant? If it is, how can we make it more current in order to address the needs of today's students and the focus that the school district has on preparing student for college and career?”

### **Stakeholder Relationships**

As an organization, *LEF Across Town* is committed to education in the broadest sense, and that means developing its role in the community as the educational environment changes. The first step in shifting, and in some cases establishing an identity apart from the school district, is navigating the relationship with the school district. One community member that serves on a committee commented: “From what I've observed and my interactions, the foundation sees themselves as being a support to

the school district but being more than just an ATM.” While bringing in additional resources for programs the school district cannot fund, *LEF Across Town* has not been seen as an ATM for some time. Internally, its identity and mission have changed over the years from the district’s foundation to the community’s foundation focused on education. Through its programs and initiatives, it is working to develop a stronger identity in the community.

*LEF Across Town* is pursuing greater independence from the school district both practically in moving out of the school district and perceptually in charting new roles. Like the term “alignment,” independence for a local education foundation has different meanings by context and individual perspective. While the foundation president sees the LEF’s work as independent from the school district, the president still has regular meetings with the school superintendent. Little is done through the LEF without working with the school district first. The LEF could not exist alongside the school district as an independent but collaborative organization with the school district without the relationship, support, and approval of the superintendent.

However, unlike a direct support organization, the intent of working with the district first is not for approval, but to ensure that efforts are aligned and the school district will see the foundation’s work as relevant, supportive, and useful for students and teachers. In other words, any initiative pursued without the legitimization of the school district would be neither effective nor helpful to its mission as an organization that is committed to partnerships in education. By driving much of what the foundation does in concert with the school district, *LEF Across Town* maintains more of a partnership role as a separate entity and an institution within the community. Also helpful to the LEF is that

it is able to explore its role within the context of a relatively stable and well-run school district.

Since the *LEF Across Town* moved out of the district administrative offices resources from the school district now represent only five to ten percent of the LEF's funding. The LEF president sees this as another way the organization is becoming less dependent on the school district for sustaining its resources. Funding shifts away from school district resources provide greater autonomy not only for staff of *LEF Across Town*, but also for the members who serve on the LEF board. Board members can better consider the tough decisions or conversations taking place in education with less concern for changes in school district funding. At the same time that *LEF Across Town* is developing its role and perspective on its work and relationship to the school district, it is still committed to acting as stewards of the school district's reputation and role within the community.

For example, even though the foundation can pick its areas of focus, it nevertheless continues to advance the work of the school district to provide educational opportunities to students across the community. As such, when tensions arose over these choices, the board chair reiterated their goals as a foundation board to keep those tensions private. The LEF board chair commented: "Our hope is that any disagreement or tension between the foundation and school district is something that is simply between the foundation and the school district, because we see no benefit to anyone to have conflicts." Again, the foundation works to have a separate identity from the school district, but not one that will detract from the shared objectives of the school district and LEF.

By having a unique identity, one LEF board member suggested the foundation was able to put on the lecture series as a way to “engender support for the public school system” without it being seen as the school district self-promoting. This was suggested by the president and others interviewed, as well as an elected school board official who serves on the LEF board. In characterizing the benefits of the foundation, the board member commented on the school district’s perspective of *LEF Across Town* as a “third party:”

I think it is an asset. I think it's important to have that [the LEF]. Not only just for the funding and resources that we [school district] get from it, but because I think they're another voice that talks about the importance of education. One, public education and two, having an outside view of and for the public to hear a different voice about how important it is to have a strong educational institution that provides prepared and ready students for the workplace and the college and career kind of thing. I think when you have someone talking about it that's not involved internally in the school district it adds another dimension, so I think that's the asset, that's the benefit.

Beyond the school district, interviewees made statements about the need to be better known across the community. In commenting on new directions for the LEF, the board chair said: “The first thing would be to try to make the full community more aware of the foundation to begin with and more aware that the foundation exists and what the foundation does to benefit students and teachers.” Another board member acknowledged:

The corporate community knows us quite well, and they're some of our biggest funders, and that's great. We couldn't be happier about that. I do think we need to get out to individuals more, and that's where we still need to work on our branding, getting them to know who we are.

Still another board member suggested that the minority community is a segment of the population that lacks “real knowledge and understanding of the foundation.” The

president observed something similar in terms of being unknown to facets of the community, even to those internal to the school district. While teachers, students, the school district personnel, and the business community were discussed frequently in terms of the work of the foundation, parents represent a unique and important stakeholder within education. As the one interview participant with loyalties to both the LEF and the school district, the school board/LEF board member commented:

How can we get parents more engaged, not just as their children being the recipients of scholarships and other kinds of support, but how can we make them part of potential contributors and not in the same way we expect from the business community, but in other kinds of ways and also for them to be advocates for us?

For local education foundations, and school districts more broadly, parents represent some of the greatest assets in the community and for the school district. This goes beyond parents as financial supporters to the LEF, but parents as advocates for the school district. To that end, the LEF may be seen as stewards for district efforts to engage more parents. In this way, the work of the LEF and school district are aligned in trying to engage parents in supporting the school district, but they do so by being seen as having different interests. The president describes the value they bring to the school district:

We offer kind of a third party perspective on the relationship of the district to its constituents, which are the parents and kids and the community at large. There is value in that we're community and business leaders that have formed to offer support of public education. But we're not the school district, and it gives us that separation where you can be a little more the 'conscience,' and a little bit more of an 'objective voice,' as opposed to a shill for the district.

The Oxford Dictionary describes a shill as a person who pretends to give an impartial endorsement of something in which they themselves have an interest. So rather

than being simply a “cheerleader” for the district, the LEF can be legitimately seen as a constructive advocate of public education when it is understood to be a separate entity.

### **Resources and Assets**

When seeking greater independence and autonomy from the school district, foundations have to make choices about resources. In some cases, the foundation foregoes an important aspect of independence in exchange for financial assistance. For *LEF Across Town*, this was not a tradeoff it could make and still do what it intended as an independent local education foundation. In fact the opposite occurred as the president recounted one of the first things that was done upon starting in the position.

One of the first people I brought on to my staff was an IT guy. Really quickly, we interfaced with the district data and metrics and measures and all that stuff, and now we’re completely wired in. That’s one of the first big things I was after. So now we have metrics, so now we can go after grants, now we have the same tools as the district, which we never had before. Now we can measure all of these programs; before it was just anecdotal.

Lacking access to information on students is not uncommon for foundations with greater independence from the school district. Inaccessible data can also be a problem for foundations operating within the school district, especially when districts are not collecting certain types of data. In the end, this challenge can limit a foundation’s ability to operate grants effectively, or make evidentiary cases for their work outside the school district. This in turn limits some of their abilities to seek other funding sources, which again may reinforce their dependence on the school district. Interestingly, when a school district limits access to data and information by the LEF, it is in some cases limiting the foundation’s ability to bring in resources that benefit the school district. While privacy issues related to student data are important considerations for school districts, limiting

access to an important partner like the LEF can signal distrust by the school district in how the information may be used and shared more broadly.

In the context of *LEF Across Town* it may also be the case that the LEF could become a competitor with the school district in applying for the same grants. In fact, this is one of the issues considered by the president, as a lack of coordination in the school district in applying for grants and attracting donations. This is something the foundation considers in its work to try to communicate better with the district when considering a grant application.

Finally, *LEF Across Town* is one of the highest earning foundations in the state and country bringing in over \$5.5 million in 2011. The foundation's largest revenue source is from in-kind donations (32 percent of total revenue), followed by revenue from other foundations (22 percent of total revenue), investments (14 percent of total revenue), and government (12 percent of total revenue). Like most nonprofits, *LEF Across Town* never feels sufficiently funded to where resource development is unnecessary. However, the foundation is focusing on developing more giving opportunities from individuals within the community, which currently represents 9 percent of total sources of annual revenue. The president described their perspective on giving:

I see us broadening our financial base to really include individuals. That's where the actions going to be to get community involvement- you've got to get the individuals to feel like we're reflecting their desires to transform the community through their donational giving.

*LEF Across Town* sees giving as an opportunity for individuals to express their support for public education through meaningful giving. In an exchange with the interviewer (KF), the president (P) of the foundation went on to say:

KF: Well, it seems like going to a corporation, maybe it's easier to get money? They have it, they're interested in donating, but you don't necessarily get the sort of community investment when you just go to a big corporation.

P: That's what I think. That's exactly why I think we should broaden our base.

By strategically broadening their financial base, *LEF Across Town* is looking for both local resources and local investments of people's time and interest in public education.

### **Summary**

*LEF Across Town* is considered an independent, non-direct support local education foundation. The foundation works to continue its role in financing programs and initiatives the school district cannot legally or financially support. However, it is seeking new areas to grow its impact on public education more broadly. While the organization may have started out much closer to and embedded in the school district, in many ways the stability of the leadership in the school district enabled the foundation to move away from the district and take on a partnership role. The President and Board of *LEF Across Town* are not resentful of the closeness with which the organization still collaborates with the school district; in fact they see their position as an advantage. Not too far away, but far enough "to step back and say 'have you ever thought about this a little differently?'" and get the community input."

### **Case 3: LEF Out to Sea**

As nonprofits have been readily engaged in advocacy and motivating change in the public realm (Bryce, 2012; Minkoff, 2002), so too have LEFs developed their role as mediators of public will and collective conscience within their communities. While many local education foundations place their greatest emphasis on funding and carrying



out the programs they have traditionally managed for the school district, some have embraced the concept of a “high-capacity” foundation whereby the organization develops the resources and ability to strengthen the community around schools for the purpose of systemic improvements or change. This role is both strategic and intentional as local education foundations seek out the areas where they can draw attention to the need for change and do so by using their resources and reputation.

One example of a “high-capacity” foundation is *LEF Out to Sea*, which combines some aspects of the more traditional role of an education foundation with an entrepreneurial perspective on how to promote systemic change within the school district. While system change in public education may be promoted by efforts of elected school board members, the superintendent, or even other state or local legislative bodies, it can also occur at the community level with increased engagement and awareness on the part of parents. *LEF Out to Sea* is one example of how an education foundation is strategically positioned to foster, finance, and facilitate change within the school district.

*LEF Out to Sea* as a local education foundation has existed in its current form since 2009 when it was re-established as a non-direct support foundation for a county-wide school district in Florida. Driven by support and financial resources from another locally-based public foundation, *LEF Out to Sea* became a community partner intended to support the school district and its mission to provide access to better quality public education. The LEF serves a community with historically poor quality public schools where a large majority of the parents with children in the county choose alternatives to traditional public schools, such as private schools and homeschooling. Given this background, *LEF Out to Sea* was founded as a community response to ineffective and

low-performing schools. Largely driven by business stakeholders in the county concerned for public education's impact on economic development, community members organized around creating a "neutral entity" to discern, advocate, and inform others on critical challenges in public schools.

Having a fairly distinct and highly intentional founding, *LEF Out to Sea* readily embraces its role in the community as an institution that exists separately from the school district. *LEF Out to Sea* has no overlap with the school district in terms of employees, resources, equipment, office space, or materials. The foundation is structurally and administratively autonomous from the school district, but as suggested by the president it exists to support public education by working as "a strong and independent compliment to the work the school district is doing." In the areas below, I draw on interviews with the president, a foundation director, four board members, two community representatives, and the superintendent of the school district. To enhance the background information and details of the organization, I also use the survey data, website, marketing materials, and the strategic plan of *LEF Out to Sea*. The different accounts reveal that *LEF Out to Sea* exists within a highly networked environment of local nonprofit and governmental entities focused on improving educational experiences for all students now and into the future.

### **Role of the LEF**

The President of *LEF Out to Sea* characterizes the foundation's role as "critical friend." This role falls on the opposite end of the spectrum from an ATM or cheerleader when classifying roles of education foundations. The LEF board and leadership are

focused on an overall primary consideration, which is “how do we represent the community's best interest” in regards to public education. Seeking out and identifying “best interest” in the community results in a combination of functional roles and viable avenues to carry out their “high level systemic work” to implement school system change.

At the most basic level, *LEF Out to Sea* shares a common functional role with other education foundations, which is to serve as advocates for public education. The superintendent believes at times that as an advocate one has “to push the school district, push the board, and push the superintendent to get better and to do new and different things.” In order to decide and formulate what are “new and different things” for the school district, the foundation conducts research that is shared with the community. Rather than simply sharing data and information, the foundation mobilizes the community around change in local schools by utilizing its data and policy research. This may be through community meetings sponsored by the education foundation, or other organization as well as through the foundation’s website tools for parents, and the news media.

Serving as a catalyst for change, the foundation’s role also involves raising money for the school district to fill gaps and to fund initiatives that come out of the research. New initiatives promoted by the foundation are targeted to areas of best practice that are often innovative and untested within the school district. As a result, the foundation funds newer programs if and/or until the school district makes funding available. In this way, *LEF Out to Sea* fills gaps in funding and resources within the school system until funds may be reallocated. Overall, the financial resources of *LEF Out to Sea* are shared with

the district to help it implement research-based systemic changes. One foundation director observed that resources are provided in this way to achieve the longer-term goal to “innovate with private dollars and then use public dollars to sustain that work and show them [the school district] a different way of doing it that's much more effective for kids.”

*LEF Out to Sea* also considers its role to be communicating with those outside the public education system and those organizations that can partner with the system to improve schools. LEF leaders gather feedback from organizations and individuals around the county to identify needs and parcel out ways the foundation can address those needs alongside the school district. One board member observed that the foundation tries to make communication an on-going and central part of the work of keeping the community engaged over the long haul. The board member goes on to suggest, “We do best when we see ourselves as an organization that amplifies the voice of the community and say, hey, wait a minute now.” This is where the foundation can legitimately be a ‘critical friend’ to the school district by helping to organize the feedback from the community. Beyond these primary roles, board members and the President of *LEF Out to Sea* speak extensively about its mission and values as an organization.

