



CASE STUDY
Foundation House

*Perspectives on 24 months to the starting line;
Reflections on what comes next*

June 27, 2016



Methodology

This Case Study was based on a review of documents and reports developed for Foundation House (FH) in the planning stages as well as one-on-one interviews (in person or by phone). A discussion guide provided continuity in terms of questions explored during the one-on-one interviews. The interviews were completed between February 25 and April 6, 2016 and included a broad range of individuals who had an interest in or are working at FH as well as those who provided advice and professional services to the Foundation House partners in the 18 months leading up to the opening in December 2015. Perspectives of staff of all organizations working at FH were gathered through observation of two discussions about building a shared culture at Foundation House.

Foundation House Partners:

Jehad Aliweiwi, ED Laidlaw Foundation

Bruce Lawson, CEO The Counselling Foundation of Canada

Marcel Lauzière, CEO The Lawson Foundation

With thanks to those who so generously gave their time to be interviewed including:

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Pegi Dover, Canadian Environmental Grantmakers' Network (CEGN)

Phil Buchanan, Centre for Effective Philanthropy (Boston)

Wanda Brascoupe Peters, The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (Ottawa)

Matt Johnson, Peter Davies, Colliers International

Ian Bird, JP Bervoets, Community Foundations of Canada

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Interviewees who wish to remain anonymous

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Executive Summary

For an idea that started with an informal discussion among several foundation leaders after a Philanthropic Foundations of Canada (PFC) meeting in the Calgary airport in mid-2014, Foundation House (FH) has come a long way from concept to reality in a relatively short period of time.

The initial conversations were focused on a very practical requirement – the approaching need to find new office space. Beyond the practicalities, the three foundations that eventually partnered to form Foundation House all shared a vision to create a meaningful learning and collaborative work environment. Foundation House would be a place where real change could be identified and nurtured by the partners and a select group of philanthropic foundations, networks and not-for-profits. FH would defy a common notion that philanthropic foundations were content to work in their own silos.

Foundation House officially opened in December 2015 after 18 months of discussion, planning and searching for just the right space. **The Counselling Foundation of Canada** and **CERIC** (Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling) were the first to arrive at the comfortable, bright and gently renovated offices at 2 St. Clair Avenue East.

In early 2016 two other partner foundations situated themselves in the innovative collaborative workspace – **Laidlaw Foundation** and **The Lawson Foundation**. Several other organizations, including some of the philanthropic and not-for-profit sector umbrella organizations, settled in or had designated office space by the end of February. Within the first few weeks, the hum inside the office was starting to vibrate outside as others in the philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors started to get a sense of “something happening”.

Once all of the organizations were settled into FH the first stage of the journey ended. Stage two, bringing the vision for FH to life, was off and running. Can this unique and intentional group of engaged and passionate organizations change the way the Canadian philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors work together? Will organic collaborations nurtured at FH lead to more powerful and far-reaching outcomes than any one organization could achieve on its own? Will it be possible to create a culture unique to Foundation House that still allows for individual organizations to maintain their own identity? And what does the vision for an “ideas’ marketplace” really mean?

It is too early to answer those and many other questions but it is just the right time to explore how the Counselling, Lawson and Laidlaw Foundations – all PFC members – created and launched Foundation House. What challenges were faced and addressed? What was learned along the way? Could FH be held out as a beacon of potential change for the sector? Will the sum be more than the total of the individual parts in this equation?

“We quickly realized this wasn’t about $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$, but rather $1 + 2 + 3 = 8$, or 10 or more. This is the power of the FH concept.”

Further evidence was needed that something important and unique could be happening, that may have been confirmed by the arrival of the Governor General of Canada, His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnson at the Foundation House doors one May afternoon. He had heard about FH and wanted to learn more.



But make no mistake there are those who still need to be convinced – with data and real outcomes – that Foundation House contribute in a meaningful way to how the sector does its work. The following offers the story on the evolution of Foundation House from idea to reality. The information was gathered through a series of structured interviews conducted between February 25 and April 6, 2016 as well as observations and information from at staff sessions held in April and May.



