Granting Philosophy: An Approach to Giving

The experiences of working with a variety of voluntary citizen groups lead Ken and Debbie Rubin to want to give back to the community and set up a less than traditional fund. Just giving assistance via a united appeal campaign or a traditional charity or responding to a selection of funding letters received was not enough. Ours was to be.

We set up The Ken and Debbie Rubin Public Interest Advocacy Fund in 1999 as an advised donor fund via the Ottawa Community Foundation. By 2003, there was sufficient monies set aside to begin accepting voluntary group project proposals.

The philosophy was two-fold: One, that what was to be encouraged was small but catalytic cutting-edge projects that were innovative and change-oriented. Two, that to accomplish this, only a small amount of funds were needed and available. It was meant to be a less conventional fund

To date in 2022, over seventy projects have been funded on a wide range of topics from environmental to social justice and human rights concerns. A brief description of each project funded is periodically posted on the advocacy fund web page at kenrubin.ca.

Some projects have been locally based while others are national in scope, and a few have had an international dimension.

Some were part of larger campaigns; others were more stand-alone projects. For example, aid given in 2012 to the Sierra Club of Canada Foundation was provided to hold a teach-in event as part of a campaign to raise awareness of the ending of many environmental assessments. Another funded 2012 project to Transport Action was for producing a report on its railway renewal town hall meetings across Canada.

Some projects like the 2010 funding assistance of a Montreal forum on police tactics after a killing of a teenager had an effect on community-police relations. Three years later, a coroner's report on the killing confirmed the need for better police training and accountability.

A 2015 grass roots project for Mamawi Together provided $1,000 and involved two schools, parents and students coming together at a well attended interactive lecture by a Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner. This helps bring the aboriginal residential school issue to the attention of the local community.

The very first funded effort in 2003 with only a $500 grant illustrates what can be done with so few funds when there is a will to undertake a project. The Canadian Organic Growers Association (COG) project came about as a result of documents under Canada's Access to Information Act. They revealed that several Agriculture Canada research stations had been growing controversial genetically engineered crops.

The funding given helped COG organize the preparations for a national awareness day and undertake events across Canada. Without the funding, this effort would not have been tried and its success helped COG try other educational awareness campaigns.

Suggested proposals have sometimes come about after brainstorming with Ken and

Debbie. One such 2009 case was with the Canary Research Institute for Mining, Environment and Health, the charity arm of Mining Watch Canada. They wanted to have new means of tackling issues surrounding the effects across Canada of mine tailing sites on lakes and streams.

The project formulated took the Google maps of these sites and combined them with write ups about mining tailing sites. It ended up creating an educational tool on the Mining Watch web site that gives the public a better understanding of what is going on and actions that are needed.

Many groups funded are constantly dealing with issues Canadians face.

One such issue is never-ending privacy, surveillance, and civil liberty violations. Some projects funded include an Open Media effort to reach out to a broader audience on on-line spying. More recently, funds helped the Canadian Civil Liberties Association develop a handbook dealing with privacy issues during the pandemic.

Other journalist-inspired projects include helping fund the development of a press freedom tacker site to be housed at J-Source, a national journalist publication and an annual award for the best story a journalist does using the freedom of information laws.

Various environmental projects have been funded. They include several environmental awareness campaign projects of the Environmental Defence Canada on matters like lead in food cans, toxics in consumer products and the workplace, chemical BPA found in everyday cash receipts, excessive plastic use, and urban sprawl.

Other projects have highlighted high interest pay day loans, gene manipulation, fossil fuel holdings, national security oversight, sustainable streets capes, whistle blower dilemmas, alternate food delivery, migrant workers' needs.

A few projects have helped raise issues the Canadian voluntary sector has had to address.

One such project undertaken in 2013 and 2014 via Oxfam, helped fulfill the wishes of Voices-Vioux, a coalition of over two hundred NGO groups. They developed an audio video educational component on their web site that consists of interviews with member group leaders expressing barriers they face in their advocacy struggles.

In 2017, another project saw some of those same groups come together under the leadership of university human rights centres and the Canadian Council for International Cooperation to see how civil society groups could advance the roles NGOs perform.

And in 2020, we funded Imagine Canada's research, surveying and communications campaign around the survival challenges NGOs are facing during the pandemic crisis.

Our effort at encouraging a less-than-conventional-funding source needs you. Stimulating applications are welcome care of kenrubin@rogers.com.