

## TOW ISSUE PAPER #4

### COMMUNICATING ABOUT THE TRANSFER OF WEALTH OPPORTUNITY

*A Success Story from Washington County Indiana*

#### **The Challenge**

Following the Great Recession (2007-2009), the Indiana Grantmakers Alliance contracted with the Center to update the state and county Transfer of Wealth (TOW) analysis. As part of this project, the Center prepared a short presentation to explain the effects of the Great Recession on wealth holding patterns, emphasizing that a significant transfer of wealth opportunity still exists within Indiana. The updated analysis was shared with members of the Alliance and the message resonated with the leader of Washington County's foundation.

Judy Johnson, Executive Director of Washington County Community Foundation, took a number of steps to communicate about the TOW opportunity with her Board. She used our presentation and she created other tools including quizzes and exercises to help Board members understand the local transfer of wealth opportunity. She explained that by acting now to create funds to support sustainable community development, they would meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

To make the connection between TOW and community needs, Johnson also held brainstorming sessions with Board members to identify the present needs of the community, including:

- Building a youth center
- Creating a downtown historic center
- Educating the community's youth
- Breaking the cycle of poverty

They also discussed what steps could be taken to meet those needs so that the well-being of the community would improve. The question then became how the community foundation should summarize these extensive meetings so that the citizens of the community would see the connection between the county's TOW opportunity and building capacity to meet community needs.

## The Solution

That summer, the foundation hired a group of high school students as part of their internship program. One of those students, Aaron Johnson, was given the results from the TOW analysis and the brainstorming session with Board members and was tasked to produce an edgy video that would make the connection between the TOW opportunity and community needs.

Once the project was finished, Judy Johnson gathered her Board members and played Aaron's video. Board members asked her to play it again and again. By bringing together two focus areas of the Foundation – youth engagement and TOW – Judy was able to accomplish her goal, summarizing these meetings in an effective way. Aaron's video helped bring Board members discussions on how the TOW opportunity could be leveraged to meet the needs of the community.

The Board's reaction to the video encouraged the community foundation to use it as part of a broader community engagement strategy. They organized a contest to promote the video within the community. Non-profit organizations would compete for \$2,500 by directing their members to a webpage including the video and asking them to vote for their favorite local non-profit organization. The non-profit organization with the most votes would receive \$2,500 and another \$2,500 would be given out through a drawing. In addition to non-profits reaching out to their donors, different communication tools including newspapers, emails and word of mouth were used to promote the contest. As a result of these efforts, they engaged hundreds of people. The contest proved to be so popular that the Foundation has committed to support it again this year. One addition to the original contest will provide residents who view the video an option to donate to a non-profit organization, a win-win for the Foundation and the non-profit partners.

The community foundation also uses the video at their major gatherings. For example, during their annual meeting they looped the video in the background. One nice feature of this video is that it can be played without any audio and the message can still be communicated.

Recognizing the power of video as a communication tool, Washington County Community Foundation recently asked Aaron to prepare another video on the importance of estate planning, writing a will and updating it from time to time. This second video was just released to the public.

## The Moral of the Story

The message behind both these videos is straight forward, “Anybody can make a difference. Anybody can give back 5% of their wealth.” And Washington County is a great example of how a community foundation used its resources – its civic leaders to identify the needs of the community and its youth to create a visual and compelling bridge between the assets of the community and those needs – to work towards a more sustainable community. The moral to the story is summed up by the words that flash across the Washington County Community Foundation website, “**Make a Difference. Just 5%.**”

## Links to the Videos

First video connecting TOW and community needs:

<http://youtube.googleapis.com/v/BIRZND9CA4A>

Second video on creating a will:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SXIRhem-zo&list=UU2g7M1g4Bqhnsj84PpT9avg&index=4&feature=plcp>

*Special thanks to Judy Johnson, Executive Director of Washington County Community Foundation for sharing her story. She can be reached via e-mail at [director@wccf.biz](mailto:director@wccf.biz).*

### Questions & More Information:

**Ahmet Binerer**

**402.323.7339 - [abinerer@e2mail.org](mailto:abinerer@e2mail.org)**

**[www.energizingentrepreneurs.org](http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org)**

**The Center for Rural Entrepreneurship's** vision for rural America is one of vibrant communities and regions that embrace entrepreneurship, that find new sources of competitive advantage in their inherent assets, and that invest in a new more sustainable future for both present and future generations. The Center's mission is to help our local, regional and state partners achieve this future by connecting economic development practitioners and policy makers to the resources needed to energize entrepreneurs and implement entrepreneurship as a core economic development strategy.

These development efforts require financial resources. Most traditional sources of funding are challenged as governments, businesses and foundations struggle to meet rising community needs. A core program area for the Center is Community Development Philanthropy, where our team helps your community, region or state build a community wealth road map. Our Transfer of Wealth (TOW) research offers insight into possibly the greatest opportunity to tap new, significant and sustainable funding streams in support of growing better and stronger communities. For many communities and regions, TOW research can help jump start important conversations leading to greater community giveback.

The Center has conducted TOW studies for clients around the nation for more than 10 years, and has published a book titled, *Transfer of Wealth in Rural America: Understanding the Potential, Realizing the Opportunity, Creating Wealth for the Future*. More product offerings are planned under our Community Development Philanthropy area.

To learn more about the Center's history and program areas, go to [www.energizingentrepreneurs.org](http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org).

---

**The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI)** provided founding support to create the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship in 2001. RUPRI's mission is to provide independent analysis and information on the challenges, needs, and opportunities facing rural people and places. The work of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, along with other centers and collaborations, helps RUPRI achieve this mission. To learn more about RUPRI, visit [www.rupri.org](http://www.rupri.org).