Who are the Foundation House partners and how do they work together?

Jehad Aliweiwi (Executive Director, The Laidlaw Foundation), Marcel Lauzière (CEO, The Lawson Foundation) and Bruce Lawson (CEO, The Counselling Foundation of Canada) all came to their roles with their respective foundations with a deep understanding of either the not-for-profit or foundation sectors. They had not worked jointly on a project before deciding to focus on Foundation House although as a result of the emerging discussions The Lawson Foundation had been using workspace at the former Laidlaw Foundation Toronto offices.

During the research for this case study, it quickly became apparent that they have developed a naturally collaborative style with each other, their advisors and supporters. Each seemed to almost organically identify their role in the process and demonstrated a healthy trust in their colleagues. This collegial working relationship may prove to be one of the crucial success factors in the long run as much as it has contributed to the success of the initial stages. It may also pose one of the greatest risks to be managed should one or more of the leaders leave their role.

The process of ensuring that Foundation House took the shape quickly was greatly helped when the Counselling Foundation that agreed to be the signatory on the lease. As this meant the Counselling Foundation also assumed the legal liability for the project, the Lawson and Laidlaw Foundations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Counselling Foundation. This agreement eliminated the need to create an entirely new not-for-profit entity specific to Foundation House, something that would most certainly have delayed the project.

Bruce Lawson took on the role of point person for the advisors including the real estate specialists, architect and project manager as well as identifying several of the office support services such as telecom and IT suppliers. This arrangement ensured that things moved forward effectively and efficiently. Having a “point person” is considered one of the ingredients of success by the Foundation House partners.

The respect and trust they have in each other is evident to their philanthropic foundation colleagues as well as the leaders of those organizations recruited to create and share the FH space.

The Counselling Foundation of Canada

www.counselling.net

The Counselling Foundation of Canada, a family foundation funded by Frank G. Lawson and his estate, was established in 1959 to create and enrich career counselling programs and improve the technical skills of career counsellors. The object of the Foundation is to engage in charitable and educational activities for the benefit of people; thus enabling them to improve their lifestyles and make a more effective contribution to their communities.

The Laidlaw Foundation

www.laidlawfdn.org

The Laidlaw Foundation supports young people in being fully engaged in the civic, social, economic and cultural life of diverse and environmentally healthy communities. We accomplish this through grants and partnerships with other organizations active in the youth sector and by influencing policies that affect young people.

The Lawson Foundation

www.lawson.ca

The Lawson Foundation is a national family foundation that invests in and engages with ideas, people and organizations that contribute to the wellbeing of children and youth and their development as active and engaged members of society.



They have established an effective and collaborative decision-making process and are determined to engage all FH organizations to find the best way to reach the FH vision.

The partners have identified that an “ideas marketplace” is one of the goals for FH and they are continuing to define this concept and how it will be brought to life through their partnership and environment they’ve created. They also understand the power of measuring success and knowing what matters to their Boards, staff, the philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors in defining the success of this experiment.



The Foundation House vision: thinking big and bold

The concept of Foundation House emerged as a response to the very real need for Counselling and Laidlaw to locate new, accessible and cost-effective offices as their leases came due. Lawson was working with a virtual office model and it was time to ground its staff and grant recipients in “a place”.

“In thinking about the design and ethos, we didn’t want FH to be perceived as a palace-in-the-sky or monument to our collective greatness,” says Bruce Lawson.

Not content just to think in terms of their own needs, the leaders of each of the founding partners quickly came to realize they had a unique opportunity for themselves and the philanthropic sector. Thinking big and bold might just allow them to create the platform that

“FH represents a measured level of risk-taking for all of us. We will be learning to live with a little more ambiguity than when we were on our own.”

would support, indeed encourage real change within both the philanthropic and not-for-profit sectors and eventually lead to collaborations that could effectively tackle bigger societal issues.

