Local Impact. Global Perspective.
Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy

Mission
The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy aims to be a global leader in helping individuals and organizations understand, strengthen, and advance philanthropy.

Vision
We envision a world with smart, adaptive, and effective philanthropy.

Values
Excellence
Inquiry
Community
Innovation
Sustainability
Integrity
Inclusiveness

At the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, we believe that strong philanthropy builds resilient and vibrant communities. That is why our mission is to help individuals and organizations understand, strengthen, and advance philanthropy.

The Johnson Center takes a unique view of our sector: we see philanthropy as a vibrant ecosystem of donors, nonprofits, and funders, working together in pursuit of the common good. As a university-based center, we embrace an applied research agenda that both produces new knowledge and translates that research and expertise into useful, applicable resources.

This philosophy propels our scholarship, our community engagement, and our commitment to data-driven decision making. Our staff are leaders in the field, driven by a desire to support meaningful philanthropy through inclusive learning, frank exchange, and profound local impact. Our thought leadership and strategic convening are intended to strengthen the work of professionals and their organizations. And our commitment to empowering communities while engaging with global perspectives demonstrates our conviction that philanthropy is a fundamentally diverse and inclusive field. Through our values and our actions, we advance a world shaped by smart, adaptive, and effective philanthropy.

The Johnson Center is an academic center of excellence based in the College of Community and Public Service at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, Michigan.
In times of great division and change, communities often struggle to adapt. However, if history has any lessons for us, it is that our common capacity to cope grows with the size of our challenges. And it does so, in part, through the lens of philanthropy. This was as true for the abolitionists and muckrakers as it is for the young people today who are calling for more fairness and inclusion in our society. As philanthropy continues to probe its relevance in civic life, there are a number of challenges and opportunities our sector must explore and embrace:

- We are in the midst of a $59 trillion intergenerational wealth transfer, and these Gen X, Millennials, and later generation inheritors are eager to make their marks in communities both local and global in scale. They are readily blurring the lines between the market and philanthropy as they push the boundaries for impact and social good.
- IBM estimates that every day our world generates 2.5 quintillion bytes of data. This number represents social media postings, consumer data, research and other forms of data inquiry. Philanthropy’s challenge is to take that information and consume it in ways that lead to quality, data-driven decision making.
- In 2018, the world witnessed one of the largest civic gatherings in history in the wake of gun violence in Florida. Youth who grew up with the conviction that their passions can be channeled into action have turned their personal tragedies into a movement they feel called to advance. They are using their time, talents, and treasure to transform their world.

As an applied research center, we see massive changes in the ways people give, preferences toward causes over institutions, and a drive toward ensuring a diverse and inclusive field that works closely with business and government. Simultaneously, we recognize that the vitality and endurance of our democracy requires a social sector that is smart, adaptive, and effective. At the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, we view philanthropy as one ecosystem, comprised of donors, nonprofits, and funders who share common interests and common challenges. A strong and vibrant sector leads to strong and vibrant communities, and ensuring that vitality requires that we understand, strengthen, and advance philanthropy for the practitioners and leaders of today as well as those yet to come.

Thank you for your support in this important work.

Kyle Caldwell
Executive Director, Johnson Center for Philanthropy
Philanthropy is complicated, sometimes even misunderstood. There are those who believe we need to separate the sector into funders and “doers,” and that philanthropy should be understood merely as the giving away of money. With more than 1.5 million nonprofits at work in the U.S. (according to the National Center for Charitable Statistics), it isn’t surprising that many would look for a way to differentiate the work of the public charities, private foundations, associations, and many more who make up the sector. At the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy, however, we have come to understand philanthropy as an ecosystem — one filled with co-dependent actors who give of their time, talent, and treasure to achieve change. This broader understanding is reflected in the Johnson Center’s work to understand, strengthen, and advance our sector to build a world of smart, adaptive, and effective philanthropy.

Why is this different way of looking at the work of philanthropy important? Because it reflects the complicated yet powerful way philanthropy works in communities of every size and at every level — an important focus of Grand Valley State University and the College of Community and Public Service (CCPS) which houses the Johnson Center. The Johnson Center serves as an anchor in our efforts to engage, enrich, and enhance the lives of our students and every community they touch.

We call ourselves an engaged College because we take the skills and talents of our faculty and staff and we work on projects in the community, in West Michigan and beyond. We see ourselves as a part of the communities we seek to learn about and work within, not as separate from them. It is this synergy of local engagement and globally-informed perspective that powers our educational and philanthropic mission.

We believe that philanthropy is most effective when it is informed by diverse voices, relevant data, and community and cultural context. Whether we’re considering community foundations partnering with local nonprofits, or international private foundations working with governments around the world, effective philanthropy demonstrates an inclusive and global perspective that can significantly impact local communities.

This holistic approach to education and philanthropy helps us not only to educate current and future leaders in the sector, but to empower the next generation of community change agents as well. What better cause could we embrace to ensure the health and vibrancy of our communities?

