



# The Ruth Mott Foundation Strategic Plan: 2016-2020

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The Ruth Mott Foundation's mission is to promote the health and vitality of our home community of Flint and the surrounding area. We envision a healthy community that is economically strong and culturally vibrant, where all residents are empowered to access the resources needed to see and shape their future. Ruth Mott's values and conduct inspire us to be welcoming, inclusive and just, treat everyone with respect and dignity, act with kindness and good humor, promote civic hope and pride, encourage personal responsibility, practice prevention, and maintain the "long view."

## OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS: 2016-2020

From 2016–2020, the Ruth Mott Foundation will pursue its mission by finding and fostering place-based interventions, including social innovation, that emerge from and are focused on achieving positive outcomes in north Flint.

## OVERVIEW

The seeds for the Ruth Mott Foundation's strategic planning process were planted in 2012 as a review of the foundation's beautification work led us to ask ourselves how we could more closely align with community residents' priorities. In the intervening years, important changes in context shaped the process of developing this plan, including the City of Flint's completion of its first Master Plan in more than 50 years, which provided a new sense of collective direction.

The content of this plan is shaped by a set of ideas that include:

- A commitment to deeply engage community and respond to community priorities.
- A desire to effectively use all of the Foundation's tools, including Applewood, convenings, grants, technical assistance, engagement, and expanded organizational capacity to achieve impact.
- A decision to identify our desired outcomes and measures of progress at the beginning, structure reporting and track progress to enable us to monitor our results in real-time.
- A promise to transition responsibly to our new strategy.

Prior to adopting this strategic plan, trustees approved a Vision for Applewood in March 2015 that contained several themes that inform the strategies of this plan. The main concepts included intentionally using Applewood as a place for convening and hosting dialogues on topics of community importance affecting Flint; opening Applewood to the public on a frequent, consistent basis with the programming lens of family, farm, and Flint history; and maintaining the Applewood collections and making them accessible in a way that ties together the history of Charles Stewart Mott, Applewood, Flint, and the nation.

## GOAL, STRATEGIES, AND INITIAL PRIORITIES

### The Ruth Mott Foundation's Goal

Residents of north Flint neighborhoods create and sustain opportunities to contribute and thrive.

## Initial Priorities

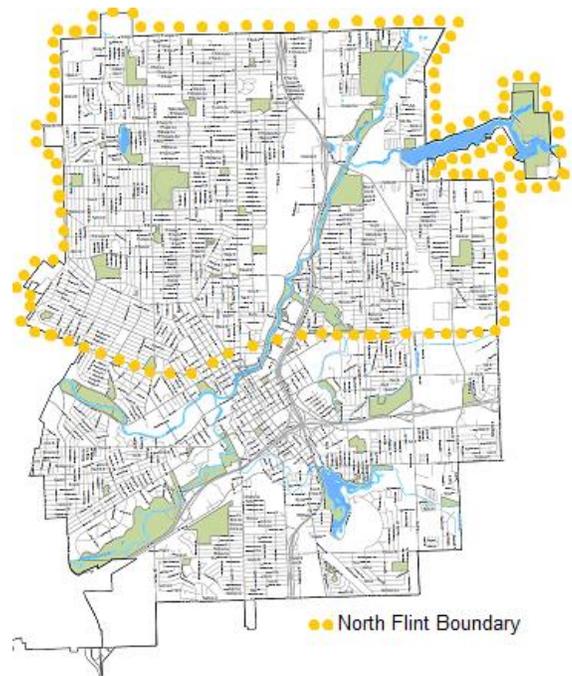
When we examined the available data on what residents in Flint saw as top priorities, recurring themes referenced youth, safety, economic opportunity, and neighborhoods (especially blight and access to services). Consequently, we commit to addressing these concerns. In addition, since the Ruth Mott Foundation has resident expertise and grantmaking experience with community health and arts and culture in north Flint, we identify them as priorities as well. These initial priorities will be further vetted and reviewed in conjunction with community partners. Finally, we see a need to act within these realms to close racial disparities. Because of the extreme level of segregation that exists in our region, working to close these gaps is important.

## Strategies

- Ruth Mott Foundation pursues its goal by finding and fostering effective and sustainable programs in north Flint, and coordinating and leveraging the resources of other organizations.
- RMF shapes its partnerships with north Flint residents and in consideration of the Flint Master Plan.
- RMF draws on Applewood in the normal course of pursuing work in the community, including grantmaking. Applewood is a welcoming place of beauty and contemplation where expertise is shared and all people can come together for interactive and educational experiences.
- RMF aligns its operations, policies and resources, invests wisely, and measures and supports the advancement of the Strategic Plan.