“I don’t think any of us truly realized the boldness of the initial decision,” says Laidlaw’s Jihad Aliweiwi. “We were all quite aware that philanthropic foundations have a reputation for working in silos. We wanted to change that impression through Foundation House by creating what we’ve called an ideas marketplace.”

In the early stages, leaders of several Toronto-based members of the Philanthropic Foundations of Canada (PFC) contributed to the visioning and scoping discussion for the project as a way to support the venture. They met regularly to further develop the plan and process for what eventually became known as Foundation House. Early discussions toyed with the idea of the joint purchase of a building before settling in to the more modest, cost effective and practical concept of a leasing and retrofitting an existing office space.

“Foundation House presented something entirely different to The Lawson Foundation – to be involved in a concrete and highly visible project that could lead to an entirely new way for us to do our work,” says Marcel Lauzière of Lawson. “It is a place that supports collegial relationships across several foundations.”

There were a couple of “visioning” sessions the second of which, the partners readily admit, was more successful than the first. Ideas were explored, verified, expanded, kept or discarded along with way. What quickly became evident was the partners’ vision to create, with the input and support of PFC colleagues, an intentional, collaborative workplace suited to a variety of philanthropic and even not-for-profit organizations.

“This is the right direction for the foundation sector. We are often accused by our grantees of operating in silos. And they are right. FH may be the example of what it takes to build a different and more productive relationship.”

Along the way the Bruce, Jihad and Marcel kept their Boards informed, building support for an investment in “place” that could mean a certain loss of autonomy for individual foundations to the benefit of a vision that could bring significant long term benefits to partners, the sector and Canadian society. Put simply, there was and is a shared belief that two plus two might just grow to equal six, eight or even 10. This



was based on the vision that the partners, working with other organizations intentionally located at Foundation House, would find new ways to leverage their assets including funding and networks to realize the collective positive impact like-minded organizations.

The three founding partners also have other assets including their influential and engaged Boards as well as approximately \$250-million in collective philanthropic assets. Together, the three partners have the ability to influence significant progress on just about any issue they choose to focus on. And most certainly have ability to establish an “ideas marketplace” to make it happen.



Evolution of a concept

Co-working, co-location and shared work spaces are nothing new in Canada or the United States. Several major Canadian cities offer a wealth options for individuals, start-ups and not-for-profit organizations looking for inexpensive work spaces. The **Centre for Social Innovation** (CSI), a social enterprise, has four Toronto and one New York location offering co-working space to more than 1,000 non-for-profits, charities and social ventures.

An early attempt by the **Kahanoff Foundation** in Calgary to engage philanthropic foundations and not-for-profits showed promised when it was launched in 1992. The space is now under the leadership of the Calgary Foundation as a convention and meeting space, generating income that supports community programs and activities while offering reasonably priced office space to charities and not-for-profits.

“One of the biggest challenges funders have is collaboration. We talk about it but don’t do it well. FH could be the model we need to change our behaviours and approaches.”

In Ottawa **Community Foundations of Canada** (CFC) established a co-located workspace a few years ago but it hadn’t quite “clicked” until the more recent decision to take on more space. This has prompted planning for an “intentional impact hub” where CFC staff and others sharing the expanded workspace can meet informally. Intentionality appears to be the key that might be reshaping the space into a more collaborative, sharing work environment.

In the U.S. it is not unusual to find several philanthropic foundations located under one roof. They might share some back office functions but there is little to indicate that this co-location option breaks down the silos between foundation or leads to collaborative programs and projects. The **Centre for Effective Philanthropy** (CEP) has been keeping an eye out for any effective models that have had measureable, positive impact but has little firm data to report.

Tides Canada is a national charity that “works to accelerate positive change and achieve greater impact across the country by bringing giving, investing, and doing under a single roof.” Focusing on capability building in the not-for-profit sector, Tides gave the concept of shared workspaces a boost in its November 2014 publication of “*Building Capacity, Sharing Values: Shared Spaces and Social Purpose Real Estate*.” (<http://tidescanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Building-Capacity-Sharing-Values-Shared-Spaces-and-Social-Purpose-Real-Estate-Final.pdf>)

“Foundations have to realize there is a real cost to not-for-profits from the siloed approach they take to funding. If FH can present a new model – walking the talk – it could be a breakthrough for others.”



