

Grand Rapids Community Foundation
Code of Ethics
Adopted: December 8, 2003

“Always do the right thing. This will gratify some people, and astonish the rest.”

Abraham Lincoln

Introduction

As a matter of fundamental principle, the nonprofit and philanthropic community should adhere to the highest ethical standards because it is the right thing to do. As a matter of pragmatic self-interest, the community should do so because public trust in our performance is the bedrock of our legitimacy. Donors and volunteers support charitable organizations because they trust them to carry out their missions, to be good stewards of their resources, and to uphold rigorous standards of conduct.

Nonprofit and philanthropic organizations must earn this trust every day and in every possible way. But organizations are, at base, people, and it is up to these people—board members, executive leaders, staff, and volunteers—to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to the core values of integrity, honesty, fairness, openness, respect, and responsibility.

Adherence to the law is the minimum standard of expected behavior. Nonprofit and philanthropic organizations must do more, however, than simply obey the law. We must embrace the spirit of the law, often going beyond legal requirements and making sure that what we do is matched by public understanding of what we do. Transparency, openness, and responsiveness to public concerns must be integral to our behavior.

Community foundations exist to help citizens help each other. They offer donors reliable administration, insight, and a way of keeping their gifts pertinent to a changing society; they offer assistance to citizens in need—whether that assistance take the form of provision of food and shelter, public cultural places and events, or recreational opportunities. Because community foundations are engaged in helping and are entrusted with resources provided by others, we have a high moral calling. We are depended on, and claim to speak to and for an entire community.

Leadership of our Foundation must contribute a vision of what the community needs and can be:

- First, we have to be just or play fair. Nothing destroys trust faster than a perception of favoritism.
- Second, to be trusted we have to be honest. When mistakes happen, they should be acknowledged and the foundation should move on.
- Third, trust requires production of real benefit. A community must come to see that real people are clearly helped and that we adapt to respond to changing needs.
- Fourth, the community foundation must respect differences. The diversity of persons within any community must be reflected in staff, leadership, and allocation of resources.

Because the work of community foundations depends on trust, all those associated with the Grand Rapids Community Foundation must make a commitment to uphold the public trust. Independent Sector's list of nine beliefs or commitments provide a broad context for ethical practice in the development of trust:

- Commitment beyond self is at the core of a civil society;
- Obedience to the laws, including those governing tax-exempt philanthropic and voluntary organizations, is a fundamental responsibility of stewardship;
- Commitment beyond the law, to obedience to the unenforceable, is the higher obligation of leaders of philanthropic and voluntary organizations;
- Commitment to the public good requires those who presume to serve the public good to assume a public trust;
- Respect for the worth and dignity of individuals is a special leadership responsibility of philanthropy and voluntary organizations
- Tolerance, diversity, and social justice reflect the independent sector's rich heritage and the essential protections afforded it;
- Accountability to the public is a fundamental responsibility of public benefit organizations;
- Openness and honesty in reporting, fund raising, and relationships with all constituencies are essential behaviors for organizations which seek and use public or private funds and which purport to serve public purposes;
- Prudent application of resources is a concomitant of public trust.

Ethical Standards for the Grand Rapids Community Foundation

Public trust is the key to our success. We believe that if we act in accordance with the general principles above we will secure trust. As we do our work based on these principles, the following standards of technical competencies and ethical values will help us best meet the public's trust.

The ethical standards for the Grand Rapids Community Foundation can be related to the five areas of community foundation activity: Governance, Management, Grantmaking, Resource Development, and Communications and Public Relations.

Governance

- Members of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation board will serve for the public good and resolve all real and potential conflicts of interest.
- Board members will serve without compensation.
- Board members will be informed of the legal requirements of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation and accept responsibility for assuring that the Foundation meets its legal requirements.
- The Board will be representative of the demographics and interests of the community it serves.

Management

- Funds will be invested to meet Grand Rapids Community Foundation goals and will not be driven by personal or business relationships.
- Staff will be hired with the skills and competencies necessary to operate a community foundation. Continuous improvement upon these skills will be required of all staff.
- Public records will be kept in such manner that they are easily understood and easily accessible to the public.
- All decisions about grants, programs, and priorities will be made in the best interest of the community.

Grantmaking

- Grantmaking decisions will be made in an objective manner.
- Staff and volunteers involved in grantmaking are required to disclose conflicts of interest in regard to appropriate grants.
- Staff and volunteers involved in grantmaking will strive to be representative of the demographics and interests of the community.
- The process for applying for grants will be open, accessible, broadly communicated, and easily understood by potential grantees.
- Staff and volunteers will treat grantees with dignity and respect, viewing them as partners rather than as recipients.
- Grantees will be held to high standards of performance and accountability.
- Grantmaking should strive to impact diverse facets of the community's public needs and complement other community resources.

Resource Development

- Staff and volunteers will provide stewardship of all accepted gifts regardless of origin, purpose, or size.
- Staff and volunteers will follow not only the technical requirements but also the spirit of donor intent.
- Staff will be compensated on a salary or flat fee basis and should not seek or accept compensation based on commissions or percentages of gifts received or pay finders fees for gifts directed to the Grand Rapids Community Foundation.
- Staff and volunteers will conduct the Foundation's asset development with respect for donors and with the donors' interest and welfare in mind.
- Staff and volunteers will offer donors options for making gifts, including making gifts to organizations other than the Foundation.

Marketing and Public Relations

- Grand Rapids Community Foundation will report to its various publics on its activities in an open, honest, direct, and intentional manner.
- Staff and volunteers will actively seek the input and involvement of the community at large.
- All communications will protect the donors' right to privacy, including anonymity.
- Staff and volunteers will exercise discretion in use of information about the organizations and donors, respecting confidentiality and privacy of those we work with.

Additional requirements for the President and Vice President of Finance and Administration

The honest, integrity, and sound judgment of senior officers is fundamental to the reputation and success of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. In addition to the requirements specified in the above Code, the Foundation's President and Vice President of Finance and Administration must also:

- Act with honesty and integrity; avoid actual or apparent conflicts of interest in personal and professional relationships.
- Provide colleagues with information that is accurate, complete, objective, relevant, timely, and understandable.
- Comply with applicable laws, rules, and regulations of federal, state, and local governments and other appropriate private and public regulatory agencies.
- Act in good faith, with due care, competence and diligence, without misrepresenting material facts or allowing independent judgment to be subordinated.
- Respect the confidentiality of information acquired in the course of employment.
- Share knowledge and maintain skills necessary and relevant to the Grand Rapids Community Foundation's needs.

- Proactively promote ethical and honest behavior within the Grand Rapids Community Foundation environment.
- Assure responsible use of and control of all assets, resources, and information of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation.

Receipt and Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that I have received my personal copy of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation's Code of Ethics. I understand that each Foundation employee, trustee, consultant, or representative is responsible for knowing and adhering to the principles and standards of the Code.

Signature _____

Print Name _____

Date _____