Dr. George Grant, Jr.
Dean, College of Community and Public Service
Grand Valley State University
The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy
Celebrating 25 Years of Leadership

2017 marked a milestone for Grand Valley State University: 25 years of serving as the home of one of the nation’s leading centers for philanthropy. The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy was founded in 1992, formulated from the shared vision of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, under the leadership of then President and CEO Dr. Russell Mawby, and GVSU, under then President Arend (Don) Lubbers, to create a Michigan-based academic center for the study of philanthropy. Today, our organization is a well-regarded center of excellence at GVSU and a vital resource for the charitable sector both locally and globally, with engagements in Michigan, across the United States, and internationally in Canada, Australia, Europe, and Saudi Arabia.

Over the course of this year, we came together with long-standing friends and new partners to celebrate our quarter century of success, sharing our work and the various ways we help individuals and organizations understand, strengthen, and advance philanthropy. As a signature event, GVSU — through a partnership between the Johnson Center and the School of Public, Nonprofit, and Health Administration — hosted ARNOVA’s 46th Annual Conference here in Grand Rapids, Mich. This premier event gathers hundreds of scholars and practitioners from around the globe to explore scholarship in the field of philanthropy. Thanks to the support of several foundations and partner organizations, the Johnson Center hosted a 25th Anniversary Celebration with this global philanthropic community. We are deeply grateful to the many nonprofits, individuals, grantmakers, and other stakeholders who made this celebration — and our first 25 years — possible.

This annual report provides a glimpse into the broad variety of field-building work the Johnson Center engaged in over the course of 2017, and our evolving understanding of the role we can and do play — with the passion and support of partners like you — in advancing locally-based philanthropy with a nuanced, global perspective. Our work would not be possible without the myriad community and field-wide partners who have generously contributed their expertise, enthusiasm, and financial support to our mission. Thank you!

We look forward to the next 25 years!

“For most of our nation’s history, personal connections have been the ballast that enabled civil society to overcome the divisions inherent in a pluralistic nation.”

— Jason Grummet & Chris Gates,
“How Philanthropy Can Help Bridge America’s Political Divide”
Globally-Minded Education for Grantmakers and Donors

Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning (IFDL)

The Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning helps build the knowledge and skills of foundation staff and high net worth donors to become more effective philanthropists. We do this through a variety of programs and offerings (including in-person courses, print and digital resources) that collectively increase understanding in the field and advance the practice of philanthropy. By identifying and addressing emerging needs and trends in giving, we meet the large and growing demand for education in this sector, working with individuals, organizations, and at the field level. Furthermore, our work in unique community contexts worldwide continues to enhance our ability to inform strategy and shape impact in our local work.

- IFDL’s major resource for individuals, The Grantmaking School, provides in-depth professional development courses for foundation staff, including proposal analysis, nonprofit financial analysis for grantmakers, and strategy and evaluation.
- The Foundation Review, the nation’s first peer-reviewed journal of philanthropy, provides the entire field with an opportunity for high-caliber evidence and evaluation-based learning. Curated, edited, and published by IFDL, the hybrid journal offers both open access and subscriber-only content, with contributing authors and case studies from around the world. To date, articles and full issues have been downloaded over 100,000 times, with over 31,000 downloads worldwide in the last year alone.
- Over 70 content partners contribute to LearnPhilanthropy, an online information and resource exchange forum designed to help grantmakers learn about the field and improve their work.

A Global Approach to Effective Philanthropy

Supporting Equitable Evaluation

In 2017, IFDL collaborated with the Luminare Group and the Center for Evaluation Innovation to conduct a field scan to identify how foundations incorporate equity into their evaluation practices. The scan revealed that, while many foundations believe this is a critically important issue, very few have focused on it meaningfully. In 2018, we are now using these findings to help spur conversation in the field nationally through conference presentations and workshops and via a dedicated website, EquitableEval.org. In the next phase of this project, we are working with foundations individually and in groups to co-develop tools and approaches to bring an equity lens to their evaluative work and to build knowledge about effective practices for the field as a whole.
I was already familiar with many of the experts on staff at the Johnson Center even before we, at the Bosch Community Fund, put out our Request For Proposals. It’s so critical for organizations of all sizes to systematically and continuously evaluate the impact of their grantmaking, and we were looking to refine our strategy. Upon working with the Johnson Center, I found the process with [Executive Director] Kyle Caldwell, [Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning Director] Teri Behrens, and their team to be rigorous, comprehensive, and thoughtful — but also enjoyable. I appreciated that our project resulted in work that was appropriate in scale and scope for an organization of our size to implement meaningfully and successfully.”

— Kathleen Owsley, Executive Director, Bosch Community Fund
Family Philanthropy on the National Stage

Family foundations and other family donors play an essential, yet often unheralded role in addressing social challenges and enhancing the quality of life in communities across the U.S. — and increasingly, across the globe. The Frey Foundation Chair for Family Philanthropy at the Johnson Center — the first endowed chair of its kind in the nation — was created to advance both the understanding and practice of family philanthropy in all its dynamic forms.