The nuts and bolts of a unique intentional workspace

The intentionality of FH is evident at the front door. All of the resident organizations with offices and workspaces, even those who work there occasionally, are listed on the sign near the door. There are no “hot desks” or transient workspaces other than for members of foundations and affiliated organizations who need a spot to work or hold meetings when they are in Toronto. The partners are also trying to determine how, when and to which external organizations they will provide access for meeting space.

This didn’t happen by accident, it started with the choice of the space itself and the design process. The partners enlisted Matt Johnson and colleague Peter Davies of the Not-for-Profit Advisory Group at Colliers Canada to help locate real estate that would allow for the collaborative environment to establish itself. Colliers was chosen because of its well-established and positive reputation for its understanding and work with the not-for-profit sector.

The imperatives: the space itself had to be on one floor, have plenty of light, offer the option for common areas such as a kitchen/lunchroom and contribute to an open, shared office environment. Professional, not flashy offices were the goal. Proximity to public transit was a must. Accessibility was a given. Size was critical as the partners had about 25 staff between them and wanted to ensure space for approximately 15 – 20 other people (six or seven organizations). And cost was the ultimate consideration both in terms of renovations and ongoing costs.

Colliers found potential sites but several were taken off the table due to renovation cost estimates as well as the centre core design common to many office buildings. The one that rose to the top was the former office location for the MasterCard Foundation at Yonge and St. Clair. Being alerted to the upcoming availability of this prime location by someone with a connection to the MasterCard Foundation was one of the early examples of serendipity – and good timing – that helped planning in the early stages.

The space at 2 St. Clair E. required some renovation including a reconfiguration of closed-in offices and the addition of meeting space. All this could be completed at a reasonable cost compared to a ground-up renovation requirements of other locations. But the bonus for the FH partners was that MasterCard was willing to leave most of its gently used and co-ordinated office furniture and fittings.

“The side-core building at 2 St. Clair East really was ideal in terms of the intended use for the space,” says Matt Johnson of Colliers. A key attractive feature of side core buildings is the size

“Bruce, Jehad and Marcel are seasoned leaders. They clearly were not thinking about the individual “brands” at the expense of the bigger picture. They have demonstrated they are open to new possibilities and committed to making change happen.”

of the open floor space as the elevators and maintenance services are located on the side, not the middle of the building. “The partners went into the search with a very broad view of what might be possible. They made a point of surrounding themselves with people who had the experience they needed to be successful. For our part we felt they listened and took advice very well.”

For design, the partners reached out to Michael Taylor of Taylor Smyth Architects. Well known for smart design of publically accessible buildings, Foundation



House was a welcome challenge for the firm. The unique aspect of this project was that Taylor and his team were working with an office interior that was already in good shape so there was no need to start from scratch. Instead they made what could be characterized as “surgical” interventions to create an environment more suited to the specific needs of Foundation House. This proved to be a fiscally and environmentally responsible solution as much of what was there was reused and less construction waste generated in the renovation process.

As with most of the projects he tackles, Taylor and his associate Shane Morgan started by understanding the qualitative and quantitative requirements. They created several options that would make the most of the space with a focus on the existing lunchroom area. The design was kept simple with addition of a few more small glassed-in offices as well as more open spaces with large work tables at stool height and whiteboards for unplanned and planned interaction.

“We understand how important it is for clients to create a space that reflects who they are or want to be,” says Taylor. “They were open to new ideas of using and creating different options for the collaborative spaces.” The result was a tasteful and professional office design.

Experienced Project Manager Kevin Mast pulled the whole project together and ensured renovations and all approvals were completed by the mid-December move-in date for the Counselling/CERIC team. Mast also co-ordinated the move-ins for the Counselling and Laidlaw Foundations.

For Mast, the co-operation between the partners helped the project go smoothly and was a change from his usual corporate client work. He still found his skills as a mediator and go-between were needed and appreciated. “The partners set the tone and example for their staff, and that made the whole project work well up to and including the moves,” says Mast.