### **Mission and Values**

*LEF Out to Sea* has one of the broadest and shortest mission statements of the foundations in Florida. With the goal of quality education throughout the school district, the foundation has worked to tackle a more immediate mission, which is to “make people believe that we can improve our public schools.” In the past, the community around *LEF Out to Sea* was characterized as having little faith in the school district and distrust in the

ability of the system to change for the better. As a result, the foundation is fundamentally committed to preserving the role of public education in the community and helping people see that the educational system belongs to the community.

This mission is driven by a number of values as an organization. A primary value for *LEF Out to Sea* is its independence from the school district. Being independent of the school district and its resources is guarded by the foundation and is reflected in the financial structure, board make-up, and place of work for the foundation. While in the past the foundation was housed in a school district building, it now operates out of shared offices with the prominent community-based organization that helped ‘re-found’ the LEF in 2009. *LEF Out to Sea* conducts its own fundraising campaigns and has no district funding for its operations and activities. The board is comprised of strategic members of different communities, including individuals from business, philanthropy, and faith communities. They also intentionally have one of the smaller boards among LEFs in the state, seeking individuals who “represent different power bases” in the community. The foundation has its own website and prepares its own marketing materials and brochures. Overall, the foundation does not rely on the school district for anything operationally or financially.

By having this freedom from being dependent or constrained by school district resources, *LEF Out to Sea* can carry out another part of its mission, which is to do what is needed when it is needed on behalf of the community. The president of the foundation argues that through independence the LEF can serve a dual purpose:

We're there to provide the superintendent and the school board cover when they're making tough decisions that are in the best interest of kids, political cover in particular; but we're also there when they're not doing what's in the best interest of kids-to hold their feet to the fire.

Another value embraced by the foundation is *transparency*. In an environment that brings together research, advocacy, and community feedback, the foundation works to ensure that its initiatives and efforts come out of a transparent process. This helps build social capital for the foundation when both the community and school district are able to see how the work of the foundation takes place.

The foundation also places great emphasis on the importance of research. Not only does it conduct its own research on its own programs, but it regularly seeks out and shares research to help the school district understand some of its own challenges. Since most of the actions taken by the foundation are research driven, staff and LEF board members take seriously how research is conducted, used, and shared in the community for understanding. One community member associated with the foundation commented on the need for independence in order to conduct the “third-party, that’s outside the school district” type of research the foundation does. Research is also used to help identify the best activities and programs for the foundation to implement. A board member identified a focus on research as opposed to programs and services as a major difference from other local education foundations, suggesting: “We don't do much in regard to direct impact or deliverables on the ground level. Our commitment is to providing the district with the best in data and research.”

### **Activities and Programs**

Using its research as a starting point, *LEF Out to Sea* often organizes its work by major campaigns or initiatives. In the past it has followed a path of sorts that started with formulating a strategic plan, attracting the financial resources and social capital to support initiatives within the plan, and working alongside the school district to carry out

different efforts. For example, it has drawn attention to high school drop-out rates in the district and the impact this has on students over the long term. The campaign helped to first bring awareness to the problem throughout the community. Then, working with the school district, the foundation exposed district leaders to a new model of supporting non-traditional, overage students in high school to help them to complete their GEDs. This new school model was piloted in the district using foundation resources, but is now being taken over and expanded by the school district.

More recently, the foundation has turned to district issues on teacher turnover and teacher shortages. Using data that illuminates the district-wide challenge of teacher turnover, the foundation has gathered the resources to help the district overhaul its teacher hiring and professional development practices. The foundation tends to walk a parallel path in terms of its programming with the school district by supporting separate initiatives that are also aligned with the work of the district. On one hand they seek out and identify long-term program initiatives and efforts to target specific areas of challenge for the school district. On the other hand, the foundation pursues ways to continuously re-engage the community in the public school system. For example, the foundation and the school district are also working on ways to promote community involvement in schools by organizing school site visits by different members of the community who may never have been in a public school setting.

The foundation regularly composes and shares policy briefs with the school district and community. These are done with the intention of sharing findings as a kind of self-reflection on educational issues throughout the district. They are also typically done in conjunction with efforts to mobilize the community around seeing challenges

facing the district as opportunities for change and improvement. In other words, the foundation does not use policy briefs as a way to incriminate or make the school district “look bad,” but uses them to start discussions about education issues within the community. As a result, *LEF Out to Sea* is constantly fostering relationships with stakeholders within the school district administration and school board, as well as individuals and groups outside the school district structures.

### **Stakeholder Relationships**

The President of *LEF Out to Sea* describes the organization’s life-sustaining elements, which for many nonprofits are their financial resources or capital. However, even though *LEF Out to Sea* has some of the largest philanthropic resources of any foundation in the state it still relies on a much less tangible resource. The president summarizes it as this:

We realize that our primary partner is the school system, and so I tell people a lot that we have zero authority to do anything. All of our authority comes from soft power. It comes from relationships our board members have. It comes from the intellectual capital we have in terms of our data and research work, and it comes from the great ideas that we can bear and the community mobilization that we've done.

To that end, the foundation works hard to cultivate their ‘soft power’ by providing support for the school district that could not come any other way. For example, the superintendent recalled the foundation’s past work in gathering community feedback:

They did a great job with the [title removed] campaign in order to solicit information from the community about what they want out of the school district. We built off that to create our strategic plan. So, I think that there are multiple examples of how I have used their former work or their current work to elevate what we need to do as a district. I look at them as a partner.



While the superintendent does not see the foundation as replacing activities within the school district, they do see the added value and benefit of having this type of partner organization within the context of a large, bureaucratic structure:

There is so much work to do, and there's so much that the school district is responsible for. There are so many challenges. Sometimes it's nice to have a partner that can focus on raising funds, focus on community involvement and engagement, and it's always nice to have a partner that at the end of the day wants public education to do well. A partner that promotes it, protects it, and tries to enhance it.

Further, the foundation provides a “broad community lens” for the school district in terms of bringing feedback in and pushing information out. *LEF Out to Sea* is adept at developing opportunities for the district to reach the community and in the past has set up forums for the superintendent to share the district’s strategic plan. By bringing the community and school district together, *LEF Out to Sea* acts as a convener or mediator of sorts which engenders support for education, the school district, and the foundation. This is not to say that the relationship with the school district is without challenges. The foundation board members suggested early growing pains in working with the school district, as well as ongoing challenges that come up when implementing programs or changes within the school district.

Even though the relationship with the school district is still an important part of its everyday considerations as a local education foundation, independence from the school district makes community support, relevance, and legitimacy critical for the type of work the LEF is doing in public education. The foundation continues to set itself apart from the public foundation that helped to recreate it in 2009 by treading new paths established by the current LEF board and the district superintendent. At times the superintendent

helps to bridge any divides that occur between the foundation and elected school board members who feel it is their “role as board members to engage the community...[and] to obviously influence and create policy.” However, the relationships with the school board are improving as new board members have been elected. The superintendent pointed out, “the foundation has networks that I have and can use to strengthen public education, bring additional resources but also ideas, and additional partners to the table.”

Overall, *LEF Out to Sea* takes seriously how it engages stakeholders on its board, within the community, and in and outside the school district administration. Outside the school district are on-going efforts in the community to bring in other avenues for students to learn outside the traditional public schools, such as charter schools. In the past, LEF board members are or have been associated with these efforts. Therefore, *LEF Out to Sea* is cognizant of connecting its mission to support quality education for all students with its commitment to improving the system for public schools. The foundation leadership sees charter schools, Teach for America, and private school alternatives as viable tools for helping students to access quality educational opportunities. However, the LEF’s primary objective is to garner stakeholder support for public schools.

Finally, one group of people not often discussed as a challenge for *LEF Out to Sea* is parents. While the LEF relies on the support and actions of prominent individuals in the community, they do their work to support and engage parents and students. Community representatives acknowledge the likelihood that parents do not know about the foundation or the work it does. However, this is who the foundation is targeting in its community forums, outreach events, and website resources. The foundation makes

efforts to reach parents with tools on its website that allow parents to access information about individual schools. In essence, therefore, parents are an equally important focus for the foundation as they, along with students, are seen as the primary beneficiaries of the foundation's work.

## **Resources and Assets**

*LEF Out to Sea* benefits from the fundraising efforts of other prominent nonprofit organizations in the community. As a result, nearly 80 percent of its revenue is from individual donors and other foundations in support of specific campaigns or initiatives based on its strategic plan. In 2011, the foundation reported \$1.8 million in revenues; however, the foundation relies on funding generated from specific campaigns held in conjunction with other partnering nonprofits. Donors to the foundation are sought out for specific initiatives and with a specific type of giving in mind. The President of *LEF Out to Sea* describes its donors:

We talk about all the folks who are donors as our 'investors.' We ask for multiyear financial commitments from our donors, because we think this is long-term work. As an executive, I need to be able to make long-term decisions and say we're going to make an investment in this project for the next three years, and if we're singing for our supper every night, there's no way we could do that.

Although board members rarely felt that the LEF is constrained by its financial resources, one board member commented on the foundation's financial situation:

We don't do that [fundraising], and we're fortunate. But there will come a point where it becomes a lot more urgent. Right now we've got a lot of big players who see this as the only credible choice for their dollars, and they care about education, and so money's coming.

In this, the foundation has another critical asset: being seen as the "only credible choice for donor dollars." This is a position the foundation does not take for granted. It

may also help to explain why 60 percent of the LEF's expenditures are for communication efforts. The foundation wants to continue to be seen and known for its work across the community, capitalizing on its unique role in working alongside the school district. This role is one the superintendent appreciates, observing:

With everything else that we have to do and everything else we have to fix and problem solve, is it that bad to have an organization that goes out to try to enhance what we're trying to do? As long as we stay on the same page...as long as we are aligned, I think we help them and they help us.

## **Summary**

*LEF Out to Sea* reflects a strategic effort on the part of prominent community leaders to support public education in its community. Its role is focused on facilitating research-based change in the school system. While never diminishing the importance of supporting students through scholarships or teachers through grants, the foundation has chosen to purposely forgo the potential breadth of such programs in an effort to seek broader impact for the entire school district and community. That is not to say its efforts are not further targeted at those areas of the district most in need of systemic change; to the contrary, the work of *LEF Out to Sea* is targeted at just that. *LEF Out to Sea* seeks to impact students and teachers, but it has chosen to do so by impacting the system that influences the educational environments for students and teachers.

## **Discussion**

The three cases described in this chapter serve as representative examples of different types of organizational relationships between a local education foundation and the school district as well as with the community outside the school district administration. The first case, *LEF Down the Hall*, reflects an organization that

experiences the challenges of understanding and responding to the school district needs and interests for the foundation. *LEF Across Town* demonstrates an organizationally and administratively independent foundation that works to align with the school district and, when necessary, encourage the district to reciprocate by supporting the foundation's values and mission. In the third case, *LEF Out to Sea* reflects a wholly independent organization that operates in parallel with the school district to support and encourage change within the educational system as an *institution* in the community. As described, local education foundations differ in how they relate with the school district. If we consider the foundation/school district relationship along a spectrum, we might place on one end *LEF Down the Hall* as embedded in the school district, because it is physically in the same building as the administration and acts with relatively less autonomy. Although the executive director and board members want to be good stewards toward the school district, their work to support the school district is constrained by the limited feedback they receive and coordination on the part of district administration. Further, the board members perceive the school district as reducing their legitimacy as an organization by treating the foundation as a lower department, stalling cooperative initiatives, and in providing fewer opportunities to work collaboratively on initiatives.

While the perception may be that *LEF Across Town* is less aligned to the school district since it moved to its own office space and seeks opportunities to engage with the community outside its regular programs, the president spends comparatively less time clarifying the LEF's role and relationship to the school district than does *LEF Down the Hall*. On the spectrum of closeness to the school district, we might place *LEF Across*

*Town* in the middle, as it is not entirely independent, but autonomous enough to drive its own programs and influence some activities within the school district.

The variation between the first two foundations is due in part to the differences in administrative oversight by the school district versus the foundation board, resource sharing between the school district and foundation, infrastructure support in the form of office space and technology, and decision making processes and programming choices. Similar differences are observed in *LEF Out to Sea* as it has separate office space, no crossover in infrastructure resources and oversight, and a parallel path with the school district to understand the community and its needs within public education. Given these differences, we might put *LEF Out to Sea* at the opposite end of *LEF Down the Hall*. Below is a spectrum of positions between the school districts and their foundations based on some of the structural and organizational variation between the three cases.

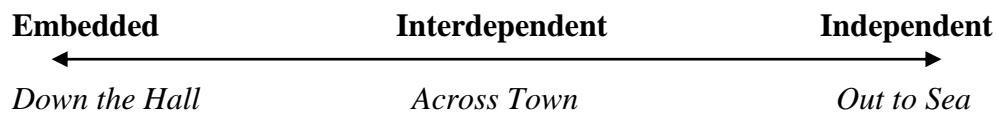


Figure 3. LEF/School District Structural Positions

While this spectrum captures the position of the three LEF cases in terms of structure and organization, the nature of the *relationships* between the organizations is not captured in these relative positions. As the first case illustrates, embeddedness does to equate to relational closeness as *LEF Down the Hall* experiences challenges in the relationship with the school district. The third case, *LEF Out to Sea*, demonstrates that independence does not necessarily result in relational distance. Within each of the cases,

however, is the pursuit of *partnership* in different ways that may not necessarily align to their structural position. To characterize *partnership* relative to the structural positions, we must consider where the relationships differ across the spectrum.