Since 2010, Michael Moody, Ph.D., has served as the inaugural holder of the Frey Foundation Chair. In this role, Moody works with a network of partners to pursue a comprehensive, international program of applied research, speaking and writing, professional education and teaching, and more. Among the signature initiatives of the Frey Chair’s work is the biennial National Summit on Family Philanthropy.

The 4th Biennial National Summit on Family Philanthropy

Donor Intent and Real Impact: Can Your Family Have Both?

The old adage “charity begins at home” captures the essence of the notion of local impact: family and community relationships form the basis of our collective understanding of what it means to respond to hardship and work together for good. When family philanthropy incorporates national and global learning into its strategies for impact and program evaluation, the philanthropic sector as a whole becomes more creative, effective, and resilient.

Philanthropy can be a lonely, uncertain journey, but hearing others’ stories at the National Summit on Family Philanthropy has provided us with wonderful learning, inspiration, and community. We’ll be back!”

— Brenda Grusecki, Trustee,
James P. and Brenda S. Grusecki Family Foundation
4-time National Summit on Family Philanthropy attendee

In February 2017, some of the country’s most experienced and entrepreneurial family donors joined national thought leaders in San Francisco for the fourth biennial National Summit on Family Philanthropy. For two days, nearly 150 peers explored the challenge of how family donors can balance legacy and donor intent with the flexibility required to achieve true impact in a modern context.

The National Summit on Family Philanthropy is hosted by the Johnson Center’s Frey Foundation Chair for Family Philanthropy. Together with a network of engaged and passionate family philanthropists, we’re advancing a culture of responsive and enduring philanthropy. Planning and design for the 2019 National Summit — to be held in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. in late January — is well underway!
**Generation Impact:**
Strengthening Philanthropy’s Ability to Engage and Steward Next Gen Donors

This year, Michael Moody, Ph.D. published new research on next gen donors with his research partner and co-author, Sharna Goldseker of 21/64. *Generation Impact: How Next Gen Donors Are Revolutionizing Giving* presents first-of-its-kind insight into the motivations of Gen X and Millennial donors who, as the recipients of a $59 trillion wealth transfer, will eventually become the most significant donors in history. The book contains original research on this vital group of philanthropists, many of whom are engaged in their own efforts to balance family legacy with modern-day priorities and social challenges. Through accessible data analysis and thoughtful personal narratives, Moody and Goldseker share the kinds of specific insights and suggested engagement techniques that will help nonprofits, fundraisers, advisors, families, and others adapt to the expectations and passions of a new generation of major donors.

*Generation Impact* has already sold over 9,000 copies, and has been featured in prominent publications, such as *The New York Times, Fast Company, Nonprofit Quarterly,* and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy.*
Community Philanthropy in Context
Learning and Giving at Home and Around the World

Community philanthropy is a growing and intricate part of the broader philanthropic sector, encompassing both a wide range of giving vehicles and a variety of approaches used by donors and foundations to fund the communities (of place and of identity) that they care about. The W.K. Kellogg Community Philanthropy Chair at the Johnson Center, the first endowed chair to focus on community philanthropy in the United States, seeks to explore and advance this field nationally and internationally through a combination of research, teaching, service, and thought leadership.

Since 2015, Jason Franklin, Ph.D. has served as the inaugural Kellogg Chair. His work on Giving Circles and other collaborative giving methods and vehicles has included research and advising partnerships in Michigan and across the country, and internationally with community and public foundations, giving circles, donor networks, funder collaboratives, crowd funding platforms, and others.

Informing Philanthropy Abroad

Philanthropy is an ancient instinct, one that is practiced in every culture on the planet. In today’s increasingly connected world, formal philanthropic practices — many of which derive from western models — are spreading. Yet this standardization is tempered by community adaptations that are driven by local culture, regulation, and leadership. At the Johnson Center, staff spent much of 2017 working with communities worldwide to identify applicable practices from U.S. philanthropy, offer learning and consultation, and customize new systems to local contexts. Our work across the country and the world embodies our conviction that an effective understanding of global practices can help to shape and advance community impact.

During the spring, Executive Director Kyle Caldwell traveled to Saudi Arabia with a team of partners to deliver a customized version of The Grantmaking School. In June, Community Research Institute Director Jodi Petersen, Ph.D., led a team of staff to the biennial conference of the Society for Community Research and Action in Ontario, Canada to present several papers on rigorous community research methods. And in the fall, Frey Chair for Family Philanthropy Michael Moody, Ph.D. and W.K. Kellogg Chair for Community Philanthropy Jason Franklin, Ph.D. both traveled to Australia to present keynote addresses, attend several conferences, and to meet and consult with local grantmaking organizations.
The Landscape of Giving Circles in the United States

Giving Circles are proving to be a powerful tool to democratize and diversify philanthropy, as they engage new donors and increase local giving. A 2017 report from the Collective Giving Research Group — a team co-founded by Jason Franklin, Ph.D., the W.K. Kellogg Chair for Community Philanthropy — established that Giving Circles have engaged over 150,000 people in the United States and contributed $1.29 billion in philanthropic donations since their inception. In a time when philanthropy is increasingly focused on billionaires’ giving, this research is an important reminder that everyday givers are coming together and pooling their resources to make a difference in their communities and for the issues they care about.