The final renovation, office outfitting and advisory expenses came in on budget at about \$650,000. This cost was shared between the partners based on the pre-determined formula.



What about the legal details?

FH partners also ensured they had assessed and addressed the legal responsibilities and requirements. Susan Manwaring from the law firm Miller Thomson a leader in the philanthropic, not-for-profit and not-for-profit legal world was called upon to assist in scoping out the approach required to formalize the partnership.

“They took the time to have the realistic discussions required for this situation. I was impressed by how they were able to look to the bigger, higher goals for Foundation House in making their decisions,” says Susan. “My role was to ensure they understood the potential for conflict and their individual and joint responsibilities in the collaboration.” Three clients presenting as one had unique risks and liabilities.

“They really had to think hard about how to bring three organizations together. They were breaking new ground”

Keeping things simple, the Counselling Foundation became the signatory for the lease with the other two partners signing a detailed memorandum of understanding. The MOU included everything from how the expenses would be split, how the revenue from the other organizations resident at FH would be dealt with and governance of the partnership up to the ultimate “what if we have to divorce” scenario.

Agreements with all organizations choosing to work at FH are being confirmed to address tenant details such as monthly payments, notice periods, use of meeting space, etc. But fundamentally all partners understand that whatever the paperwork says, each organization still has to achieve its mission and vision. And if FH doesn’t deliver on the vision no piece of paper will make a difference for their Boards. This has made the partners particularly aware of how much work, thought and attention to detail is required to ensure the best platform for success is in place.



If you build it, will they come?

Yes they will, and they did.

The first to be canvassed for interest were the PFC members in the original planning group but none of them had immediate requirements for new office space. The partners wanted to keep some flexibility in order to offer space to incubate early-stage organizations. They also wanted

“I am talking to people I never realized or thought might have an interest in the issues of my organization. And we are jointly discovering connections that will benefit us.”

to engage sector umbrella organizations, especially those they had an existing relationship with such as the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network (CEGN), The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (The Circle), PFC and Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) some of which are were open to finding new office space, or in Toronto often enough to benefit from a permanent or occasional workspace and a place to convene.

GrantBook, an organization that supports the digital requirements of grantmakers, decided to situate staff at FH.

An unexpected but welcome bonus? GrantBook Managing Director Anil Patel developed the concept for lettermark FH logo which was enthusiastically received and adopted.

In addition, the partners wanted to include networked organizations that had the potential to bring others through the office on a regular basis. So it seemed natural for them to reach out to the Ontario Non Profit Network. ONN, itself a not-for-profit, works to strengthen the Ontario charitable and not-for-profit sector by identifying and addressing issues through education, policy development and advocacy.

Recognizing the potential frustrations that could arise if the partners tried to determine “who would sit where” they decided designer Michael Taylor should have that responsibility. He had become quite familiar with each organization and its needs as part of his research into the design requirements. His “arms-length curated approach” to allocating the desks and offices seems to have been successful in this early stage.

“Foundation House is more than a hub. I don’t think any of us know what’s really possible yet. I don’t see boundaries at this point.”

There appears to be a good understanding of the FH vision amongst staff at all levels and, for the most part, everyone settled into the space shortly after the boxes were unpacked.

“I’m curious to see if what happens at FH can actually encourage foundations to stop hoarding their assets and put them at the centre of the table. This would allow them to share and build in new and exciting ways.”

What made this easy for everyone was the co-ordination of the set-up in preparation for move-in by Project Manager Kevin Mast. A great deal of thought was put into office requirements (telecommunications and technology platform support, photocopy requirements and equipment, office supplies management, reception) and even office amenities such as coffee, kitchen lay-out and equipment were considered and in place before the FH opened for business. And the bonus is that GrantBook is an internal resource to FH.



Those joining FH agree they were warmly welcomed. Most cite an early joint lunch held the month before the office renovations were complete. It was the first opportunity for people to see the new space, meet their future colleagues and get a sense of the unique mandates of each organization – and the potential areas where those mandates meet. A second luncheon was held in early February following the first “move-ins”. Staff also note the special Family Open House in early May. Everyone was invited to share their new office with parents, partners and children for an afternoon.