*Partnership* refers to an intentionally collaborative relationship between two organizations (Kapucu, 2006). While the three cases presented illustrate organizational interactions that tend to look like partnering relationships, some differences exist in how the *partnership* is realized across different foundation depending on their relative relationship to the school district. For example, one of the more prominent differences across the three cases is how LEFs seek and secure attention from the school district and community. Whereas the location of *LEF Down the Hall* seems to make it the likeliest of foundations to receive attention and engagement by the school district, *LEF Across Town* and *LEF Out to Sea* more readily experience attention and focus from school district administrators. Even though they are not direct support organizations and are in fact located outside of school district offices, *LEF Across Town* and *LEF Out to Sea* reflect greater alignment in their interactions and collaboration with the school district.

The three cases are also different in how each organization engages with the school district, from trying to carry out basic programs with middle management to supporting systemic change by working with the superintendent and school board. *LEF Down the Hall* has found ways to work with individuals in the school district to implement their programs, while *LEF Across Town* and *LEF Out to Sea* meet regularly with the superintendent to plan their current and future initiatives. The three cases also demonstrate different perspectives on the resources they bring to the school district

outside of donations, such as goodwill, community engagement, and information/policy awareness campaigns.

Finally, the cases suggest that foundations pursue an identity relative to the school district and outside stakeholders. While the primary relationship for LEFs, and affiliated foundations in general, is with the “parent” organization, this relationship is nevertheless influenced by how the foundation is given or shapes its own identity. *LEF Out to Sea* is fundamentally independent of school district control and the district’s organizational structure, while *LEF Across Town* is pursuing greater autonomy where it can be identified as more of a community-based organization. *LEF Down the Hall* recognizes the boundaries of acting ahead of school district support given its position as an extension of the school district. While *LEF Down the Hall* receives infrastructure support and the executive director is considered a school district employee, both *LEF Across Town* and *LEF Out to Sea* employ their own staff and accept very little if any financial support from their school districts. The choices foundations make with regard to how they relate to the school district in staffing, resource sharing, and donor perceptions impact their identity as an organization within the community around the school district.

In the next chapter, I will draw from the variation within the three cases to conceptualize *partnership* across all 18 foundations in this study as they fulfill their varied roles as affiliated foundations.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS OF PARTNERSHIP

Chapter four presented three cases of local education foundations that share similar contexts in terms of supporting students and teachers in public education. However, the cases reflect that LEFs provide this support in a number of different ways and within different organizational contexts between the foundation and the school district. In some local contexts, LEFs maintain an embedded structure with the school district drawing the organization closer to the school district's control and influence. On the other hand, in local contexts where the foundation is independent of school district control and influence, foundations are further removed from the school district. As the cases in chapter four demonstrate, relative embeddedness or independence are not necessarily indicators of the type of partnering relationship between two legally independent organizations. In this chapter, I characterize dimensions of *partnership* across several types of embedded, interdependent, and independent foundations to connect structure and relationship in the context of affiliated foundations.

In the model of affiliated foundations first presented in chapter two, I proposed that the relationship between an affiliated foundation and its “parent” organization was characterized by two ongoing efforts, *legitimation* and *stewardship*, to develop a *partnership*, or collaborative relationship. Figure 4 shows the affiliated foundation model applied to local education foundations.

As described in chapter four, the three local education foundations experience different types of organizational relationships with the school district based initially on how they perceive and experience *legitimation* and *stewardship* with the school district.

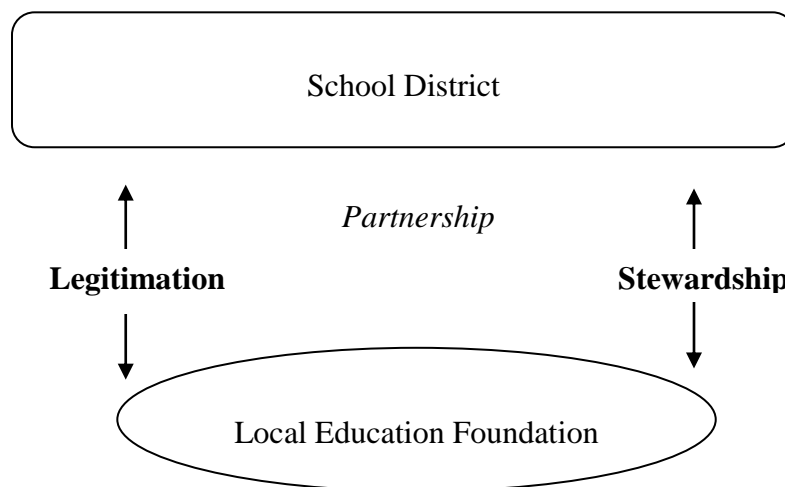


Figure 4 . Model of Local Education Foundation/School District Relationship

*LEF Out to Sea* consciously works to be both good stewards of the school district’s reputation and efforts to improve public education, while benefiting from the reciprocity of legitimation in working in parallel with the school district. The two organizations have a reciprocal relationship where each supports the work, reputation, and efforts of the other. *LEF Across Town* also finds ways to act with stewardship toward the school district as the district extends greater legitimacy and support for the LEF’s work in reaching out to the community. *LEF Down the Hall*, on the other hand, experiences less overt legitimation on the part of the school district, and somewhat fewer opportunities to be good stewards for the school district.

### **Position and Partnership**

The analysis of interviews across the 18 foundations indicates that one of the most frequently acknowledged shortcomings of LEFs regardless of type (embedded, interdependent, independent), size, or mission is that the foundation is not well known in

the community. While any number of reasons exists as to why this is such a widespread challenge for local education foundations (e.g. branding issues, lack of community outreach, targeted rather than broader awareness campaigns, recent name change), it gives credence to the partnering relationship with the school district as the foremost focus of foundations. In other words, many foundations spend considerable time being known and working with different parts of the school district, which may detract from their efforts to be better known in their community. As local education foundations have little purpose as an affiliated foundation without acceptance from the school district, *partnership* is typically the responsibility of the LEF to pursue with the school district. Again, *partnership* refers to an intentionally collaborative relationship between two organizations (Kapucu, 2006) and involves on-going efforts to foster a partnering relationship (Austin, 2000). LEFs recognize that school districts can and do find ways to bring in additional resources without an LEF (Longoria, 1999) so the pursuit of *partnership* is critical to an affiliated foundation's relationship to a "parent" organization.

Of the 18 foundations that participated in interviews, only one has an executive director whose role in managing the foundation is just one part of the director's administrative position in the school district. While another foundation director indicated the job was part time, the remaining 16 foundations have directors or presidents who manage LEFs and the relationship with the school district and community on a full-time basis. While an LEF may have relationships with multiple stakeholders, its primary connection is with the school district that created or accepted the organization as an affiliated foundation. In this chapter I draw from my cross-case analysis of interviews to propose four dimensions that characterize *partnership* in the LEF/school district

relationship. The dimensions are: 1) attention, 2) successive engagement, and 3) resource infusion. As described in chapter three, my coding of interviews followed a multi-round coding process (Saldaña, 2013) to identify the dimensions of *partnership* through iterative explanation building. By grouping narrower codes into more meaningful categories using interview data from all foundations in the study (Yin, 2009), I draw on excerpts from interview transcripts as representative examples of the concepts and attributes of partnership in affiliated foundations. While other representative examples may exist within the interview data, I made efforts to utilize the perspectives of different interviewees as they best characterized the concepts detailed in the following sections.

### **Attention**

In describing alliances between nonprofits and businesses, Austin (2000) describes the concept of *focused attention* whereby the partnership “receives concentrated engagement by key decision makers” (p. 85) in order to carry out a strategic alliance. Drawing on the idea that attention matters when two organizations work together, in the LEF relationship with the school district *attention* may be characterized in two ways: functionally and symbolically. *Attention* serves a functional purpose to inform, guide, or approve the work of the foundation in relation to the school district. The symbolic purpose of *attention* is to demonstrate appreciation, relevance, and inclusion. When combined, the functional and symbolic roles of *attention* are based on merit rather than an organizational position. In other words, functional and symbolic *attention* from the school district is not inherent to being an affiliated foundation but earned by the foundation.

## **Functional Attention**

*Attention* from the school district serves a functional purpose: 1) to understand what the district wants ‘done’ and, 2) for the foundation to understand what it can do for or with the school district. These are subtly different orientations that LEF directors and board members readily observe some inconsistency in application. To the first part, when an LEF is overlooked for a longer period of time, especially as a direct-support organization, it is left with the challenge of “guessing at what it is that we should be doing...or what are the highest priorities that would create the highest impact in the school district.” In my coding of interviews, the most frequent tasks of LEFs were funding, meeting needs, serving as an intermediary for resources, and providing different resources. In other words, LEFs were primarily created to attract resources and meet needs within the school district. Also indicated through the cross-case analysis, not all school district needs are identified by the school district; some are cross-identified between the foundation and the school district or outside groups. As suggested by interview data, therefore, understanding the explicit needs of the school district is essential to the work of LEFs.

Among local education foundations that are considered direct support organizations and embedded in the school district, LEF leaders often struggle for attention and consideration of the school district superintendent and/or school board members. Directors describe periods where they feel “disconnected” from the school district, which is usually a perspective that grows as superintendents or their designees stop attending foundation board meetings. Directors also describe changes in the

frequency or length of their individual meetings with the superintendent as another way they perceive a lack of *functional attention*.

On the second part (understanding what the LEF can do for the school district) *attention* serves the functional purpose of helping the foundation to know how it can serve the school district. When school district representatives stop attending meetings, LEFs are unable to benefit from an understanding of where they can fit the LEF's work into the school district. One school board member on an LEF board describes how "The superintendent and I sit on the [LEF] board, so we kind of represent the institutional knowledge of the district over time, what's current, and where the needs are." With this type of institutional knowledge and information, LEFs can then find ways to match their work with school district needs and contexts. This is especially important as LEFs act as an intermediary with donors who have specific interests that may be harder to match up without having insight on current challenges or near future changes within the school district.

As is the case with other collaborative relationships, when interactions between leaders occur with less regularity, information stops being exchanged and relationships between leaders dissolve, making it difficult for the foundation to be responsive and relevant to the school district. Mechanisms for *attention* are therefore built into the relationship with the school district by having the superintendent and a school board member designee as part of the LEF board. While not necessarily being formally part of the LEF board, foundations also encourage *functional attention* by asking curriculum directors or other department heads to attend their board meetings. In one case, the foundation director shared:

We also have the career and technical education and literacy director on our board, so they always know what's going on. They always know what's coming down the pipe as far as department of education at the state and federal level goes. They know what the schools need, too, because they are in the schools on a regular basis.

Having these types of school district staff members on their board or at their meetings allows foundations to have “eyes and ears” across different departments that can impact the work of the LEF as well as within schools that are harder to reach on an individual basis. Again, attention from different constituents within the school district serves the functional role of matching up LEF resources and programming ideas with school district needs.

Paradoxically, among non-direct support organizations that operate with greater independence from the school district, capturing the school district’s attention is for the most part not a challenge. One foundation director commented, “We’re non-direct support, so we listen very closely to what the school board needs and recommends, but the board makes its own decisions about what we want to fund and how we want to run things.” In other words, attention does not serve the same functional purpose for a direct support LEF as a non-direct support LEF. Those foundations that have greater independence from the school district also have greater autonomy in deciding how to be responsive to the school district and community. For most of these types of foundations, they consider their direction coming from needs identified by the community, opportunities identified by foundation board members, and donor interests. At the same time, foundations with greater independence from the school district still strive to be collaborative with the school district by making “some joint decisions and having some input from the school board for anything we do.” While attention from the school district

can serve a functional purpose to equip the foundation to formulate new and or innovative ideas, the symbolic aspect of attention empowers the foundation to carry out its role.

### **Symbolic Attention**

*Symbolic attention* serves the role of acknowledging the foundation's efforts and the value it brings to the different constituencies in the school system. In this way, *symbolic attention* encourages the commitment of the executive director and more so the LEF board members. *Symbolic attention* is similar to legitimation, which is meant to serve to communicate recognition, value, and relevance to external stakeholders (e.g. community, donors, parents, other nonprofits). However, *symbolic attention* is associated with signaling legitimacy to internal stakeholders of the foundation to foster commitment and demonstrate appreciation. Board members often suggest that they want to feel like their work is making a difference to students and teachers, contributing to public education, and is helping the school district in even small ways to be able to focus on other priorities. One foundation board member summed it up in this way: "I think that if we're not at the table [with school district administrators] or we're not thought of, it is because no one sees what we do as being terribly vital." In other words, when the superintendent or school board members fail to acknowledge and engage the foundation, the LEF board perceives that it is not a valuable partner for the school district.

Another board member who served over ten years on the board of the local education foundation recalled a difficult time period for the foundation when the board felt disengaged and isolated from the superintendent. They compared the LEF's treatment in the school district with being "like the redheaded stepchild" where they were



disconnected from the rest of the school district. When the school district distances itself from the LEF, the foundation can do little by way of new or innovative programs because they are cut off from access to and insight from the school district. In such cases, LEFs tend to continue in their existing roles without change or adaptation to school district needs.

On the other hand, while LEFs want to feel engaged by the school district, they “don't just want to be asked to pay for things...we want to be strategic partners.” To that end, LEF boards do not want to feel “micro-managed” by the school district. In this way, foundation boards seek both *functional* and *symbolic attention* not for the purpose of being controlled, constrained, or used as an ATM, but for partnership. While LEFs are not considered equal partners with the school district, their difference from the school district as a public charity is what allows LEFs to bring value to the school district. Being different and being seen as different is in essence its relative advantage in working with the school district. However, not all difference is appreciated and can sometimes be discouraged by school districts. As school districts withdraw or fail to provide *symbolic attention*, foundations are forced to take stock of their work and engagement with the school district. In doing so, LEF leaders often have to identify ways to earn their *functional* and *symbolic attention* from the school district.