By considering the aggregate impact of these grassroots funding collaboratives, Franklin and his colleagues’ work provides a global and national lens for understanding local philanthropy.

$1.29 billion in collective giving

150,000+ people engaged in collective giving in the U.S.

65+ giving groups in the State of Michigan
Detroit and Grand Rapids: Michigan’s Major Metropolitan Communities

Michigan’s two largest metropolitan centers — Detroit and Grand Rapids — may be dissimilar in significant and historic ways, yet both boast thriving philanthropic sectors that are integral to each city’s identity. Tied together by community, policy, and I-96, Detroit and Grand Rapids form two critical hubs in the landscape of U.S. philanthropy. And the unique way philanthropy functions in these two regions reflects both the culture and needs of their respective communities.

A Pilot Program in Detroit

The robust philanthropic ecosystem in which the Johnson Center lives and operates is both an impetus for our growth and the reason we were established in Michigan in the first place. In the past 25 years, the Johnson Center has established deep roots in our West Michigan community in ways that are reflective of the area’s unique character — focusing on family philanthropy, supporting grassroots nonprofits, and providing research and information for data-driven decision making. Longstanding community relationships have powered our work and made possible our ability to support the field. Today, the Johnson Center is exploring how we can share our expertise, resources, and thought leadership with other communities, especially in Detroit.

The seven-county region that is Metro Detroit is a dynamic environment with active philanthropic networks; two-thirds of the state’s nonprofit and philanthropic assets reside here (Public Sector Consultants, 2014). Yet support systems for those organizations and networks are under-developed. Beyond its traditional work to support the general welfare, philanthropy is also at the center of some of the region’s most intractable challenges, including mass transit, economic development, civic engagement, and even municipal failures. This is why the Johnson Center took the step to support smart, adaptive, and effective philanthropy in the region by opening an office in the GVSU Detroit Center in January 2017.

Under the leadership of Teri Behrens, Ph.D., director of our Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning, the Johnson Center worked with Detroit-area funders to identify needs, design solutions, and provide professional learning opportunities, including on-site course offerings from The Grantmaking School and various consulting and coaching engagements. These initial collaborations have, in many cases, blossomed into longer-term partnerships, including a multi-year engagement with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to help them develop a learning environment for their board and staff. In less than one year, we have proved the value of an expanded presence for the Johnson Center in Metro Detroit and begun to build a sustainable demand for our strategic guidance and thought leadership on the state’s east side.

Poised for Expansion

We are committed to the notion that smart, adaptive philanthropy is fueled by high-quality research-to-practice learning and a strong understanding of how data can and should be used to drive change. With this philosophy in mind, we are preparing to launch a Metro Detroit Engagement Strategy in 2018–2019 that will solidify our presence on the east side and better serve our partners there. We look forward to building on new and existing relationships to support the robust philanthropic environment of Metro Detroit.

A Partnership Born in Detroit

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation was established with the proceeds from the sale of the Buffalo Bills football team upon the death of the owner, Mr. Wilson. In setting up the foundation, Mr. Wilson wanted those who knew him to make the decisions regarding the use of the funds. To that end, all of the foundation’s assets are to be distributed within 20 years. The foundation has to move quickly in order to meet this deadline while ensuring that they have the best impact possible in the two communities in which they work (Buffalo, N.Y. and Southeast Michigan).

Since spend-down foundations are becoming more common, this presented an opportunity to both support and document the changes that occur over a foundation’s lifecycle. The Johnson Center’s presence in Detroit helped pave the way for a new partnership and a new opportunity to advance philanthropy’s understanding of foundation spend-downs. Over the next five years, Johnson Center staff will be working with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation to promote learning internally and for the field. We are providing grantmaker training for new staff, facilitating staff dialogues to promote learning, assessing the broad impact of the foundation on the nonprofit organizations in their two key communities, and developing the foundation’s archives. Through this work, the foundation will leave a double legacy: direct impact in these communities through their grantmaking, and knowledge for the field about effective practices in spending down.

Grand Rapids is home to some of the nation’s largest family and corporate foundations, including those established by the families who founded major corporate entities such as Amway, Steelcase, and Herman Miller. These institutions, and many like them, grew out of West Michigan’s strong culture of family, faith, and a profound belief in giving.