By the end of March 2016 word was getting around and those seeking to join the FH intentional workspace were disappointed to be told “sorry, we have no more room”. Some PFC members from other cities are taking advantage of their access to meeting and desk space. And sometime in later 2016 the partners are hoping to have a process to engage external organizations that wish to access meeting space on an occasional use basis.



So what about this FH culture thing?

Every workplace has a unique culture that is based on many elements including the leadership and strategic direction of the organization, the people-focussed skills of its leaders combined with effort and energy put into building working relationships within and across various teams.

Almost immediately some key professional benefits of working at FH emerged and could be consider markers for the development of the FH culture. For instance, most of the organizations at FH have fewer than seven staff members. On their own, many staff may not have colleagues with similar leadership roles responsibilities within their organization but at FH they do – across organizations. Whether at the CEO/ED, director, manager or administrator

level there is someone they can reach across organizational structures to talk to about common opportunities and challenges – if they choose to do so. As it turns out the early adapters were the communications staff who coalesced around new opportunities to share stories and successes more broadly across their networks.

For the Foundation House vision to be realized a new, collaborative culture must be built. The trick is to figure out a way to encourage the development of a culture based on “place” while at the same time acknowledging the individual cultures of the organizations that have chosen to work at FH. Once again the partners reached out to find the knowledge and skills needed to move the FH culture forward.

“Intentionality is very important. It means that some people may have to get used to ‘being bothered’ during the work day as others drop by to speak with them.”

By early April – about six weeks after the final “move-in” date – Kinamark Leadership Communications had initiated a process to explore the current understanding of the vision for Foundation House with the staff of each organization. The first step in the process included a staff survey to identify common themes, hopes, concerns and suggestions from all staff. That survey informed the first version of what were called the “House Rules”, known as the Principles (see above). Interviews were held with the

CEOs and EDs of Foundation House organizations and meetings were facilitated with the staff of each organization, and to support frank and open conversation CEOs or EDs were not present.

These individual team meetings culminated in half-day session with 37 people sharing ideas, exploring the various aspects of office culture that had already been emerging in the first couple of months. The consensus, with some caveats, is that the Foundation House culture petri dish is working and a common desire to find solutions to the things that aren’t quite right yet.

Principles We Live By

1. *We foster a fun, friendly, and welcoming workspace.*
2. *We work with an eye to inviting and igniting trust and relationship.*
3. *We create and nurture an environment of learning and collaboration.*
4. *We have respect for each other.*
5. *We approach conflict resolution with openness.*

(Draft May 31)



The office may be light-filled and airy but sinks full of dirty lunch dishes does not a happy workplace make. Organic collaboration may be the goal but what about those working at FH who struggle with the open concept lay-out or find the noise levels very disruptive? Or the casual interruptions when FH colleagues want to have a quick conversation on interesting or compelling ideas? How will the interpersonal conflicts that will inevitably surface be addressed? Will there be a common approach to problem solving?

As with anything involving people and emotions, it seems one of the key connections may come over shared meals, a Friday afternoon “kick-back” with a glass of wine and family open house events and just getting to know each other.

“In the first month I was already seeing potential collaborations emerge. And not just because it was in any plan.”

One theme that is consistent is the desire to learn more about the work of others at FH. What is keeping them busy? Who are they working with? What are they learning from their work that can be shared? How can those who work off-site be effectively included in the ongoing shared learning process?

There are still many questions to be acknowledged, addressed and resolved. The point of the effort to date has been to develop a commitment to a culture that allows those questions and issues to surface and be resolved in a transparent and fair manner.

Planning for the inevitable challenges

Throughout the early months when the idea of Foundation House was emerging, there appears to have been an understanding that to make progress, each of the three leaders would work with their Boards and other stakeholders to create a shared understanding of the value of the investment required in the short and long term to make FH a reality.

