

Philanthropic Investment

In Big Ideas

In the Fall of 2008, the Community Foundation announced a competitive grant process to allocate \$200,000 of the Pfizer Foundation's gift to support a few "Big Ideas" that addressed significant community needs with innovative approaches. AAACF received 42 proposals totaling \$4.5 million in requested funding. We found these three to be the most compelling philanthropic investments.



Partners in the Big Community Harvest include:

Front Row: Sharon Sheldon, Growing Hope Board Member and Washtenaw County Public Health; Eileen Spring, Food Gatherers Executive Director; Missy Orge, Director of Outreach and Training for Food Gatherers
On Top: Jude Walton, Avalon Housing Community Relations

Three Big Ideas

FOOD GATHERERS BIG COMMUNITY HARVEST

AAACF awarded \$92,000 to Food Gatherers to initiate an innovative multi-faceted collaborative program which will provide locally grown, healthy food from community gardens to our region's lowest income households. In a recent *Food Security Report*, funded in part by a 2008 Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation grant, Food Gatherers found an alarmingly high rate of food insecurity, especially among families with children. The Report found that every local food pantry was experiencing increased demand in the face of decreases in funding. And The Report also identified cost as the single biggest barrier to low-income households eating healthy food.

Food Gatherers' collaborative Big Idea is to partner with other local agencies to invest in four strategies that will yield more healthy food right away and will encourage self-directed, easy access to affordable, locally grown food for low-income households.

Food Gatherers and Project Grow will pilot a supportive gardening model on five Avalon Housing sites where residents will be provided the technical support and encouraged to grow their own vegetables. Growing Hope will coordinate a network of community gardens with local faith-based community groups that are active in providing food to low-income households. Training and continued support will be provided to help these groups transition from "random acts of gardening" to a planned, timely and sustainable effort. Tokens that can be redeemed at the Ypsilanti Farmers Market to purchase fruits and vegetables will be made available at local food pantries. Finally, Food Gatherers will also cultivate a three-acre community garden on its Carrot Way property. Producing a portion of its own food will enable Food Gatherers to be a more reliable and consistent donor of healthy food to those in need.

ECOLOGY CENTER – CREATING A CLEAN ENERGY PROGRAM

AAACF awarded \$58,000 to The Ecology Center, which is collaborating with the City of Ann Arbor Energy Office, Recycle Ann Arbor, and Washtenaw County to develop a program that will provide an affordable way for Ann Arbor homeowners and area businesses to improve energy efficiency and seek renewable energy sources. AAACF's grant will fund the research and tools necessary to develop the program which is modeled on an innovative approach currently underway in both Berkeley, California, and Boulder, Colorado.

Currently the upfront costs of energy improvements and associated financing issues have been the primary barriers for many households and businesses to adopt energy efficiency measures and renewable energy systems. Under a local Energy Economic Development Corporation, area households and businesses will be able to apply for a free energy audit which will identify energy conservation measures prioritized in terms of their respective savings and payback. Affordable options to finance the cost of those improvements will be made available through the program. Increasing energy efficiency in area homes and businesses and encouraging the use of renewable energy sources, promises to generate substantial and sustainable economic and environmental benefits to the entire community – an important step toward our region's long-term sustainability.

I knew that AAACF would have the capacity to determine the recipients and distribute the gift in an unbiased, thoughtful manner. The call for imaginative ideas leading to the grants AAACF awarded using the Pfizer Foundation gift was a good and fair process that achieved what it set out to do - focus the gift on just a few projects that promise to provide a meaningful and lasting impact on our community.

David Canter, former Pfizer Ann Arbor Site Director



SPARK EAST

AAACF awarded \$50,000 to SPARK, for innovation-based economic development in greater Ypsilanti. Due to geographic limitations in its current funding, not all of SPARK's services can be extended beyond the City of Ann Arbor. With new funding support from the Community Foundation, SPARK East will provide business accelerator services to start-up companies looking to locate in Eastern Washtenaw County and Ypsilanti. These business accelerator services provide a range of start-up support for young organizations from comprehensive business planning, market studies and assessment, strategic development, entrepreneurial education and training, to budgeting and funding. SPARK East's programs will focus on business development needs that are critical to promoting Ypsilanti as a desirable place to work, live and visit.