Detroit’s philanthropic community grew rapidly with the success of the lumber and, later, auto industries, as Michiganders who met with success reinvested their wealth in the communities they lived in and (often) helped establish. Over time, great challenges and disparities formed in the wake of massive industrial and economic expansion. Today, philanthropy plays a strategic role in helping to find solutions to these systemic issues.
Building Capacity Locally with a Global Perspective

Nonprofit Services (NPS)

Nonprofit Services works to strengthen nonprofits’ knowledge of how philanthropic actors mobilize resources, collaborate, define equitable roles, and develop leadership for the benefit of all. Through one-on-one, team, and community-wide strategic programming, NPS fosters a deeper understanding of the many roles that structural and human ecosystems can play in building capacity and resiliency for communities, organizations, and individuals.

Johnson Center workshops saw many sell-out crowds in 2017–2018, with a variety of new offerings. Presented in partnership with the Association of Fundraising Professionals, the Changing Conversation Around Fundraising Effectiveness was offered in both Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, Mich. W.K. Kellogg Chair for Community Philanthropy Jason Franklin, Ph.D. introduced a new workshop for the more seasoned professional, Advanced Fundraising for Today’s Dynamic World. We also explored new workshop formats with the first annual public relations panel helping nonprofits learn to Harness the Power of the Media, and a Lunch & Learn discussion with grantmakers from across the country facilitated by Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning Director Teri Behrens, Ph.D.

Program development for NPS focused on peer learning opportunities that included the introduction of Executive Coaching groups. Facilitated by Tamela Spicer, a certified coach and program manager for NPS, the groups provided executive directors an opportunity to learn with and from peers through weekly discussions. Described by one participant as “nonprofits anonymous,” the small groups allowed executives a safe environment to share challenges, learn new skills, and build their networks.

Leadership Learning Cohort: An Inclusive Network for Leadership

Fundamentally, nonprofits exist to facilitate a community response to a community need. Yet stark gaps persist between the makeup of nonprofits themselves and the communities they serve. Less than 20 percent of nonprofit CEOs and/or executive directors are people of color — a figure that has stayed static for more than a decade (Thomas-Breitfeld & Kunreuther, 2017).

Philanthropy continues to test out methods for moving the needle on equity and inclusivity in the sector. It’s not just about hiring practices. It’s also about building talent pipelines, fostering mentorship and support networks, and identifying resources for capacity growth and sustainability. In the spring of 2017, the Grand Rapids Community Foundation and the Johnson Center teamed up to offer a six-month Leadership Learning Cohort designed to help nonprofit leaders of color in the Grand Rapids area grow their organizational capacity, offer one-on-one coaching, and demonstrate strength in numbers. Seven local nonprofit leaders signed on to learn and lead together.

Prior to my attendance at the Leadership Learning Cohort, I was struggling with making community connections. I needed more mentors and I needed to understand the philanthropic and social justice landscape of Grand Rapids. Having only moved to the city one year prior to founding Be a Rose, admission into the cohort was timely and much needed. Participation in the cohort gave me practical and implementable strategies for increasing board involvement in our work, recruitment of volunteers, and partnership-building skills. I am so grateful for having been given the opportunity to be a participant and to meet other nonprofit leaders in the city.”

— Christine Mwangi  
Founder and President, Be A Rose  
Participant, Leadership Learning Cohort
Grand Rapids’ First Neighborhood Leadership Academy

At the Johnson Center, we see community engagement itself as a form of philanthropy: a giving of time, talent, and treasure for the betterment of society and your neighbors.

And we’re not alone in this philosophy. In early 2018, the Johnson Center collaborated with a strong group of partners and over 30 representatives from neighborhood associations across Grand Rapids to shape the first ever Neighborhood Leadership Academy. This eight-week initiative was designed to provide neighborhood associations with the tools they need to be successful vehicles for civic engagement and change.

In 2017, Stacy Stout, Assistant to the City Manager, met numerous times with local leaders from several neighborhood associations to co-create an outline of learning objectives and topics to increase associations’ core organizational capacity and impact. This ad hoc team helped map out key training structures — such as planning adequate time for discussion — and was intentional about shaping an Academy experience that could benefit associations with various levels of current capacity. Stout and the Johnson Center’s Nonprofit Services team then worked together to build on that outline and design a curriculum that touched on everything from racial equity to fund development and volunteer management. Relando Thompkins-Jones and Marlene Kowalski-Braun, Ph.D. from the Division of Inclusion and Equity at Grand Valley State University, contributed material and facilitation to ensure the curriculum was intentionally inclusive and accessible.

One of our favorite offerings? Free child care for all participants during the hours of each session.
I believe opportunities like the [Neighborhood Leadership Academy] are important because they empower people to shape their respective neighborhoods which ultimately shift communities. Building resident voice is paramount to the collective impact required to build Grand Rapids into a top-of-mind destination for tourists who may be considering Grand Rapids as their next landing spot. Whether we are living, working, or playing in a neighborhood, educated and empowered people in a community evoke thriving neighborhoods, which [in turn] equal amazing cities to call home.”