These are foundations established by families that have generations of philanthropic activities, programs and projects to be proud of. It was, in no small measure, a bold move just to ask them to think differently about themselves. To their credit, the partners are seen as lean organizations known for great work so the notion that FH could be their next great achievement is not that far-fetched. The three partner Boards have demonstrated faith in their leaders but will want and deserve to know how success of the venture will be measured and how that success will be aligned to the unique strategic direction for each of their foundations.

Some of those interviewed feel the case for FH may not be that different than co-working environments such as the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI). These are not naysayers but are interested to know what the data will show in 18 – 24 months.

“Frankly, being at FH provides us with greater, more professional visibility with our funders. The tone of our conversations at all levels seems to be different.”

Beyond the leadership and the Boards, the partners have other challenges to address. Will they be able to truly bring the FH vision to life? How will they truly leverage their joint resources? For instance, many observers as well as those organizations resident at FH are expecting to see a significant collaborative change project emerge. Work with Canada’s

Indigenous Peoples has been cited as one area that all FH residents should be continuing to explore with vigour based on past and existing projects. The inclusion of The Circle as well as CEGN at FH is one indication of the interest and commitment to this important area.

Integration of office processes will be an ongoing challenge as the need for meeting space and other supports varies between the three partner organizations as well as others at FH. In particular there is a recognized need for a good room booking system that is fair but also allows for the potential access by others outside FH to meeting space.

One issue raised by several people during the research was the possible detrimental effect of the blurring of the lines between the funders and the funded resident at FH. Would it be difficult for those organizations that seek funding to reach out successfully to other funders whether philanthropic, corporate and public? Obviously maintaining individual reputations and being seen to work independently within the FH milieu will be important.

Staff concerns about the work environment will be more of a continuing area for oversight that will sometimes require quick response. With the settling of the “Principles We Live By”, the need for more specific policies or processes to address workplace expectations unique to FH will be possible. As each organization resident at FH continues to have their own workplace and corporate policies and structures alignment between these existing policies and any new policies specific to FH will be critical.

“This is a journey of learning: finding out where the organizations at FH touch and overlap; understanding how we can work together and still meet our own mandates.”



And what about the possibility that Bruce, Jehad or Marcel leave their current positions with the partner Foundations? All of them would be quick to say that the vision of FH is not about them, it's about what their organizations working with others can achieve together. Their focus is to imbed collaborative thinking into the way ideas are brought forward and nurtured collectively to support real change. And measuring progress, sharing and celebrating success will demonstrate the power of the vision. They also realize that keeping their Boards engaged and committed to the vision will ensure that regardless who sits in their chairs FH carries on.



What can and should success look like for Foundation House?

Many of those interviewed for this Case Study made a valid point that FH is just starting. There is no real data to say that it is succeeding...yet.

One of the words that has come up with respect to FH and how smoothly things seem to have gone in the early stages is “serendipity”. An interesting word defined by such phrases as “discovery of something fortunate” and “gift for discovery”. Serendipity may have a lot to do with where things are in June 2016 but it will take some thought to decide on how to identify and measure the success of FH.

Suggestions for success measures included the most practical to the most ambitious.

Year One

- Are the same names still on the sign at the entrance?
- Peer-to-peer support networks are evident and skills sharing among at all levels, between organizations is happening, formally and informally.
- Are other groups of philanthropic foundations considering replication of the FH model in their city? Is anyone at FH supporting this effort? Is FH seen as the “standard”?
- There are specific indicators of engagement based on how meeting space is being used, for what purpose and by whom.
- Are collaborative processes being established, documented and measured?

Year Two

- Is one or more significant collaborative projects beginning to emerge that may not have been possible or may not have happened as quickly without FH as the base for these efforts?
- Is there evidence that FH is helping to reshape how philanthropic foundations see themselves and their work, and how they engage the broader sector?
- As a testing ground for ideas, shared technologies and platforms is there evidence the FH approach is changing the way organizations and their Boards make decisions on their digital and other strategies?
- Has policy been influenced by collaborative efforts that originated at FH?