### **Merited Attention**

Being ignored, disconnected, or overlooked is sometimes rationalized by foundation leaders who seek ways to merit greater attention. For example, a lack of attention may be a result of not attracting enough resources to warrant consideration on the part of the school district. A foundation director commented, “I almost have to sell

my leaders into paying attention to me...because, *really*, their budget shortfall one year is \$20 million. We're bringing in \$2 million a year.” Another director echoed this reality: “Our \$2.5 million budget is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$3 billion school district budget.” In other words, school district administrators are sometimes perceived as overlooking foundations that are unable to bring in “bigger dollars” relative to school district budgets.

Foundation directors also attribute disengagement by the school district to growing organizational independence where superintendents have less control over the work and activities of the foundation: “I just think the superintendent wants the foundation to be a department of the district and just have control of it.” Without total control over the foundation and its resources, superintendents sometimes choose to engage with the foundation only when necessary or when asked by the foundation. School districts may also pursue relationships with other nonprofit entities such as local community or private foundations, signaling to the LEF a degree of irrelevance to the school district. Foundation leaders recognize that for some superintendents the foundation may not be seen as a priority because other things have to be based on their performance and contract specifications. One direct-support foundation leader recalled an experience with the superintendent of the district when the foundation was explicitly made a priority by the school board:

The first year when the superintendent was not quite as engaged, I understand that the school board made that a topic of their evaluation, talking about the support of the foundation and making it a big priority for the superintendent. So when the board tells you that this foundation is a priority, then it becomes a priority for the superintendent. So, since that time, the superintendent has been really very, very engaged with us...coming to all the meetings rather than sending somebody else...the superintendent is there all the time.

Districts are interested in programs or initiatives that directly impact curriculum and professional development. At the same time, LEFs are interested in programs that have a direct impact on students and teachers. Therefore, foundations are more likely to receive attention from the superintendent when they initiate or change programs related to curriculum, such as teacher grants or STEM lessons, in-class experiences, or technology. To that end, LEFs can increase their value to and attention from the school district when supporting programs or initiatives that take place in the classroom.

Aside from bringing in larger dollars and funding programs that directly impact curriculum, foundation directors can capture the attention of the school district through their board members. For example, a foundation board comprised of individuals in the community with “clout” can attract the attention of district superintendents and school board members. One director described this relationship in starting new programs or initiatives in the school district:

I always run things this way first: get approval or buy-in from my board and then take it to the superintendent, because it's a hard argument when I say I have these business leaders who are very prominent in our community that want to do this. I've never been met with resistance that way. So, that's been my approach.

Foundation board buy-in and support has the added benefit of drawing greater attention from the community as well, reinforcing the school district’s interest in the foundation.

The functional and symbolic parts of *attention* are mutually reinforcing components of the relationship with the school district. The more functional attention a foundation receives, the more it is able to do the things that warrant symbolic attention, such as public recognition, being part of the district’s strategic plan, and being called

upon to work on specific opportunities in the school district. However, engagement and attention on the part of the school district rarely happen without merit. In other words, LEFs have to actively work to become an organization that the school district leadership will see as a “strategic partner.” While *functional attention* is the starting place for newer LEF leaders trying to navigate the existing relationship between the foundation and school district, *symbolic attention* is what LEF board members consistently strive to achieve in their roles. One LEF board chair captured the combination of *functional*, *symbolic*, and *merited* attention in describing the monthly meetings they attend with the LEF president and school district superintendents. From their perspective, the monthly meeting is a way for the foundation director to seek feedback from the superintendent (functional), a way for the foundation to “stay in tune” as partners with the school district (symbolic), and a way for the board chair to build a personal relationship with the superintendent, thus meriting the attention given to the education foundation.

Foundation leaders and board members, while at times frustrated by a lack of attention or consideration on the part of school district leadership, have become adept at strategically engaging the school district leadership when possible and working around organizational obstacles when not.

### **Successive Engagement**

Engagement on the part of the foundation is often in response to the content and consistency of attention provided by the school district. In contrast to *attention*, engagement tends to flow from the foundation to the school district. In describing cooperative alliances between public and nonprofit organizations, Wilson (1992) refers to *successive integration* where “organizations begin cooperating at a distance in a weak

joint venture” but “over time, the alliance becomes stronger” (1992, p. 251). Something similar is observed in the context of local education foundations where the foundation engages the school district in minor ways and over time by building credibility and trust, strengthening their areas of engagement with the school district. *Successive engagement* therefore refers to the process of progressively engaging in more substantive ways with the “parent” organization to carry out the work of the foundation. *Successive engagement* is seen not only in whom the LEF engages within the school district, but also in how LEFs leverage their existing relationships and work within the school district. Therefore, *successive engagement* is about accessing different facets of the school district in a gradual process that moves between *transactional* and *instrumental* engagement to pursue alignment between the two organizations.

### **Transactional engagement**

*Transactional engagement* by the foundation involves seeking out staff in the district for the purpose of refining the existing work of the foundation or to improve implementation of current programs. *Transactional engagement* occurs when foundation directors attend to specific department or school requests, go directly to individuals to inquire about gaps in resources, or ask for assistance in carrying out existing programs. A foundation director summarizes the philosophy of *transactional engagement* in characterizing the role of the foundation as “to serve the superintendent’s priority and support those things where there might be gaps in what they need.” *Transactional engagement* is, therefore, characterized by a somewhat passive acceptance of what the foundation does and will do for the school district rather than an active, iterative process of developing the work of the foundation alongside the school district.

One director describes the approach to accessing the school district to carry out the foundation's role:

What I do is speak with the district on a routine basis to kind of ascertain what their needs are. I attend a lot of meetings on the district side, so I always try to keep abreast of the shortfalls. Then I'll just sit down and have a conversation with the curriculum department and try to see where we can best be of service.

The type of engagement just described involves current programs or minor initiatives between the foundation and some part of the school district. It rarely involves a significant change or modification in the work or mission of the foundation; it is one way a foundation seeks to be responsive to specific, easily identified needs rather than broader, multi-dimensional district challenges that come to light with collaboration between the two entities. While *transactional engagement* typically takes place with different staff throughout the district, LEF directors may seek out senior administrators to keep them informed and secure their support for current programs:

I've worked on meeting with the superintendent and the two deputies somewhat regularly, and I try to keep the meetings very brief, and focused on really the highest priority in terms of what I need them to know, and how I need their assistance. I've tried to be very respectful of how demanding their roles are, and I also have worked hard to develop a relationship with the directors.

LEF directors relate their struggles with gaining support from school district administration as a reason for frequent *transactional engagement*. Foundation directors are forced to find ways to "get to know people" and work around a lack of senior-level support that can provide immediate access and responsiveness on the part of school district staff. As a result, foundations become "acceptors" of school district interests for the foundation rather than co-producers of a role for the foundation in serving the school district. An LEF board member captures this approach in talking about the work of being

an executive director in a school district that lacks senior-level reinforcement: “You've got to know people. That's how we get stuff done, and that's how you have to do stuff in the district.” Over time, *transactional engagement* can lead to understanding of the internal structures and processes of the district as well as development of a record of success:

We [the LEF] understand what schools need and how to get things done, and we understand teacher training, and we understand how to use incentive funding, and we have good relationships. So, we have a track record. I think it can be easier to come to us because of our history or track record and our knowledge and understanding.

As described by the 20 year veteran LEF director, foundations find ways to understand and relate to the institutional structures of the school district in order to foster *instrumental engagement* practices.

### **Instrumental engagement**

*Instrumental engagement* involves two parts: specific efforts to engage with senior administrators in the school district and planning or formulating a plan together around issues across the district. Unlike *transactional engagement*, *instrumental engagement* involves the foundation working with the school district on the district's strategic plan, the foundation's long-term program commitments, and targeted fundraising efforts for district-wide initiatives. In other words, *instrumental engagement* is not about the foundation asking the school district to inform or guide the foundation's programs, but about developing their work together, being part of the district planning process, and communicating to the school district long-term goals and objectives of the foundation.

*Instrumental engagement* typically involves some amount of data-driven problem identification, a focusing event or series of events that the foundation responds to, or a challenge that impacts students in a significant way but is outside the scope of the school district's purview. Examples include working with increased homeless student populations (data-driven problem), addressing changes to early release schedules for students (focusing event), or local housing shortages for incoming teachers (outside the scope of the school district work). When these types of issues are identified by the foundation, community, or school district, foundations may initiate *instrumental engagement* intended to foster a collaborative response by both organizations. The distinction therefore between *transactional* and *instrumental engagement* rests in the difference between engaging senior-level administrators rather than middle managers, and leading or telling rather than asking the school district for the goals and role of the foundation. Where *instrumental engagement* takes place, foundations ascertain their direction from external stakeholders that include LEF board members and other constituents in the community. For example, one foundation director describes an 18 month long effort to gather feedback from the community in order to write a "statement about what we all wanted for our schools." Through an iterative process of listening to the community, sorting through comments and suggestions, and identifying critical priorities for the community, the LEF was able to produce a document to be shared with the district in long-term planning. While the school district was only minimally receptive to the final recommendations in the document, the product was used to engage directly with schools where individual principals were interested in the support of the foundation. In this way, *instrumental engagement* also happens directly with individual schools when



the foundation engages in a collaborative process of using data or research in future planning and initiatives at a specific school site.

While foundations across the board are likely to practice *transactional engagement* on an on-going basis since most of their work involves students, teachers, and schools, *instrumental engagement* is not always present and rarely occurs without first building credibility through *transactional engagement*. *Successive engagement* therefore enables foundations to see past the image the school district constructs of the foundation's ability to engage the community and address problems within or outside of schools. By trying to be responsive to the needs of the school district, or individual schools in the district, and then to opportunities for the foundation to grow in its capacity to support schools, *successive engagement* reinforces the concept of resource infusion.

### **Resource Infusion**

Local education foundations bring a unique resource mix to their relationship with the school district that would not readily exist without the foundation. By nature of their establishment as affiliated foundations, LEFs are designed to accept, generate, and attract outside resources for the “parent” organization. *Resource infusion* therefore includes the unique combinations of *tangible* and *intangible resources* provided by the LEF that also contribute to its shared goals and objectives. As public charities, LEFs are able to accept monetary and in-kind donations, as well as private or state-sponsored grants to be used in support of the school district. As community-based nonprofits, LEFs may provide school districts with less tangible and harder to quantify resources such as business and community support for public schools, third-party representation, facilitation of community engagement, and trust building in the community and goodwill toward the

school district. *Resource infusion* therefore involves *tangible* and *intangible* resources or benefits, as well as a give and take with regard to financial support, on-going activities, one-time initiatives, and connections to the community.

### **Tangible resources**

LEFs are considered to be a mechanism for school districts to accept money for “above and beyond” types of initiatives in public education (e.g. student scholarships, teacher grants, and reading and mentoring programs). Given the size and scope of county-wide school districts in Florida, ongoing funding gaps continue to challenge school district leaders to do more with less and eliminate non-essential programs in order to redirect funding (e.g. music, arts, reading programs). While LEF leaders acknowledge that the financial resources accepted on behalf of the school district are rarely large enough to make a substantial impact on district operations or their budget shortfalls, LEFs intend to attract *tangible resources* for above-and-beyond types of programs or activities. Above-and-beyond initiatives are considered to be non-essential functions such as small amounts of money for classroom supplies, funding for “innovations in learning” through classroom grants, using money to “raise learning to the next level” within schools, and generating funds to do “things school districts can’t do with tax dollars” such as post-secondary scholarships or student/teacher school supply stores. *Tangible resources* therefore include both actual monetary donations and the provision of in-kind supplies, technology, and capital that are identified through some kind of financial accounting process.

In the membership survey of the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations, resources are categorized as revenue and assets while resource use is determined as a

percentage of expenditures across 12 different categories such as student scholarships, teacher/staff recognition, visual/performing arts, mentoring, and professional development. In other words, *tangible resources* are accounted for by money and donations coming in, and the application of money and resources going out to programs or initiatives. While financial resources could presumably be used in many areas throughout the school district, LEFs work to achieve greater resource alignment with the school district by determining the “best use” of resources based on LEF programmatic goals and school district needs. For example, school districts could conceivably make use of funding to fill teacher or administrative staffing shortages. However, foundation directors explicitly argue that that is not what local education foundations were designed to provide school districts. Further, nearly all foundation directors describe with some detail the processes they go through to match their donor interest with school district needs. *Tangible resources*, while primarily from private sources, are often the indicator used to determine “top” local education foundations, high-performing foundations and foundation boards, and annual performance success on the part of executive directors. However, even if not overtly accounted for in financial statements, foundation directors, boards, and school district administrators are acutely aware of other resources foundations provide. One metaphor that was used by foundation directors and/or board members is the idea of the foundation being part of the school district’s “toolbox.”

**Toolbox.** Beyond generating tangible resources through money or other donations, LEFs can support the superintendent, school board, and individual schools as a tool to fix a problem or address a challenge. The idea of being a “tool” comes from the perspective that superintendents have departments within their organization, and

partnerships with organizations outside the school district structure, to execute their work. Essentially, departments and other partners may become part of the “toolbox” for a superintendent or school board trying to solve problems or improve schools. Given this perspective, nearly all foundation leaders described wanting to be seen as a “tool” for the superintendent to be used in different ways as part of the “solution.” While LEF board members were less convinced of the LEF actually being seen as a “tool” it is a characterization considered to be relevant for the school district: “Now, whether [the superintendent] sees us as part of his/her tools, I don't know, but perhaps that's really where we need to be.” At times being a “tool” for the superintendent involves working with individual schools, as “they [individual schools] need different tools depending on what school they are.”

Some examples were used to illustrate this role. One foundation became a “tool” for the district when it coordinated with the public transportation agency to adjust bus schedules to accommodate after school programs. Beyond the scope of a typical foundation program or initiative, this was a simple way the foundation was useful to the school district in solving a logistical problem that significantly impacted students. Being seen as a “tool” for the school district works both ways in that foundations try to be responsive when asked to take something on, but also proactive by indentifying ways to help the school district. Another example involves a foundation that created a parent resource guide for a particular section of the school district that suffered from low parent involvement. Unlike the last example, this was initiated by the foundation as something it could do to help with a challenge faced by the school district. Foundations have also started to gain access to data around specific school district issues to inform the work

with the school district, provide research support on best-practice programs for students, and engage in problem and solution identification alongside the district using foundation resources.