— Latesha Lipscomb
Helping to form a neighborhood association for the Heartside neighborhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan
A Global Convening on Local Impact

ARNOVA and the Alliance for Nonprofit Management: Bringing the World to Grand Rapids

West Michigan has a rich history of giving, a tradition that supports local impact with a global perspective. In November, we marked another milestone in this narrative with the convening of the 46th annual Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) conference here in Grand Rapids, Mich. The Johnson Center and GVSU’s School of Public, Nonprofit, and Health Administration convinced conference planners to bring the event to Grand Rapids in 2017, and our city more than rose to the occasion. Nearly 1,000 participants from around the world gathered in Grand Rapids to discuss the role of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations in strengthening local communities — the largest gathering in ARNOVA’s history. Michael Moody, Ph.D., the Frey Foundation Chair for Family Philanthropy, moderated the conference’s opening plenary panel.

The Alliance for Nonprofit Management held its Annual Capacity Builder’s Conference across the hall from ARNOVA, providing conference attendees with the opportunity to access two innovative organizations and a plethora of thoughtful conversations. During the conference, Director of Nonprofit Services Matthew Downey and Nonprofit Services Program Manager Tamela Spicer presented their work on developing inclusive and sustainable Board Ecosystems.

nearly 1,000 attendees
3 days of learning
180+ presentations
Powering Local Community Impact with Research and Technology

Community Research Institute (CRI)

The Community Research Institute delivers high quality research and online data tools to strengthen efforts for community change and advance the philanthropic sector. With combined expertise in social science, technology, and community engagement, we bridge the gap between the information community members need and the change they want to make. Our work helps change-makers measure progress over time and ultimately maximize impact.

- CRI’s **objective research** elevates the voices and experiences of community residents to identify needs, inequities, and resources.
- CRI’s **accessible data tools** inform systems change efforts by helping organizations and individuals visualize and understand current landscapes and change over time.
- CRI’s **focus on equity** advances just, inclusive philanthropy by bringing to the fore an understanding of how differences in race, gender, socioeconomic status, zip code, and other factors differentially influence experiences and outcomes in communities.

Community Voices for Systems Change

**VoiceKent: Elevating Community Voice**

In 2017, CRI collaborated with the Kent County Health Department to expand its longstanding annual survey of the Greater Grand Rapids area (VoiceGR) to include residents from throughout Kent County. VoiceKent gathers data on Kent County residents’ experiences and views related to health and wellbeing, discrimination and inclusion, and overall quality of life in order to provide that information back to the community to guide the efforts of residents, nonprofits, governments, businesses, foundations, and other local decision makers. For example, the Kent County Health Department used data from VoiceKent to inform its Community Health Needs Assessment for 2017, and other partner organizations — including Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc., Heart of West Michigan United Way’s Essential Needs Task Force of Kent County, Literacy Center of West Michigan, YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids, and GVSU’s Seidman College of Business — used insights from questions added to VoiceKent to inform their work.

**Community Profiles 2.0: Informing Systems Change**

Community Profiles 2.0 is an online data and mapping tool that aims to improve democratic decision-making capacity in communities. The purpose of the tool is to inform systems change by facilitating the development and use of neighborhood information and data systems in local policymaking and community building. CRI also collaborates with community members on content development, and provides technical support and training on the tool.

**Equity Education: Advancing Inclusive Philanthropy**

In all of CRI’s work — including VoiceKent, Community Profiles 2.0, and the customized research and data projects we do in partnership with nonprofits and foundations — we strive to foreground issues of equity. Research and data that presents only aggregates and overall averages often hides underlying inequities along the lines of race, gender, socioeconomic status, ZIP code, and other traits. By disaggregating data in our research and building disaggregation functionality into our online tools whenever detailed demographic data are available, CRI brings awareness to inequities so that they can be addressed. Furthermore, through presentations and trainings on our research and data tools, we advance culturally competent philanthropy by educating the community and our project partners about areas of inequity and exclusion.
Field Focus: Conversations that Matter Right Now

In the spring of 2018, the Johnson Center launched a new digital initiative, Field Focus, dedicated to exploring particular topics that are important to philanthropy — all of philanthropy — right now. Our first campaign, Field Focus: Data and the Sector, ran April through June of 2018 and dug into how the social sector uses data to better understand itself and to improve the quality and efficacy of our work.

On a dedicated site, JohnsonCenter.org/FieldFocus, we compiled relevant existing material from the Johnson Center and curated resources from the many outstanding peer institutions across the sector that use data to study and understand the state of our field and the causes we care about. We also generated new content from partners nationwide. A webinar on gaps in giving data featured professionals from the Urban Institute, George Washington University, and the state government of Michigan. Experts from nearly a dozen other organizations — including the Center for Effective Philanthropy, Nonprofit VOTE, and Charities Aid Foundation — contributed original blog posts and appeared as guests on themed episodes of our podcast, Field Notes in Philanthropy.