At this time, Bruce, Jihad and Marcel are working to establish a common “suite” of success measures for the consideration and approval of their Boards. These measures will be naturally aligned with the business plans for each Foundation since accountability for the success of the investment in Foundation House is imbedded in each of those plans.

“What social issues will be focus for the partners and others at FH? They have an opportunity to make change happen through collaboration in a way that foundations can’t do on their own.”



Frequently asked questions about Foundation House

How were the financial arrangements structured for the partners?

The Counselling Foundation is the lease-holder and there is Memorandum of Agreement in place with all three partners that specifies cost-sharing apportioned based on the number of staff in each organization. “Rent” received is taken off the top each month and the remainder of the rental and other expenses is divvied up between the partners.

How was the “rent” determined for the organizations that joined Foundation House?

Research into “rental” and “usage” rates in other shared work environments in Toronto was completed to come up with a rate for private, open workspaces and related amenities. Some supplies and services are included in the rate, such as internet, meeting space and kitchen beverages. Phone system requirements are charged separately.

Cultural differences between organizations may have a significant impact on the success of FH. What steps have been taken to maximize the benefits of these differences?

The initial work on recognizing and affirming the unique elements of the FH workplace culture will be helpful including the “Principles We Live By”. The intention is not to change the culture of an organization but rather to find the most effective way to identify and develop a positive work culture in the space that is known as FH.

Where do individual staff mandates and organizational purposes fit in the FH model?

Individual mandates will continue to be assessed as part of the annual performance processes unique to each organization. The strategic and business planning processes enacted by each organization continue to be a primary focus. The FH vision centres on the actual and potential areas for overlap and alignment how these are recognized in strategic and business planning by each organization.

Is there a process for managing disputes among the various staff?

This issue will be addressed in the initial culture work and through ongoing FH workplace discussions. Issues will surface in different ways over time, particularly as staff evolve in their own roles and organizations refocus their individual strategies.

Is there a management committee that oversees the operations?

The leaders of the three partner organizations functioned as a management committee in the first months. In the summer of 2016 a more broadly-based management committee will be created.

What happens if one of the partner leaders leaves their organization? Will the vision of FH be at risk?

Leaders will continue to work with their Boards and staff to ensure there would continuity and connection the FH vision regardless of who is at the helm.

20 Learnings from the Foundation House Experience...to date

1. Start with the end in mind. Put realistic measures in place and measure, assess, refine, measure again. And celebrate results.
2. Ensure there is a common understanding and willingness to share the risks and rewards.
3. Agreement on the partnership “point person” or “key contact” and a joint decision-making process is more likely to keep things moving and on track.
4. Make sure to have the right people at the table to help develop and realize the vision.
5. Practicality: embrace it but don’t let it overtake thinking big.
6. Governance imperatives: keep Boards informed and engaged in the big idea.
7. Partnerships can lead to some loss of autonomy but also offer the prospect of exceptional collaborative outcomes. Identify the balancing point.
8. Accept that there will be skeptics who have “heard and seen it all before”. Not everyone will see the power in a powerful idea...until it is proven.
9. Be intentional but believe in the power of serendipity, “in-the-moment discussions”, “bubbling up” and the watercooler as creative and collaborative tools.
10. Place is important. Make sure the choice of location and the office configuration is attractive to those who work there every day.
11. A common “place” culture takes planning, work, commitment and time. It can and should be complementary and support cultures within individual organizations.
12. Do not underestimate the importance of cross-organizational collegial relationships.
13. Get used to and coach others to live with ambiguity.
14. Do not underestimate the frustration with and resistance to “kitchen duty”.
15. It may take some staff longer to “grow into” their new work environment.
16. Change takes time.
17. Getting to “place” is just the start. Real outcomes and successes are 12 – 24 months down the road.
18. Shared connections and experience in the philanthropic sector as well as reasonable alignment in approach to the work can create a strong platform for success.
19. Make the vision a big one. Even if you have to compromise a little, there must be enough boldness to excite and engage people.
20. Enter the process on a positive note...like each other.