Foundation directors often recall being a “tool” for principals who may need help with an event or initiative at their schools, teacher recognition resources, or even small funding for something that supports learning but is not part of their budget. One foundation director made a common observation about working directly with schools: “we have relationships where principals call us and say here is what I need.” As a result, the process of establishing the foundation as a valuable “tool” is something that occurs with different facets of the school district and develops over time. While the ultimate goal is to gain relevance for school district administrators as part of their “tools” to do their work, foundations are often seen as “tools” for principals, department heads, or regional directors throughout the school district. The “tool” and “toolbox” metaphor relate to the other kinds of resources provided by local education foundations.

### **Intangible resources**

While the value of local education foundations is often determined by the dollars they attract, accounting for the *intangible resources* or benefits the foundation brings is more difficult. For example, nearly all LEF leaders and board members consider the foundation to be a mechanism for engaging the community in public education. This occurs in different ways across specific facets of the community. One foundation director recalls the workforce focus they have with their local business and corporate stakeholders:

A lot of our work is influenced by what the private sector sees as a need for the workforce in the community going forward; therefore, a lot of times they will

influence us to work with the school district to implement a particular initiative to try to solve a certain need that they perceive in examining what skills the workforce is going to need in the next 20 to 25 years. Part of the engagement is the listening and assessing needs from both sides [school district and private sector] in order to ultimately improve the educational quality for our students.

While corporate and local business engagement often leads to *tangible resources*, the stakeholder interest that is created in these interactions brings local support, awareness, and responsiveness to schools and school district needs. These efforts have likewise been replicated at the state level with the creation of *The Voice of Florida Business in Education* where local and national business leaders are provided information and opportunities to use the information to engage with lawmakers and elected officials to support legislation that impacts public education. Nevertheless, foundations also manage individual-level engagement and support for schools through volunteers across different programs (e.g. elementary reading programs), student mentors (e.g. at risk youth), and mentors for principals from business leaders within the community.

Given the connections LEFs are able to create within the community, foundation leaders also recognize their potential to serve as a “third-party” organization that can speak about the school district in a seemingly unbiased, constructive way. By building a network of external stakeholders and constituents in different aspects of the community, foundations can communicate with them about strengths and weaknesses within the school district, upcoming and important opportunities to support public education, and unique or expanded information when limited or negative information is shared with the public. One foundation director commented:

When we blow their [school district] horn, it's not them blowing their own horn, and that is a very different way that people receive that. When I and my volunteers, and my board, and the whole foundation stakeholders group begin to

be cheerleaders and champions of our school district, it makes their work much easier. It's reputation management.

Through the efforts of the foundation acting as a separate, third-party organization, the district may be endorsed and seen as legitimate in the work it does to provide education services. By relying on the variety of LEF stakeholders who can provide school district recognition and encouragement, the reputational capital of the school district is enhanced. Another foundation director observed a related role for the foundation in keeping the community informed about public education:

I think that's probably the biggest thing...the foundation is a great way to tie the community into what is going on at the school board without involving the politics. When the school board stands up and talks, it's all about tax dollars and political agendas, and you know when we look at it, it's more from a 'these are the good things that are going on in the schools' standpoint, and 'this is how you can support those things that are going on.'

Several foundation leaders referenced past or future efforts to raise local taxes to benefit schools, suggesting their "third-partyness" is or could be beneficial to gaining support for the district in the community. As a third party in the relationship between the school district and community, foundations can be a legitimate, independent partner for the district in drawing attention to the needs of schools and the importance of supporting the local school system. At times, this can counteract or act as an alternative perspective to what is produced or shared by local television news, local newspapers, or other local periodicals.

Another less tangible role local education foundations can take on is acting as a convening organization where different organizations, groups, and individuals are brought together by an organization that facilitates their interactions (Connor, et al.,

1999). Local education foundations can serve as a convening organization by “bringing people together in conversations, engagement, and hearing their voices and getting them involved in discussions to talk about the role they can play in all of this.” One superintendent echoed this perspective, suggesting that the foundation can “fill gaps with community engagement, celebrate public education, and demand that more people embrace public education, support it, and play their own individual role or collective role in doing that.” Some foundation directors recount their efforts to work collaboratively with other nonprofits in the community to enhance resources and support for students and teachers. In practice, coordinating across other nonprofits is a benefit to the school district as foundations act as a conduit, connecting community nonprofits with areas of need within the school district. Even though LEFs have a harder time accounting for this type of work, school districts that serve entire counties benefit from an organization equipped to coordinate different types of social services for students. For smaller foundations, the capacity to act as a convening organization or conduit for community resources in schools is still an aspiration. However, there is some indication that when financial resource growth and program expansion stall, foundation directors can still work to leverage other types of support for schools.

In communities where the school district has underperformed its role or been highly criticized in the past, foundations have made efforts to create goodwill and develop trust within the school system. That is not to say foundations become “mouthpieces” for the school district; often, goodwill and trust are facilitated by active processes to listen to the community and share what is learned with the school district for its benefit. This role may also involve bringing issues to the attention of the school



district by working with the community. A foundation board member in a relatively independent foundation observes the reputation the foundation has gained over time in the community:

From the outside looking in, we're a go-to organization that has the ability to actually have an impact on the school board and superintendent in doing things differently. We're looked at in the community with an expectation that when something's wrong, we ought to be making some noise about it, because we have in the past.

A similarly independent foundation director describes an 18 month long project that consisted of “broad-based outreach” by holding listening sessions in homes, churches, and facilities belonging to community groups. From there, the foundation went through a process of “prioritizing what came out of the notes” and publishing the process in the local newspaper. The foundation director described its purpose for undertaking this process:

We just wanted to have a little more emphasis on that convening, that advocacy. And yet, you don't get much done unless you build trust, and I think education foundations have a lot of trust both within business communities and within schools. So, no one was willing to give that up either. So, we didn't turn into advocates that were publishing white papers and critical, but we did get focused.

Although this role is less common, foundations that encourage community feedback, discussion, and the creation of goodwill around public schools do so with an end goal in mind. Their focus in carrying out such efforts is to develop new programs, initiatives, or changes in the school district that come out of the process of listening to community feedback. For most foundations, the work of convening, gathering feedback, and working with the school district to make change is more of an aspiration than reality.

Both *tangible resources* and *intangible resources* can be limited by how the school district perceives the foundation and its work within the school district and in the broader community. That is, the identity of a foundation as closer to the school district or more independent of the school district influences their work within the district and with external stakeholders.

### **Positional Identity**

As affiliated foundations, LEFs have an inherently complex relationship with the school district that challenges the identity established by those internal and external to the organization. The identity of an LEF is a combination of how the foundation sees their role and relationship with the school district, how the school district perceives a certain role for the foundation, and in turn how the foundation's role is communicated to outside constituents. One foundation board member, who has served on an LEF board for over 10 years, observes the challenge of creating an identity:

School board members change and perception of our foundation changes *their* perception of our foundation. So we have to constantly be moving to make sure that we're coming up with the singular voice of 'this is what we do.' Some don't want to hear it, some don't want to listen. It's very challenging.

*Positional identity*, therefore, characterizes how the organization positions itself relative to internal and external stakeholders to communicate that “which is distinctive and enduring” (Brinkerhoff, 2002, p. 23) about the LEF. The internal constituency of an LEF includes all facets of the school district, such as the superintendent, school board, district administrators, principals, and teachers. The external constituency is comprised of individuals not connected to or within the school district, such as LEF board members from the community, other community groups and individuals, parents, and students.

LEFs seek ways to refine or redefine their identity as an organization relative to internal and external constituencies that impact the perceptions of the other.

### **Proxy**

Fundamentally, the identity of the foundation as a school district *proxy* rests in the resource/independence trade-off that occurs when local education foundations accept financial support, in-kind donations, and other benefits from the school district (e.g. low rent offices, use of school district pay roll systems, and school district benefits programs for LEF staff). As reported in the 2011 Membership Survey, over 80 percent of LEFs in Florida receive some type of in-kind benefits from their school district. These types of resources tie the foundation and school district together through the budgeting and oversight process similar to any other school district structure that receives funding or resources. Foundation leaders and LEF board members recognize that with school district resources a tradeoff exists in forgone independence and autonomy as a result. For example, foundation directors may be placed on school district organizational charts while foundation funding must be approved through the annual school district budgeting approval process. Further, by accepting resources, foundations are less empowered and justified in acting on their own to choose different activities or initiatives that may be seen as “critical” to or controversial for the school district. In turn, foundations that accept school district resources accept an identity from the school district as a *proxy* organization, where there is an expectation that the foundation will act as an extension of the school district with little push back from the foundation. In some cases, they are treated as departments in the school district, or part of a department within the school district.

For some LEF executive directors, the *proxy* identity is more applicable because they are designated school district employees, paid for by district funds and therefore having greater obligation to the school district's interests. In cases where LEF leaders are not employees but are given funding from the district, one foundation director shares a common perspective: "I'm not going to bite the hand that feeds me." Out of necessity for resources, therefore, foundations may limit their public activities to staying positive about the school district and staying away from most things that are political or controversial with regard to the school district's reputation.

Being positioned as a *proxy* organization is challenging as executive directors must still consider the expectations of their board members to whom they are also accountable. Even though the school district has chosen to establish or recognize the foundation as an affiliated entity, LEF directors are committed to respecting the foundation board members who are charged with making decisions about the use of resources. One foundation director describes a common approach among LEF leaders who may relate to a *proxy* role:

Really everything that we've done has had to have some sort of buy-in from the school district, because it involves either staff, or being on a site, or some facility usage or something. I think, even though the supervisor, my supervisor, is the superintendent within the school district, I feel a bigger obligation to my board and whoever my president is at the time

While the role as *proxy* may be underlying the relationship between the school district and foundation when school district resources are shared, foundation leaders recognize that very little can be done in the context of schools and education without the school district's consent at minimum and support at best. As a result, foundations may choose to make other strategic choices to assert or reserve some independence from the

school district by shaping their identity as *intermediary* organizations. At the same time, LEFs that may be considered *proxy* organizations can shift perceptions of their relationship to the school district, taking on characteristics of “fair-weather friends.”

**Fair-weather friends.** As a school district *proxy*, some foundations indicate that association with the school district can enhance or detract from their relationship or identity in the community. Having the ability to “play up” or “play down” the relationship with the school district can provide protection from negative press. For example, one foundation director recalled trying to distance the foundation from a recent media report involving an inappropriate relationship between a teacher and student. Another executive director recalled putting some distance between the district and foundation relationship when speaking in the community during the time a school closure report was being considered by the district. In a similar vein, a foundation director recalled avoiding having any association with a recent school bond referendum being considered by the community. While the referendum eventually passed, the director and board members tried to avoid having the foundation come down on one side or the other of the referendum. In each of these cases, being a “fair-weather friend” occurred where foundations were more embedded in the school district, or close enough to the district that issues could reflect poorly on the foundation. In these examples, one foundation director captures the essence of *fair-weather friends* in “making the relationship sound a little stronger than it is or is not.”

The same is also true for the school district in associating with the foundation. School districts with more embedded foundations may disassociate with the foundation when issues come up within the organization. In one case, a foundation was party to a

lawsuit involving a large sum of money to be given to the foundation in a donor's will. While the validity of the will was being contested, the school district avoided commenting or responding to the foundation as it worked through the legal process of securing the donation. The foundation executive director recalls: "Well nobody wanted that PR." As a result, foundations in a *proxy* role experience greater instability in their relationship with the school district, as each organization can make use of distance when needed.

### **Intermediary**

Through efforts to accept/rely on fewer resources from the school district, owning decisions that are made by LEF boards, and gaining access to or using outside data to inform programs, foundations support their identity as an *intermediary* organization. Whereas the *proxy* role may be imposed on the foundation by the school district, the *intermediary* role is a result of strategic choices around structure, decision-making, and work with outside groups. As *intermediary* organizations (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Van Til, 1987) foundations act in between the school district and community to connect external groups, information, and donors back to areas of need within the school district. While an identity as an *intermediary* organization can still occur even when the school district provides some resources to the foundation, executive directors and LEF board members purposely change how the organization is structured, the nature of their work with other organizations, and internal decisions on the foundation's work in order to solidify this role.

Foundations often establish their *intermediary* position by first executing a name change for the organization. In some cases this involves taking out any association with

the school district's name, while in other cases foundations change the structure of the name to convey a more inclusive group than just the school district. In addition, to remedy the burden of serving two masters (the school district and LEF board members) some foundations raise funds to pay for their own foundation director and provide a foundation board performance review of the executive director as opposed to having an evaluation by the superintendent. This helps to clarify the role and priorities for the executive director to the school district, but also to the community. It shifts the identity of the foundation away from being a *proxy* for the school district, superintendent, and especially school board. It also provides accountability within the foundation for the executive director.

To further reduce ambiguity for internal and external constituents, foundations seek to validate and orient their work with the school district by establishing programs or initiatives using data on problems or issues related to teachers and students. As foundation directors report increased interest in improving graduation rates, increasing college enrollment, and growing STEM initiatives related to career and certification programs, they often have some difficulty in gaining access to data from the school district. Specifically, within these programmatic areas, foundations describe their attempts to gain access to data through the school district as difficult or even futile. Some school districts may not have the data the foundation needs, and when they do, foundation directors experience delays on the part of the school district in sharing the data.