New Podcast: Field Notes in Philanthropy

During the 2016 election cycle, Americans heard a lot about philanthropy — which political donors were stepping back or stepping up, how the Clinton and Trump Foundations did or did not use charitable assets for personal gain. To nonprofit sector professionals, these are fundamental questions with the potential to affect millions of jobs and millions of Americans. Yet it seems that most philanthropy in this country still happens off the front page. We struggle, as a country, to talk about the impact of philanthropy — on elections, on policy, on communities — but we’re living it every day.

To help strengthen our colleagues’ and our fellow Americans’ understanding of where philanthropy fits into the fabric of our society, the Johnson Center joined forces with WGVU Public Media, a service of GVSU, to launch Field Notes in Philanthropy in early 2018. The podcast explores the places where politics, current events, and philanthropy meet. Director of Nonprofit Services Matthew Downey and Director of Communications and Engagement Tory Martin join WGVU News Director Patrick Center as the podcast’s hosts, and each episode features one or two additional guests from the field. Episodes from the spring of 2018 were tied to this year’s Foundations on the Hill, the onset of the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation, increased philanthropic interest in the 2020 U.S. Census, and more.
Training the Next Generation of Philanthropic Leaders

The Johnson Center is proud to play a central role in preparing emerging practitioners to pursue distinguished careers in the nonprofit sector. Alumni of our student positions, graduate assistantships, and fellowship programs are at work today at nonprofits, foundations, and public entities across the country, carrying forward the philosophy of servant leadership and embracing the pursuit of smart, effective philanthropy.

Davia Downey, Ph.D., assistant professor of Public Administration and director of the Master of Public Administration program at GVSU, held the 2016-2018 Russell G. Mawby Fellowship in Philanthropic Studies at the Johnson Center. Downey leveraged the program’s resources to pursue a line of research that had been germinating in her mind for some time: the connection between local governments’ emergency management response during the disasters in Detroit and Flint, Mich. and the nonprofit organizations in these communities that were called to respond.

Kristina Pepelko, 2017–2019 Joel Orosz-Kathy Agard Fellow, is pursuing a master’s degree in public administration at GVSU while serving as a graduate assistant with the Institute for Foundation and Donor Learning. Pepelko led the research and creation of a report on “Philanthropy in Kent County, Michigan” which was distributed to attendees of the ARNOVA conference in November. This report, and her work with IFDL to advance the sector’s understanding and capacity around equitable evaluation in grantmaking has enabled Pepelko to create her own impact in the field while benefiting from the expertise and mentorship of longtime professionals.

The Johnson Center is profoundly grateful to the many philanthropy and university luminaries who, by their leadership and foresight, have provided enduring opportunities for us to host and support our sector’s next generation of innovators. Thank you!

In Michigan, public sector capacity and issues of financial solvency continue to plague the environment, and with the help of the Mawby Fellowship, my research partner and I intend to continue probing this issue of how governments and philanthropy have worked together to respond to crises. Our findings inform the debate over third sector collaboration with the public sector and provide a fascinating snapshot of how nonprofits can work with local government organizations to create new opportunities for coordination when extraordinary events occur and, hopefully, develop long-term solutions for governing as a result.”

— Davia Downey, Assistant Professor of Public Administration, Program Director, GVSU’s Master of Public Administration
Finances and Financial Narrative

The Johnson Center is committed to ensuring our organizational sustainability by securing and stewarding the human, financial, and intellectual resources necessary to support our mission. We deeply value our relationships with the many generous donors, strategic partners, and passionate clients who empower our work. Together, we are building a world that is shaped by smart, adaptive, and effective philanthropy.

The Johnson Center has an annual budget of $4.3 million, excluding the facility and administrative costs that are provided by Grand Valley State University. Our expenses are supported by a diverse funding mix that includes program revenues, the GVSU general fund, and earnings from several endowments. In the coming year, the Johnson Center plans to increase the role of contributed revenue in driving our thought leadership and ability to support the field. In particular, the Johnson Center seeks to expand its unrestricted gifts, endowed funds, and general operating support, all of which provide additional financial support for pursuing our mission to understand, strengthen and advance philanthropy.

Funding and Expenses for Fiscal Year 2017-18 (July 1, 2017–June 30, 2018)
Remembering Dr. Russell Mawby (1928—2017)

Dr. Russell G. Mawby, Ph.D. (he preferred, “just Russ”) was the longtime CEO of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and a champion of philanthropy. His leadership in helping to bring a clear focus to how philanthropy can be nurtured, taught, and sustained is difficult to overstate.

During his lifetime, Russ spearheaded efforts to support local and youth grantmaking. Today, youth grantmakers are at work across Michigan and the country thanks to his devotion to children and his firm belief that young people have the capacity to learn and grow through giving to others. Community foundations are a vital resource in many communities — both rural and urban — thanks to the leveraging efforts of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s challenge grants and youth grantmaking strategies that he advocated. And in large part because of Russ’ general curiosity about how the field could go about formalizing the teaching and research of philanthropy, academic centers like the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy now contribute to a thriving sector every day. Russ’ boundless curiosity and passion helped to advance a legacy of thoughtful, effective philanthropy that will endure for generations to come.