## North Flint Defined

Taking a place-based approach to our strategic plan requires a clear understanding of the geographic boundaries so we can communicate our area of focus. For the purposes of the Ruth Mott Foundation's strategic plan, we define our area of interest to be *north Flint*. The boundaries of our geographic focus area are the city limits on the west, north, and east, and the street known as Flushing Road/5<sup>th</sup> Avenue/Longway Boulevard on the south. While some areas bordering Flint may have similar challenges, restricting our focus to the city positions us to work intentionally along with Flint's Master Plan and with city-specific partners.



## Flint Water Crisis

The Ruth Mott Foundation Board of Trustees in February 2016 committed \$1 million in funding to address the Flint water crisis. The funding has been directed toward the short-term and long-term needs of Flint's children and adults exposed to lead, in recognition that the crisis impacts the health and vitality of every Flint resident. The \$1 million for Flint's recovery from the crisis will not reduce the foundation's commitment to implementing its strategic plan in north Flint.

## OUR TOOLBOX

### Engagement

A renewed, vigorous and all-encompassing approach to community engagement is central to the Ruth Mott Foundation's strategic plan. This will involve a culture shift towards Shoe Leather Philanthropy for the entire organization. Shoe Leather Philanthropy is: Walking among, talking with, listening to, learning from and sharing with the people we are serving.

This practice will be part of the job for every RMF staff person and trustee. We will expect all to be able to connect with and relate to people of all backgrounds in a respectful and genuine way. We anticipate needing to change the way we do our work to seek out and pursue relationships with people and organizations that might not have been on our radar before, but have ideas and gifts that can help north Flint residents thrive.

In *Do Nothing About Me Without Me: An Action Guide for Engaging Stakeholders*, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations emphasizes that people need to play an active role in addressing the issues that affect their lives. They define stakeholder engagement as:

- Reaching beyond the usual contacts for information and ideas.
- Listening and applying new learning about how to strengthen your grantmaking.
- Involving a wider audience of individuals and organizations in philanthropic decision making.<sup>1</sup>

Getting to that point will require us to build our own capacity. Consequently, our implementation plans include:

- Creating the position of Community Engagement Officer that will be highly visible within the north Flint community, scout potential new relationships and opportunities, craft a community engagement strategy for the foundation, and coordinate with other staff to put it into practice. Because of the need to have this staff person be out in the community as much as possible, we will explore options for embedding the Community Engagement Officer at a site such as a community center or neighborhood hub located in north Flint.
- Shifting our approach away from “outreach” and to “engagement” by connecting the Ruth Mott Foundation’s strategies, assets, and expertise to efforts of other organizations, groups, specific audiences and the general public to improve a community condition and/or the quality of life for residents. This involves focused work with the community in a bi-directional way rather than solely dissemination of information or education. In addition, it takes place in the community rather than on site at the foundation.
- Consulting with leaders and residents in the north Flint community to verify what we think we have heard as their top priorities in order to field-test our assumptions. This is an important step as we begin to put the strategic plan into practice.
- Hosting periodic gatherings to informally gauge community perceptions of RMF’s work, seek feedback, and gain insights useful in refining our strategies. Over time, this may lay the groundwork for a more formal process for gathering advice from north Flint residents.
- Engaging with stakeholders and decision-makers, including officials at the state level, to advocate for policies that advance the goals of north Flint residents. In addition to making grants that use advocacy as a means of making change, staff can develop and use networks to advocate as well.

True engagement means the foundation has to build relationships based on mutual trust; listen and respond to questions, criticisms and challenges; confront internal and external assumptions; and make the decision to not be in control. The foundation may find itself in the position of being a resource for an initiative, but not its leader. And, we may find that taking a stand on matters that are important to north Flint residents is unpopular in some circles. Yet, it is the work we are signing up to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Bourns, J. Courtney. *Do Nothing About Me Without Me: An Action Guide for Engaging Stakeholders*. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2010.

## Convening

The Ruth Mott Foundation has experience with convening, ranging from providing a place for conversations, organizing and hosting trainings, and actively bringing together partners to address an issue or opportunity. As we implement the strategic plan, convening will be used purposefully to advance the goal of helping north Flint neighborhood residents create and sustain opportunities to contribute and thrive. Going forward, our approach to convening will include:

- Brokering conversations between public and private actors to promote greater investment in north Flint. RMF alone cannot grant enough dollars to transform north Flint, but we can encourage investment from others. To build momentum, our grantmaking dollars must be paired with building relationships with other potential investors.
- Using Applewood as a meeting place for launching partnerships and civic dialogue. In the spirit of being welcoming to all, Applewood will be a site where people of differing experiences and perspectives can come to understand each other more deeply and identify ways to work together for the common good.
- Bringing together north Flint leaders and others for work to contribute to the north Flint strategy.