In response, foundation boards often support “owning” their own data by collaborating with other networks or community groups. Such efforts are perceived as a

way to reduce opportunities for subjective and short-sighted decision making that may come as a result of having frequent turnover in superintendents or school boards who want the foundation to act in a certain capacity. Data that foundations use may come out of their efforts to gather feedback from the community as well as from working with other educational nonprofits, local universities and community colleges, or other research organizations and groups. To that end, donors may be sought to provide funding for the processes involved in generating or gathering existing data the foundation can use in its work. In this way, they are able serve as an *intermediary* for donors interested in supporting meaningful work through the foundation. As LEFs begin to look outward for the orientation of their work, using data, and connecting to other groups or nonprofits with an interest in a specific issue, they start to connect community resources with unique needs in the school district. Therefore, the role of *intermediary* is a mid-way step towards achieving a partner identity, which is often more for the benefit of communicating and securing an identity with the broader community. In other words, the *identity* as a partner to the school district helps to establish a useful position for the foundation within the broader community.

**Donor Management.** As foundations work to become an *intermediary* organization, managing donors and donations across the school district challenges the foundation's ability to act in this way. Despite the natural and expected role of the foundation to raise money and accept donations on the part of the district, foundation directors have little recourse or mechanism to track the pursuit of donations by district employees, departments, schools, booster clubs, or Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). One director observed, "Sometimes they ask for a dollar when they should be asking for



\$10,000. You've got too many people asking. It's not coordinated. It's not organized, so it's very important to have a plan to organize.”

While foundations have learned to cope with within-district competition for donations across different facets of the school district, some foundations have pushed back on the district to encourage more of a joint effort around raising philanthropic dollars. In some cases, district superintendents have asked foundations to provide some coordination around asking donors for annual donations. One director recalled their philosophy:

One of the reasons we're [the LEF] successful in the county is that I can go to a business, and I can say, “how would you like to be able to touch every school in a *fair* way and when every other teacher from every other school comes knocking on your door looking for a buck, you can say, go to the foundation. We have a fund there and apply?” It takes them out of the ‘no’ business.

In this example, the foundation can serve as a clearinghouse for donations and grants. Coordinating and managing donations in this way also has the benefit of making contributions easier for donors to give in the ways they want while having resources equitably accounted for across the school district. It also provides a more uniform way for donors to be recognized.

Beyond competition or finding ways to be equitable, foundations are often forced to be involved with donors or fundraising on the back end of receiving funds because funds are passed through and managed by the foundation as a public charity. As a result, foundation directors report a lack of capacity in dealing with pass-through funds and in managing donor saturation. A foundation director captured a common experience by LEFs:

We were disappointed that when they [the school district] were starting to look at how they could raise revenue through advertising sales, they started down a policy path where they did not even invite us to the table to discuss it with them. Probably just an oversight; nonetheless, they hired a person now to go out and sell advertising, and some of our donors have brought it to our attention and shared a little bit of concern about it.

As this example demonstrates, foundation directors experience the challenge of identifying their work to the community where they are not the sole entity soliciting donations for similar uses. While much less common (for now), one foundation that has a more autonomous relationship with the district, works to manage its donor circles at the same time that the school district has more than one charitable nonprofit associated with the school district serving in different roles. Given that donations, resource generation, and support make-up the objectives of a local education foundation, pursuing a *partnership* with the school district alleviates some of the donor challenges by shaping an identity and positioning the organization as more of a partner with the school district.

### **Discussion**

In this chapter, I outlined the core dimensions of *partnership* between school districts and local education foundations, with consideration for their position between embedded and independent. Through *partnership*, the foundation and school district work together to carry out not only shared goals, but also common or parallel goals in support of the overall mission of each organization in the context of public education. My analysis reveals the *functional* and *symbolic* role of *attention* from the school district to the foundation. *Functional attention* serves the purpose of communicating the needs of the school district and revealing to the foundation how it can align with the needs and mission of the district. *Symbolic attention* refers to the efforts on the part of the school

district to engage and empower the foundation internally to carry out its work. While *functional attention* meets the needs of the executive director to understand how the foundation can work with the school district, *symbolic attention* is often beneficial for LEF board members who look for some indication that their efforts are helpful and valuable to the school district. Any form of attention from the school district is often merited by the work of the foundation. In other words, *attention* is neither inherent to being an affiliated organization nor to being structurally closer or further away from the school district.

*Successive engagement* refers to the way foundations engage different parts of the school district for different purposes. *Transactional engagement* is how foundations build their reputation with the school district by meeting needs across departments or individual schools. *Instrumental engagement* occurs at the senior level of school district administration and is more for engaging with the district to plan joint efforts. It involves a longer-term, strategic approach to the work of the foundation alongside the school district. *Instrumental engagement* is most often seen in foundations with greater structural distance and autonomy from the school district.

*Resource infusion* characterizes the *tangible* and *intangible resources* the foundation brings to the school district. While *tangible resources*, such as funding and donations, are often measured and attributed to the success of a foundation, the *intangible resources* bring benefits to the school district it would likely be unable to create or acquire on its own. These include acting as a “third-party” organization able to speak about the school district objectively, a “convening” organization able to bring different groups together for a common purpose, and bringing goodwill to the school district by

engaging the community in support of schools. The “toolbox” metaphor suggests what foundation executive directors strive for in combining *tangible* and *intangible* resources. In other words, if a foundation is part of the “toolbox” for a superintendent, its capacity as an organization is such that it can take on different roles and generate different types of resources to help the school district solve problems. While foundations in any position with the school district could theoretically become a “tool” for the superintendent, embedded foundations have a harder time being seen in this way.

The final dimension characterizes the *positional identity* of local education foundations as a *proxy* or *intermediary* working towards a partner organization. *Positional identity* describes how an identity is accepted, asserted, or employed by a foundation to engage with internal and external constituencies. While foundations that are identified through their relationship as a *proxy* of the school district are more accountable to district administrators, those foundations that are an *intermediary* organization have an outward focus to connect back to the school district. Where foundations employ an *intermediary* identity, they do so for the benefit of community and donor perspectives. Foundations seek a more effective relationship with the school district as an *intermediary*, but they can also provide some distance between the two organizations where donors feel more comfortable with how their contributions may be used. While an embedded foundation may seek to develop an *intermediary* identity, not all foundations aspire to shift their identities. Those LEFs that begin as independent organizations will rarely become less so, while those that seek greater independence may do so in different ways depending on the situation. In some cases they may act as a *proxy* and in others they can take-on the *intermediary* role as needed. Foundations and school

districts may demonstrate elements of “fair-weather friends” in that they can distance their organization from the other as needed.

Drawing these dimensions together, Figure 4 reflects the four dimensions of *partnership* in the relationship between school district and local education foundations that act as affiliated foundations.

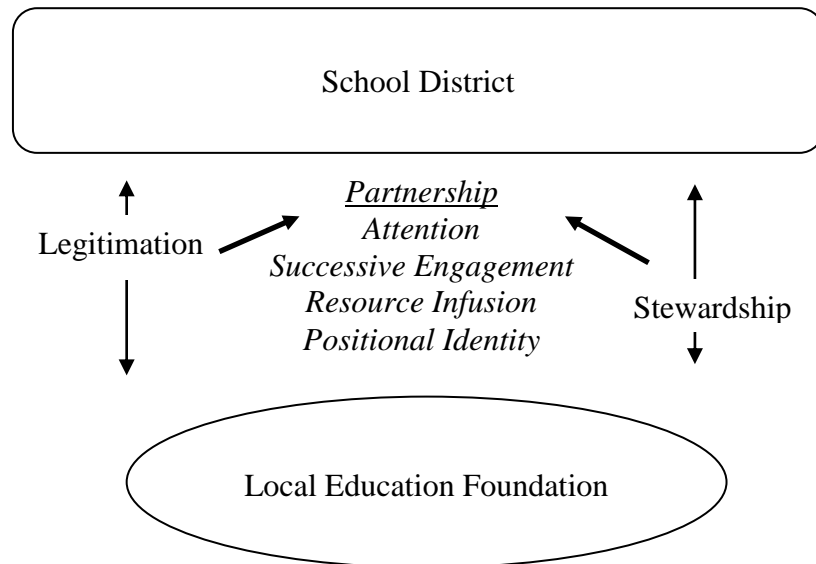


Figure 5. Full Model of the Local Education Foundation/School District Relationship

The full model of affiliated foundation/school district relationships illustrates some changes to the direction and strength of different dimensions from the previous models based on the analysis of this relationship. Initially, *legitimation* was proposed as a central part of the school district and foundation relationship as the “parent” organization helped to create or recognize the foundation. However, *legitimation* is not an equal endeavor. The arrow indicating *legitimation* is longer going down to the foundation because the school district has to provide greater recognition in order for the foundation to carry out its work for the school district. In other words, the asymmetry that characterizes the relationship between the two organizations renders the LEF in

greater need of legitimacy from the school district than the reverse. On the other hand, while some LEFs may be constrained by resources from and dependence on the school district, the *stewardship* arrow is longer going up as LEFs practice greater stewardship towards the school district when they endeavor to support public education. In other words, as externally-derived organizations, *stewardship* is more strongly employed by the foundation in choosing to respect and support the reputation and well-being of the school district. Even in cases where LEFs are critical of the school district, they tend to criticize in the spirit of *stewardship* towards the school district and on behalf of the community.

The middle part of the diagram is where we derive the substantive variation across local education foundation and school district relationships given the different types of foundation positions. Drawing on the spectrum presented in chapter four, foundations experience more or less of the *partnership* dimensions depending on how the LEF is positioned with the school district, as embedded, interdependent, or independent. As shown in Table 4, the *partnership* dimensions are assessed across the three LEF positions, reflecting the Position/Partnership Spectrum.

Embedded foundations typically work to cooperate with the school district by serving the school district's needs. Even though we would expect an embedded foundation to receive a greater amount of *functional attention* and therefore understand the needs of the school district, this was often not the case. Embedded foundations struggled to attract *functional attention*, making it much less likely to receive *symbolic attention*. Independent foundations on the other hand were less in need of *functional attention* as they often work in parallel with the school district and receive a higher

amount of *symbolic attention*. Independent foundations are harder to ignore on the part of the school district as they tend to shape their own work alongside the school district.

Partnership Dimension	Foundation Position with School District		
	Embedded <i>Cooperative</i>	Interdependent <i>Collaborative</i>	Independent <i>Innovative</i>
<b>Attention</b>			
Functional	High	Mixed	Mixed
Symbolic	Low	Mixed	High
<b>Successive Engagement</b>			
Transactional	Mixed	Low	Low
Instrumental	Low	High	High
<b>Resource Infusion</b>			
Tangible	High	Mixed	High
Intangible	Low	Mixed	High
<b>Positional Identity</b>			
Proxy	High	Mixed	Low
Intermediary	Low	Mixed	High

Table 4. Position/Partnership Spectrum

Foundations may practice both *transactional* and *instrumental engagement*; however, the more independence a foundation asserts in relation to the school district the more their engagements become *instrumental*. While embedded foundations tend to be comparatively higher on providing *tangible* rather than *intangible* resources or benefits, foundations that are less embedded in the school district can use their separation to provide *intangible benefits* for the school district other than money or supplies. Finally, LEFs that are interdependent with the school district can be both a *proxy* and an *intermediary* for the school district. Those interdependent foundations that may be slightly more embedded in the school district may carry out their role as an extension of the school district with marginally more autonomy than a fully embedded foundation. As a result, interdependent foundations can also act as an *intermediary* in certain situations,

whereas embedded foundations have a harder time being seen and acting as *intermediary*, and independent foundations are rarely positioned to act or be seen as a *proxy* organization.

### **Conclusion**

The reality of affiliation between two vastly different organizations makes relationship building complex given that a partnership is neither implied nor inherent to affiliated relationships. The dimensions of *partnership* conceptualized in this chapter reflect the on-going and dynamic nature of a nonprofit organization that engages in this way with a governmental entity. Regardless of the context of public education which is often dynamic and changing on its own, local education foundations almost daily confront their need for attention from the school district to carry out their work. The type and extent of attention they receive from the school district influences how and who the foundation engages. Where superintendents are less concerned with the foundation, executive directors of LEFs pursue the attention of others within different departments or schools to disseminate resources. When attention is consistent and the foundation has meaningful buy-in from the superintendent, foundations not only seek to strategize and plan alongside the school district, but they are also responsive in their ability to convene other organizations that can support public schools and improve the system.

Nevertheless, the first three dimensions can be impacted by the *positional identity* given to, asserted, or created by the foundation. If the foundation is seen as a *proxy* by the school district, and treated as such, LEF programs are likely to remain consistent over time with little constructive/critical engagement from the foundation to the school district. As a foundation asserts more of an *intermediary* role, the school district and



community begin to experience the potential of working through the foundation to impact the district. Where a foundation absorbs the identity of “partner” in relation to the school district, LEFs gain credibility in the community that extends to the school district. Therefore, the foundation is externally merited by the internal consistency of the relationship with the school district. As a result, the nature of the *partnership* between a local education foundation and school district is a product of overlapping, dynamic, and related dimensions which are tightly coupled and rarely static. Further, these dimensions vary across the different positions foundations have established with the school district. In the final chapter, I explore the practical and theoretical implications of the affiliated foundation relationship given what is revealed through local education foundations.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

In this research I argue that the cross-sector relationship between a governmental entity, or “parent” organization, and an affiliated foundation is unique among other cross-sector interactions for several reasons. First, the basis of the relationship is cooperation, collaboration, and/or innovation rather than contracting, service provision, or carrying out services for user fees. Second, unlike service-oriented nonprofits, affiliated foundations are tasked with resource generation and management relative to a single “parent” organization. Third, while the relationship between affiliated foundations and their “parent” organization assumes a partnership (e.g. independent organizations working together for a common purpose), it is an asymmetrical partnership in that the “parent” organization will likely always have greater resources, power, and, at least initially, reputation and credibility. Fourth, affiliated foundations need a “parent” organization to carry out their work while “parent” organizations can still operate absent an affiliated foundation. As a result, the relationship between the affiliated foundation and the “parent” organization is central to defining and carrying out a partnership between institutionally separate, but structurally linked organizations.