Russ Mawby passed away in October 2017. While many working in this field today might not recognize it, his acts for the love of humanity — his philanthropy — have sent ripples out across our lives and communities, ultimately helping to shape and advance the life’s work of so many of our colleagues across the sector. We at the Johnson Center are forever grateful for his leadership and his giving spirit.

Thank you, Russ!

“The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Grand Valley State University are fortunate hosts for the **Russell G. Mawby Fellowship in Philanthropic Studies** that supports both faculty and students in research focusing on the intersection between academic fields of study the and theory and practice of philanthropy.
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Strengthening Philanthropy through Field-Building Support

We deeply appreciate the many generous organizations and individuals who have fueled the work and mission of the Johnson Center through program-based support in 2017 and 2018. Your generosity and enthusiastic partnership have enabled our staff to reach peers in communities across the nation and countries around the world. Together, we are sharing the lessons of new original research, informing practice through insightful thought leadership, and empowering nonprofit organizations of all types to shape their communities through smart, adaptive philanthropy.

Thank you.

Johnson Center 25th Anniversary Celebration at ARNOVA 2017

Recognizing those organizations that provided support for the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy’s 25th Anniversary celebration at the 2017 ARNOVA annual conference.

- Experience Grand Rapids
- Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation
- Frey Foundation
- Grand Rapids Community Foundation
- Steelcase Foundation
- Wege Foundation

VoiceKent

Recognizing those organizations that provided support for the 2017 VoiceKent community survey.

- Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.
- Heart of West Michigan United Way – Essential Needs Task Force of Kent County
- Kent County Health Department
- Literacy Center of West Michigan
- YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids
- Grand Valley State University
- Seidman College of Business
**The Foundation Review**

Recognizing those individuals and organizations that provided support for whole issues or individual articles of *The Foundation Review* in order that specific content could be made available to the field at no charge.

- Rohit T. Aggarwala
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- TCC Group, Inc.
- Walton Family Foundation

**Frey Foundation Chair for Family Philanthropy**

Recognizing those individuals and organizations that provided support for the research, thought leadership, and field-building work of the Frey Foundation Chair for Family Philanthropy at the Johnson Center.

- Frey Foundation
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation
- Tarsadia Foundation
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- Youth Philanthropy Connect Program of the Frieda C. Fox Family Foundation

**National Summit on Family Philanthropy**

Recognizing those individuals and organizations that provided support for the fourth biennial National Summit on Family Philanthropy held in San Francisco, Calif.

- Frey Foundation
- Fidelity Charitable
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- The Iles-Schropp Group – Merrill Lynch
- F. Martin and Dorothy A. Johnson

**W.K. Kellogg Chair for Community Philanthropy**

Recognizing those individuals and organizations that provided support for the research, thought leadership, and field-building work of the W.K. Kellogg Chair for Community Philanthropy at the Johnson Center.

- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
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- Ktisis Fund of RSF Social Finance
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

**The Grantmaking School**

Recognizing those organizations that provided support for the development and deployment of curricular material for The Grantmaking School.

- Ford Foundation

Continued on next page ➤
2017-18 Donors and Grantmakers

LearnPhilanthropy

Recognizing those organizations that provided support for the maintenance and enrichment of the LearnPhilanthropy online forum and database for philanthropy educational resources.

• William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
• Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Individual and Family Supporters

Recognizing those individuals and families who provided support for the research, thought leadership, convening, training, and field-building work of the Johnson Center.

• Teresa R. Behrens and George Schimmel
• Kyle and Juliann Caldwell
• Julie and John Couturier
• Jason E. Franklin
• George and Beverly Grant
• Dr. Priscilla J. Kimboko
• Adam and Anne London
• Arend and Nancy Lubbers
• Joel and Florence Orosz
• Jodi and Aaron Peterson
• Pat Flannery Robinson and Dan Robinson
• David and Jerri Schroeder

Advancing Our Mission through Broad-Based Support

We offer our enduring gratitude to those individuals and organizations that have in the past and continue now to provide foundational support for the rigorous field-building work of the Johnson Center. Your gifts and partnerships power our mission to help our colleagues worldwide understand, strengthen, and advance philanthropy. Thank you for your generosity and your passionate commitment to building vibrant communities through effective philanthropy.

• Kathy Agard
• Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)
• Association of Fundraising Professionals
• Consumers Energy Foundation
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• F. Martin and Dorothy A. Johnson
• KConnect
• W.K. Kellogg Foundation
• The Kresge Foundation
• Arend and Nancy Lubbers
• Russell G. Mawby
• Michigan Nonprofit Association
• Joel and Florence Orosz

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We would also like to thank Independent Sector, Council of Michigan Foundations, and Michigan Nonprofit Association for welcoming us to the Our Common Future conference in October 2017, where we were able to celebrate our 25th anniversary with a joyful reception.
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