

Steve's Letter - 2014

“Collaboration embraces a healthy exchange of ideas.”

Foundations have the greatest impact when they take the initiative to seek out issues and help support new directions in community development. During the past 40 years the Frey Foundation has done just that, supporting major community projects in downtown Grand Rapids, preserving precious watersheds, farmlands and forests in Northwest Michigan, and supporting a systemic approach for school readiness in young children. Now, through the process of strategic planning the Frey Foundation is taking a fresh look at our program areas and governance, and the insights we've gained are bringing a new, exciting dynamic to our work.

Of all we've learned in this process, one central observation is this: the Foundation's funding is most effective when we have clear, well-defined priorities that are paired with a high degree of flexibility. Our trustees describe that disciplined combination as *crisp and nimble*. It's a funding strategy that increases the impact of our grants while keeping us open to creative new ideas and approaches.

We have also learned that projects with a broad base of community support from the outset have the greatest chance to succeed. As part of a collaborative funding process, we become one of many voices at the table, which ensures that each venture is studied from several angles. It's a vigorous approach that engages both public and private funders and results in stability and sustainability for projects and programs of all sizes.

It is immensely gratifying that in Grand Rapids and the other Michigan communities where we focus grantmaking, the spirit of collaboration is *already a long-held tradition*, embraced by a diverse network of governments, corporations and funders. As the foundation moves into its fifth decade, with the third generation of Frey family members on board, some things are certain. We will continue to invest in change so we can make a difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations and communities. We will seek out innovative ideas and approaches. And we will continue to focus funding in Grand Rapids and West and Northern Michigan. Our regional focus is a home-court advantage we relish and it's at the heart of all we do.