In light of this initial premise, my dissertation sought to investigate one type of affiliated foundation through a multi-case study of the partnering relationship between a school district and their local education foundation. Within this context I relied on the use of representative case studies of local education foundations in public education to study the “parent”/affiliated foundation relationship. Through my cross-case analysis, this research conceptualizes the different dimensions of *partnership* between two

independent but connected entities engaged in an asymmetrical, cross-sector relationship. In the final part of my analysis, I brought together different LEF structural positions with the school district and the dimensions of *partnership* to examine the presence of more or less of the dimensions.

The development of my research in characterizing affiliated foundation relationships is the product of a qualitative study influenced by iterative processes of adding, subtracting, and refining concepts as they relate to each other (Eisenhardt, 1989). To begin, the public education context was initially motivated by my overall curiosity in local education foundations (private entities) and school districts (public entities). Early on in my research, I sought to identify and then characterize how local education foundations influenced education policy at the local, state, or national levels by strategically positioning their organizations with the school district, within the community, or in response to changes in education policy. As locally-based organizations with access to private money and community representation, I hypothesized that local education foundations would be strategically positioned to influence school district policy related to administration and staffing or curriculum and operations. However, as data collection, case analysis, and time do their part in bringing forth a dissertation, these hypotheses were challenged by what was learned from LEFs about their work within public education.

After conducting my interviews and reflecting on the experiences of foundation leaders, the assumption that local education foundations intended to, were, or could impact education policy at any level of policymaking was unsupported. Further, based on the multiple accounts of LEF directors and board members it was nearly impossible

for a foundation that is affiliated with a school district to carry out a strategy to position their organization without the school district's willingness to endorse or at least participate in such an endeavor. In other words, a strategic position suggests a one-sided effort that an organization has control over relative to their external environments (Moore, 2000). While nonprofit organizations must give some attention to positioning in relation to other organizations for relevance and survival, affiliation with a "parent" organization and a governmental entity specifically, renders the one-sided endeavor of strategic positioning essentially futile for affiliated foundations.

Therefore, what became central to my study was neither strategic position nor overt policy impact, but the variation of the relationships that are forged in affiliated foundations where cross-sector interactions take place with organizations more or less closely structured. The relationship between a school district (a governmental entity) and a local education foundation (an affiliated foundation) is central to determining the nature of any impact local education foundations may have on school districts and public education more broadly. As the case studies in chapter four reveal, some local education foundations seek and realize greater impact on public education given the structure and characteristics of their relationship with the school district and community. In chapter five, we see the dimensions of *partnership* which account for how foundations interact with school districts in an affiliated relationship. Accordingly, the problem that this research addresses is how we account for sustained, cross-sector interactions where partnership, reputation management, stewardship, community engagement, resource generation, and goodwill are brought to bear upon a public entity by a quasi-public entity.

Throughout my time conducting this research and analysis, I sought to balance my context-specific focus with broader interests in public and private organizational interactions. I consistently worked to look broader and deeper into what is known and theorized about relationships between government and nonprofit entities. Through my exploration of the literature, I often found that cross-sector collaborative relationships and cross-sector *contractual* relationships were readily explored (Oliver & Ebers, 1998) since the 1980s when the privatization movement all but sanctioned inter-sectoral solutions to societal challenges (Minow, 2002). Even though cross-sector collaborations, partnerships, and interactions are researched extensively to understand their formation (Bryson, et al., 2006; Dees & Anderson, 2003), the characteristics they take on (Brinkerhoff, 2002; McNamara & Morris, 2012; Selsky & Parker, 2005), where and why they are effective or ineffective (Gray, 1985), and the extent to which they have been formed in specific service areas or contexts (Garrett-Jones, Turpin, Burns, & Diment, 2005; Simo & Bies, 2007), I found a mere passing reference to the organizational structure and substance of an affiliated foundation (Bass, 2010; Paarlberg & Gen, 2009; Smith, 2010). By combining my interest in public education and cross-sector relationships, I was able to research a topic only recently accounted for in the literature, and minimally explored.

Through my qualitative research approach and findings, this study contributes to the growing literature on newer organizational relationships and organizational structures taking shape as sector distinction fails to fully account for the behavior, dynamics, and interactions of different organizations. In other words, although identification with a particular sector was thought to reflect certain values and behaviors in organizations

(Moore, 2000; Rosenau, 1999), cross-sector collaborations, hybrid organizational structures, and new structural arrangements between organizations from different sectors have challenged our initial assumptions. In turn, the shifts in organizational relationships create space for context-specific studies such as this.

Drawing on my analysis and the concepts presented in chapters four and five, I summarize the implications of my findings for local education foundations, affiliated foundations, and cross-sector relationships between organizations attributed to the public or private sector. I also provide some recommendations on other areas of future research given the content and limitations of this study. I close this conclusion with some reflections on next steps for research moving forward.

### **Local Education Foundations**

As one type of affiliated foundation, I found that local education foundations differ along a spectrum of organizational positions and purposes for carrying out their work. The spectrum includes on one end a charitable nonprofit that is part of the school district (e.g. fundraising arm) and on the other end an independent nonprofit that collaborates with the district (e.g. community-based nonprofit). Along this spectrum are LEFs with differences in cooperation and autonomy with the school district, variation in community engagement and responsiveness to different stakeholders, and a combination of purposes for engagement in policy awareness and advocacy. Much of the difference across foundations that serve the relatively similar purposes of supporting teachers and students may be attributed to the characteristics of the partnering relationship with the school district. While this dissertation is less unique in relying on case studies as the primary research design (Gray, 1985), it is unique in that through this study we can see

how different types of affiliated foundations take shape alongside a “parent” organization. The state context was also new in that to my knowledge Florida education foundations have not been the subject of widespread research or focus in the way local education foundations in California and New York have been readily explored (Brent, 2002; Mattison, 2012; Zimmer, et al., 2001).

As much as LEFs have their structural identity laid out in their status as a public charity, organizational by-laws, and mission statements, in the case of Florida, they are affiliated organizations that operate within an institutionalized environment, bound by laws and policy, and influenced by the local culture and expectations for public education. In other words, due to their affiliation with a school district, this relationship can limit the work of local education foundations. Therefore, how school districts choose to structure, or fail to structure, their relationship with a local education foundation impacts the work of the foundation, the value and benefit it can bring to a community, and the capacity of a foundation to be a nonprofit in the spirit of what we hope for nonprofits to do in society (Moore, 2000).

The spirit of nonprofit work rests in the ability to be seen as something different from government and different from a private business while creating value in society. Throughout my study I demonstrated the pursuit of relationship at minimum and partnership at best with a governmental entity on the part of a local education foundation. In the Florida context, the affiliated foundation structure was not only set out in legislation before foundations were created, but was also established as a philosophy by those engaged in the work. Rather than criticize, shame, or set apart school districts, local education foundation leaders and board members have often chosen to engage,

equip, and enhance public education institutions that are frequently left to defend their own work with sometimes little return in the form of goodwill or legislator support for local systems. However, local education foundations are not tasked with or expected to depict school districts or public education as above reproach or as martyrs. By and large, the directors and board members who contributed their insights and experiences to this study are eager to dig in and grapple with the real challenges in public education. The challenges they see are at times systemic to larger public institutions or characteristic of public education in an era of school grading and performance management, as well as those challenges that can be attributed to broader societal issues that school districts can rarely change but must always face (e.g. student homelessness, poverty, immigration, college access).

As school districts continue to experience greater need with relatively equal or fewer resources, local education foundations may be seen as a means to an end for attracting additional resources. The link between financial resources and educational opportunity is both empirical and ideological so much so that foundations may be considered a way to work around local property tax restrictions or other efforts to equalize public education funding. Although this has been the subject of research and commentary on local education foundations in states where property tax laws have placed a limit on the amount of local taxes a school district can raise (Deitrick, 2009; Fleming, 2012; Zimmer, et al., 2003), this was not an issue that bore out in the Florida context. For example, whereas foundations may rely on parents as donors, Florida foundations rely more heavily on corporate or local philanthropic donors. They tend to spend resources on enhancing education and not replacing budget shortfalls for mandated items.



Florida foundations benefit from state-matching grants to support specific initiatives where public and private money can be combined to support low-income or high needs students. In other words, resource generation and use tends to be targeted to the specific, higher needs within a community.

Nevertheless, we should consider the deeper public issues that motivate a school district, or in the case of Florida a state, to create or recognize a nonprofit entity to attract private dollars on top of that provided through federal, state, and local tax dollars. Already in existence are booster clubs, parent teacher associations (PTAs), and individual school fundraising activities. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Florida where school districts are geographically defined by county, foundations are not able to make a significant impact on school district budgets or resources. However, in practical terms, local education foundations have the potential to generate *community* within fragmented public school systems where parents may feel disconnected, local businesses may be unsure how to carry out their desire to give back within a system that is difficult to penetrate, and where local organizations lack the capacity to convene and organize efforts alongside a school district. Their ability to provide the intangible resources and benefits, to work with the school district in instrumental ways, and gain the necessary support and credibility in both the school district administration and community is what makes their value possible. In other words, the *partnership* that is created between LEFs and the school district influences their ability to impact or enhance public education in the ways they were intended. In addition, the nature of the *partnership* with a school district enables or hinders a local education foundation to influence local policy implementation. Where partnership exists and is fostered through collaborative efforts, the work of LEFs

can lead to, facilitate, or encourage change within the local systems of education.

Nevertheless, local education foundations can only do so where the structural parameters are in place to facilitate such work. This leads to some implications that this research has highlighted in structuring LEFs to support *community* and develop partnering relationships with school districts.

To begin, school districts may benefit from establishing a local education foundation or reevaluating an existing relationship with a local education foundation to find ways to empower or structure the work of the foundation. The disappointing cases in this study were those where foundation boards and directors were ready to do more for and with a school district that had long imposed upon the foundation a limited or inaccurate perspective of what it does without being able to see the potential of the organization to act in other ways. When engagement by the LEF is unable to move past *transactional* activities and *attention* is difficult to secure from the school district, LEFs may be trapped by the structure and dynamics of their existing relationship with the school district. However, as demonstrated in chapter five, local education foundation relationships with the school district can change over time when foundations become better equipped to support the needs and address the challenges within their local school system.

To that end, where states desire to support school districts and their creation of an affiliated organization, it would be helpful to establish the policies for having such an organization in order to ensure the broader school district is served through the LEF. One of the potential sources of inequity among local education foundations is when they are established by individual schools or groups of schools within a district that may already

be highly resourced relative to other schools (e.g. California). Florida avoids some of these issues by shaping their policy in the following ways: 1) allowing for each district to have a support organization, 2) providing state sponsored grant opportunities for programs reaching low-income students, and 3) ensuring that only the designated local education foundation within a district qualifies for the matching public funding. By supporting a state-wide dollar-for-dollar grants matching program (equal parts public and private dollars), local education foundations are provided a legislative endorsement for the work and relationship they bring to public schools throughout the state. It is therefore, incumbent upon the foundations to work towards a *partnership* with the school district as they carry out their role with both local and statewide endorsements.

Finally, researchers suggest that school foundations are right for communities (Brent & Pijanowski, 2003; De Luna, 1998) and wrong for communities (Fleming, 2012). When they are right, LEFs provide funding for specific resources and help to recognize and support teachers. Where they are wrong, it is because foundation resources “let legislators” off the hook for funding certain things in schools, they encourage more highly-resourced parents to become donors, and they allow for a disproportional influence of business on public education. To these points we should consider that where a community feels the school system could benefit from a separate organization created from within the community, it is more important to consider the way the foundation is structured to minimize and/or alleviate these types of concerns. In other words, there may be more to lose from their absence that warrants a thoughtful consideration of how to ensure their presence in public education.

## **Affiliated Foundations**

Affiliated foundations represent something new in the form of government-supporting nonprofits (Gazley, 2013). They are not part of the “hollowing out” of government services, but rather a “filling in” to government with private resources and support. The significance of this type of interaction, where governmental structures stay intact, should not be lost while trying to understand how it is that affiliated foundations give back to government through both relationship and resources. In other words, cross-sector interactions, contracting-out, and public-private partnerships have often been associated with dismantling governmental structures, where affiliated foundations intend to support the structures in place.

In an era of tight budgets and close scrutiny over the use of public resources, affiliated foundations would be considered a public management tool to generate private resources for public organizations. The benefit to governmental entities is in having access to resources not constrained by budget processes, legislative oversight, or mandates from elected or appointed bodies. As demonstrated in the foundations in this study, resources are sought to support programs, activities, or materials that tax dollars are unavailable for or could not be used in the same manner. Since the use of funds is subject to the oversight of a nonprofit board, the resources brought in by local education foundations are, for the most part, designated by representatives from the community in which they operate.

Some would and do argue that through private resources generated by affiliated foundations, governmental entities are better able to innovate within existing programs or structures. The resources generated by an affiliated foundation are more easily used to

innovate within institutional environments less flexible to do so with public dollars. As suggested by LEF executive directors, affiliated foundations can test programs, provide research evidence of innovative practices, and support trial implementation using private dollars. The benefit comes about when innovations generate value to the mission of the school district and are subsequently absorbed into the long term financial structure of the district. However, affiliated foundations may unintentionally reinforce the classic perception that governmental entities fail to innovate or are incapable of using resources effectively. Since affiliated foundations are established with consideration of private donors, who may prefer to give money where they can better monitor how the money is used, ensure donations are not “lost” within a larger public organization, and support programs and initiatives of interest to them (Smith, 2010), they may inherently reinforce the idea of a government failure or inadequacy to manage funding and resources. As executive directors in this study describe the position of the foundation to the school district in terms of embedded or independent and being able to act as “fair-weather friends,” we can see how the perception of the school district as a governmental entity influences how the foundation is perceived. Even though executive directors may shape this perception to their advantage when actively courting donors, their efforts often reflect the opposite belief about government. LEFs work to help the school district with innovations by generating financial resources and connecting different facets of the community back into the school district structures.

