

Knowledgeable, networked, strategic, collaborative and compassionate are just a few characteristics of Michigan foundations.

Yet polls, interviews and other research conducted by the Philanthropy Awareness Initiative (PAI) reveal that few civically engaged Americans can name a foundation or see more than an ATM machine when asked what foundations do.

A new CMF project is striving to change that one-dimensional view by shifting the way influential leaders in government, the business community, higher education, the nonprofit sector and the media understand the role and value of foundations and the benefits of partnering with them to solve critical issues facing our state.



Called *Philanthropy 3D-Michigan* (3D-MI), the project aims to demonstrate the unique contribution of foundations to increasing Michigan's economic competitiveness. The idea is to engage CMF members in developing clear messages and stories about the value and role of philanthropy in the state to use with the news media and Michigan decision-makers.

Vicki Rosenberg, CMF's vice president of communications, education & external relations, who leads the project, stresses the importance of changing the way Michigan foundations are perceived and valued.

"Michigan's well networked and sophisticated philanthropic sector has great stories to tell about the unique ways they contribute to making the state stronger. But media coverage typically focuses on money given rather than the other ways foundations make a difference like finding strategic solutions, sharing expertise, forming partnerships and convening stakeholders," says Rosenberg.

"As the voice for organized philanthropy in Michigan, CMF is eager to bring that hidden value of foundations into the open through 3D-MI," she adds.

In 2009, CMF will develop and test a process for reaching influential leaders with new messages about the role and unique value of foundations. Initial steps include:

Forming a coalition of 25 CMF member foundations to work with CMF on developing new messages

Collecting stories and information from coalition members about their work, the way they communicate it and to whom

Interviewing 65 influential leaders – 25 foundation trustees and 40 leaders from other sectors – to learn how they perceive the role and value of foundations in increasing Michigan's economic competitiveness

Testing new messages through CMF and coalition member communications

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Producing a report about the ways Michigan foundations contribute to increasing the state's economic competitiveness through K-16 education, health care, workforce development and other key issues

Research and evaluation will be conducted by The Community Research Institute at The Johnson Center for Philanthropy & Nonprofit Leadership at Grand Valley State University.

David O. Egner, president and CEO of the Hudson-Webber Foundation, co-chair of CMF's Public Policy Committee and member of CMF's Government Relations

Committee, says the work of 3D-MI "is vitally important, far-reaching and intended to create a new and sustainable way of communicating the value of foundations."

"This research will identify the best examples of Michigan foundation work, exemplifying these transformational values...and then disseminate these important examples to influential citizens and the media," says Egner. "We want to reposition the value of foundations in the mind of influentials across the state."

Created by CMF, 3D-MI is also a regional pilot project of the Philanthropy Awareness Initiative and is funded by the David & Lucille Packard Foundation.

PAI Director Mark Sedway calls the project "one of the most vital communication initiatives being undertaken in the foundation sector today."

"Foundations are often isolated from many people on the front lines of local, regional and national efforts to improve American society," says Sedway, citing the findings of a recent PAI report, *Philanthropy's Awareness Deficit*.

– David Egner

"PAI selected 3D-MI for a regional pilot because of its focus on telling the story of the transformational work of philanthropy through the lens of a high profile issue and its emphasis on the critical role foundation trustees can play in outreach to decision-makers. Now more than ever foundations need to share their work, successes and ideas with others as a way of finding solutions to complex problems requiring multi-sector responses."

For more information about 3D-MI, contact Vicki Rosenberg at 616.842.7080 or vrosenberg@michiganfoundations.org.