## Grantmaking

Grantmaking is an integral part of how RMF does its work. In order to best align with the needs and opportunities in north Flint, we will change elements of our grantmaking approach. In addition to project and single-year grants, we will use grantmaking strategies that have been proven to maximize grantee capacity:

- Make general operating support and capacity building grants a strategic part of our grantmaking.
- Award multi-year grants, which provide grantees with a chance to plan in advance. It also gives them a chance to get off the treadmill of applying for grants and focus on implementation and impact. (Standard year-end reporting and ongoing grant monitoring will apply.)
- Make capital grants when doing so is the most effective way to achieve our aims.
- Explore opportunities for collective impact. By joining with other funders, we can leverage resources and bring greater community focus to an issue.

## Applewood

Applewood is a unique resource that RMF will use to advance our mission in the north Flint community. We will draw on Applewood in ways that are consistent with the Vision for Applewood adopted in March 2015, such as:

- Using the resident expertise at Applewood in horticulture, history, and other areas to benefit north Flint.
- Recruiting Applewood staff and volunteers to better mirror the population of Flint and equip them with the skills necessary to engage a diverse public on site and in the community.
- Making the capital improvements at Applewood necessary to support being open to the public on a frequent and consistent basis.

## Organizational Capacity

Achieving our north Flint goal will require new skills for the foundation, as well as changes in organizational culture. Some of those cultural changes relate to increased use of Applewood, renewed community engagement, strategic communications, and becoming a learning organization.

A vital part of that evolution is the creation of three new staff positions: Community Engagement Officer, Learning Officer, and Communications Director. Each has a specific and critical role to play in achieving an organization-wide culture shift toward engagement, becoming a learning organization, and strategic communications.

## Exit Strategy

Philanthropy does not have a single clear and consistent approach to ceasing past work in order to free up resources for new work. However, exit frameworks typically consider a number of factors and differentiate tiers of exit grants accordingly.

In pursuing an exit approach, RMF will balance the desire to minimize disruption to longstanding grantees with the need to free up grantmaking resources as quickly as possible as we shift strategies. Staff will assess all current grants using the lenses of geographic fit and effectiveness in contributing to desired outcomes identified by north Flint residents.

All grantees facing an exit will be briefed at a face-to-face meeting.

## Foundation-Initiated Grantmaking

Going forward, the only unsolicited grant proposals RMF will accept are those that align with the north Flint strategy. We may also initiate grants to a small number of organizations whose work is not focused on north Flint, but benefits Flint as a whole and that we identify as central to our overall mission. Staff will work with organizations whose work:

- Is critical to our mission;
- Leverages significant resources;
- Serves Flint as a whole; and
- Is unique among local agencies.

Over time, the Ruth Mott Foundation intends to build grantee capacity through foundation-initiated grants so organizations reduce dependence on our funding.

## OUR STRATEGY

We pursue a strategy that “*sees the possible.*” We believe community vitality emerges from safe and vibrant neighborhoods that are home to healthy, financially secure families and children. We will deploy all our resources with the following strategic questions in mind:

- Are we finding, funding and inspiring social innovation in Flint?
- Are we seeking new ideas both here in Flint and beyond?
- Are we appropriately identifying and exiting grants that do not effectively contribute to our desired outcomes, even if they are geographically aligned?
- Are we making connections, empowering and maximizing civic engagement among residents and both informal and formal leaders?
- Is success both possible and measurable? A scorecard or dashboard would collect data and hold the Ruth Mott Foundation and Flint accountable for our collective efforts.
- Is our strategy aligned intentionally with the Flint Master Plan?
- Are we making both long and short-term investments in the community and in ourselves?
- Will our strategy contribute to local capacity and long-term change that is sustainable?
- Are we building on the Ruth Mott Foundation’s strengths?
- Is our strategy consistent with our donor’s intent, including Mrs. Mott’s wish to honor the life and legacy of Charles Stewart Mott?

This strategic plan will guide the Ruth Mott Foundation over the next five years, at which point the work and its impact will be assessed. Depending on that assessment, the trustees of the foundation may decide to extend or modify this plan, or to move in a different direction.