Therefore, the value of an affiliated foundation is realized in opportunities to dispel such perceptions of government failure by reinforcing the reality that little can now be done without the help of other organizations often from different sectors. In moving

past the idea that government governs, into the belief that people can participate in governing (co-production), and through governance we embrace the roles of individuals and organizations with structural, philosophical, and capital comparative advantages. Besides government officials and legislators, who or what else can help communicate when government is doing well and where it can be engaged as a partner? Affiliated foundations may be just the mechanism for doing so. Which is why, as this research demonstrates, *partnership* is critical to affiliation because an implied, inherent, or automatic relationship where independence and alignment go hand-in-hand rarely exists. Partnering comes out of dynamic efforts on the part of multiple constituencies to build trust, relevance, cooperation, value, and legitimacy. Therefore, if the path moving forward involves creating a greater number of affiliated foundations in other public contexts, we should heed the obstacles of forging a relationship between two organizations from different sectors, with different institutional characteristics and motivation, and two separate accountability structures. Treating an independent, structurally separate, and philosophically different organization, such as an affiliated foundation, as a *proxy* detracts from its purpose for existence. Similar to other nonprofits, affiliated foundations fulfill a need alongside government that governmental entities would be hard-pressed to do on their own because they are government.

Therefore, what public manager would not want at his/her disposal an organization created to accept charitable donations that can be used in support of the organization or organizational constituents? At the same time, something important is lost or never gained in simply taking money from an organization (ATM) without cultivating a relationship with those dedicated to using the money in a way that brings

value (i.e. nonprofit board members). Affiliated foundations offer more than a slush fund, and the discerning public manager realizes the potential engagement and relationship that is lost when interactions are merely *transactional*. As the affiliated foundations in this research demonstrate, LEFs that are constrained by their embedded structure are often unable to engage with the school district for *instrumental* purposes to influence change, target their impact to specific needs, or organize involvement in schools. That is not to say all substantive interactions among affiliated foundations, communities, and donors achieve the citizen engagement and “government is us” advocated for by King, Stivers, and Box (King, Stivers, & Box, 1998), but that under the right conditions that facilitate *partnership*, the affiliated foundation structure has the potential to do so.

Nevertheless, this too has its own set of implications and challenges. For example, systems change and are impacted by the work and resources of well-meaning foundations that for any number of reasons lack the democratic engagement we expect when organizations interact with public institutions. In other words, we cannot readily assume engagement by one or more facets of the community results in substantial communication and feedback processes we strive for in a democratic society. Even though there are inherent public and private challenges any time you combine resources and efforts from organizations in two different sectors, we would do well to evaluate the motivation and mission for newly formed affiliated foundations. Well-meaning collaborations are borne out of thoughtful considerations of where and how to create value between governmental entities and nonprofit organizations.

Although the challenges that came out of this analysis focus on the school district/LEF relationship, we can see how the affiliated nature of such organizations provides an added layer of complexity. Where affiliated foundations are created, they must find ways to overcome the almost inevitable trap of becoming independent without proper ties to the “parent” organization or embedded to the extent that the nonprofit-ness is lost. In other words, affiliated foundations should seek legitimacy, practice stewardship, and cultivate a *partnership* that allows each organization to realize its relative contribution to the interaction.

### **Cross-Sector Relationships**

Cross-sector relationships are interesting for researchers because they can be problematic. While studies have provided many tools and frameworks in which to understand just how problems and issues take shape, these tools have focused on cross-sector and public-private interactions in service provision. My initial insight was that since contracts and services were not the defining characteristics of affiliated foundation/“parent” relationships something different would come out of how we understood them to be a type of cross-sector interaction. However, what I uncovered is that in characterizing these organizational relationships, similar elements are often accounted for using different concepts, or different degrees of emphasis. Because of this, I feel confident as a researcher that I have correctly placed the affiliated foundation within the realm of cross-sector relationships.

Where we generate interest and expansion in this research space is in the way affiliated foundations are designated as public charities, considered private in the sense that nonprofits are privately incorporated entities, and yet often combine public and



private money and accountabilities to both a governmental entity and a nonprofit board. This in essence captures their *hybridity* along with their complexity as an organization that has many different purposes including local engagement, governmental partnership, and private-sector support. Public and private interactions such as those captured in this research will likely always generate new questions and challenges to previous understandings because of their “publicness” (Bozeman, 1987) or the constraints inherent to affiliated foundations based on political authority (i.e. “parent” or partner entity that is governmental). Cross-sector relationships have a mix of governmental and economic accountability, constraints, and authority that causes us to consider who or what is in a position to control and shape such interactions. Since cross-sector interactions can occur in emergency situations (Gray, 1985; Kapucu, 2006), over a short-term period (Bauroth, 2009), or for a longer-term purpose (Connor, et al., 1999; Moore, 2000), we would do well to continue to account for the concepts and frameworks that explain the different purposes for interaction.

Cross-sector relationships are often unique to a specific context, the organizations involved, and the length or substance of such interactions (Bryson, et al., 2006). Their differences arise out of diverse contexts, organizational actors, and structures in terms of being long-term interactions or short-term responses to public problems. They are fraught with power imbalances, accountability issues, and dynamic environments where policies may change, actors come and go, and structures take on new shapes (Galaskiewicz, 1985; Garrett-Jones, et al., 2005). They tie together resources and organizations and force individuals to communicate and coordinate work, all while being motivated by different values and expectations for behavior (Austin, 2000; Moore, 2000).

Added to this is that they are not going away (Dees & Anderson, 2003; Smith, 2004). In carrying out an investigation of one type of affiliated foundation and its relationship to government, I consider this work a step towards thinking about a government-supporting nonprofit (Gazley, 2013) and whether such collaborations suggest the limits of government to effectively do what it is tasked with doing or if private money donated to government will become a necessary normal. Where affiliated foundations become a larger part of cross-sector interactions, we will need to consider the potential risks of infusing private resources into governmental organizations. It will likely also be important to begin focusing on the structural dynamics of affiliated foundations. As some of the cases in this study reflect, larger, bureaucratic entities have the potential to absorb affiliated foundations into governmental structures where they are intended to exist alongside a “parent” organization.

### **Research Limitations**

This research looked at one type of affiliated foundation/ “parent” relationship, in a specific state context. This is both a limitation as well as an advantage of the research. I relied on a common policy context in public education by drawing on LEFs from a single state that has county-level school districts in order to control for some contextual variation (e.g. school district designation, state education policy changes, demarcation of community being served). As suggested in the introduction, while we can expect school district institutional contexts to be similar regardless of state or location, the research cases are still taken from only one state that has a specific policy context around the work of LEFs. While the policy support for local education foundations provides a richer research environment for looking at affiliated foundations, I would expect it to be more

difficult to replicate and compare across cases in a state where such a context was not in existence. For example, Texas has the third largest population of local education foundations behind New York and California. However, all three states have local education foundations that can serve a school district, school, or several schools. I would anticipate that some of the relationship challenges and partnership dynamics to be different for foundations set up by a school versus a school district. Not only would a foundation that serves a school or group of schools likely have a different capacity than one that serves an entire school district the size of a county, but also their work, stakeholders, and donor pool would be vastly different. Foundations that serve a school or several schools may also be less formally structured to generate resources, rendering the need for and dimensions of *partnership* conceptualized in this study irrelevant or inapplicable. Further, in other state contexts it may be more difficult to factually account for the presence of local education foundations or their affiliated-ness if they can be specific to a school or district.

Within my study I was able to interview 40 individuals in 36 interviews comprised mainly of executive directors or staff of foundations, foundation board members, and some school board members and a superintendent. The perspective I was not able to capture as much representation from was school district administration. Of the superintendent and school board members who contributed to this study, they brought a somewhat different perspective of the relationship with their local education foundation. For those who represented the school district, the foundation was nearly always described as a partner. However, it was clear in the way those with a school district perspective communicated that the partnership was useful and valuable to the

extent that the LEF's work stayed in line with the school district's expectations and needs. While executive directors were forthcoming in describing the tension that can come and go in working with the school district, school district representatives gave little indication that the two organizations struggle with partnership. Based on school board members' accounts, the foundation was established to serve the needs of the school district, whatever those might be, and it was the foundation's role to be in line with their needs as a district.

Given the perspectives of school district representatives, albeit limited in number, I would expect that *partnership* would be more readily and frequently assumed by school districts that often have the upper hand in relating to the local education foundation. In other words, school district representatives would assume a partnership exists and support it as long as LEFs did not act in unacceptable ways. So while this study may overstate the complexity of an affiliated foundation/ "parent" relationship because it relies on the perspectives of the less resourced organization in an asymmetrical partnership, it nevertheless captures the perspectives of those who have the burden of forging a relationship with the school district. So while I would not expect the spectrum of LEF positions with the school district or the dimensions of *partnership* to be different, I would anticipate a study that has greater representation of school district perspectives to better capture the challenges of organizational identity in terms of how others see the organization, and the school districts perspective specifically.

### **Research Considerations and Thoughts**

Based on the research in this study, I would consider a few next steps to extend the contributions of this work. For researchers interested in exploring affiliated

foundations, it would be helpful to develop a tool for assessing the *partnership* dimensions of the foundation/ “parent” relationship. Although this research conceptualizes some dimensions of partnership that may arise in an affiliated relationship, operationalizing the dimensions would be beneficial to those working in an affiliated foundation as well as those with interest in studying them. An inventory of sorts that allows directors, boards, or “parent” organizations to assess their relationship would allow for better understanding of the public-private interactions in this type of structural relationship. The tool may also be useful for affiliated foundations in other contexts such as cities, counties, public library systems, and police departments. Useful comparisons could then be made across these specific areas of government to determine the extent and nature of affiliated foundations beyond resource generation, if applicable. Further, while this study looks at an affiliated foundation at the local level, it would be useful to study affiliated foundation relationships at the federal government level where the constituency is not as local or community-based.

Another extension of this research includes the creation of a tool that allows for greater understanding of the extent and diversity of the work of local education foundations, beyond generating monetary resources. By accounting for their intangible contributions, school districts considering establishing or partnering with a local education foundation may be better informed as to the true value of an LEF to a school district and community. Likewise, using the spectrum of positions laid in this research, others may consider whether or not there are other positions for LEFs with the school district they serve, and whether partnership or combativeness may be more prevalent. Since several executive directors indicated that local education foundations were modeled

after university foundations, there is potential for conducting a comparative study to identify qualitative differences between two different educational contexts, but with similar pressures for improvement and accountability.

Finally, in considering this study the reader may find areas where I have been both positive and perhaps over celebratory of education foundations. As a former public school teacher, I am often disappointed with the near persistent culture of condemning and punishing public education systems. In local education foundations in Florida I reflected on “beacons of light” for public education, where credible organizational actors can not only constructively challenge school districts to do and be better, but work to foster a voice of *community* and for community to counter the negative perception that is so often associated with public school districts. No one is off the hook for what is wrong in public education, and local education foundations would be the last groups to suggest that; but more people should know about what is right in public education, and local education foundations may be able to lead the charge.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### **Introductions**

- 1) Please tell me your name and position within the foundation as well as a brief background on your experience in education and how you became involved with the foundation.
- 2) From the perspective of **the foundation** you lead, what is the role of the education foundation within the community and has this changed over time? Are there other roles/directions the foundation aspires to? (backward looking, forwarding thinking, some recognition of the spectrum of roles)
- 3) In general, how would you define the public value of **an** education foundation? Specifically, how would you characterize the public value of **the** foundation you lead? (creating public value- how so)

### **School District**

- 4) Describe the relationship between the foundation and the school district, including district administration, school leaders, and school board members. (changing relationships)
- 5) Characterize the autonomy and/or collaboration with the school district within the process of identifying programming and allocating funds. (changing programming)
- 6) As an LEF in a field of education foundations within Florida and outside the state, do you bench mark your work against other school district foundations, nonprofits, or other types of organizations? (changing position)

### **Community**

- 7) Who do you include in the concept of “community” and describe efforts to engage the “community” in the work of the foundation (e.g. parents, school leaders, institutions of higher education, civic groups, elected officials, business groups, etc.)? (engaging who)
- 8) From your perspective, who are the primary stakeholders concerning the work of the foundation? In other words, are there individuals and/or groups you are most concerned with engaging? Does this change over time?

## **Policy**

9) What focus, if any, does the foundation have on education policy at the state or national level? Provide relevant examples of how the foundation demonstrates support or engagement in this policy area. (limitations of engaging in this area)

10) Looking forward, where do you see the foundation moving in the future and what are some of your considerations in pursuing this movement? Do changes in education policy impact your trajectory? (changes in direction, impact of policy)

## **Additional Questions for Case Study- School District**

1) Are there any other organizations the foundation connects with to provide services/programs to schools in the district, based on the needs or requests of district administrators?

2) Given that \_\_\_ has a new superintendent, how has this changed the work of the foundation or your relationship with the district?

## **Additional Questions for Case Study - Community**

1) In thinking about the work of the foundation and its role in the community, does the foundation influence how the school district operates? Can you provide an example?

2) If a foundation with a similar community context as \_\_\_ wanted to model their foundation after this one, what advice would you give to the foundation leadership?

## **Additional Questions for Case Study - Policy**

1) Describe the concept of a high performing/high capacity local education fund. Do you consider the foundation to be high performing?

2) What is needed from the school district in terms of support or legitimacy to become a high performing foundation? Likewise what factors or qualities are needed in the community to make this come about?

3) Is there a shared or common view of education reform or policy that is supported by the foundation? If so, is consensus needed? How are shared views developed?