

CARRYING VALUES FORWARD:
THE SIRAGUSA FAMILY
FOUNDATION'S PATH TO
CONTEMPORIZING ITS GIVING

SIRAGUSA
FAMILY FOUNDATION

December 2018

Introduction

Renamed in 2016 to honor its longstanding legacy, The Siragusa Family Foundation is a multi-generational family foundation based in Chicago, Illinois that funds in the areas of arts, education and health. Founded by Ross D. Siragusa in 1950, the foundation is governed today by his descendants and managed by local staff.

Following in Mr. Siragusa's philanthropic footsteps, the foundation supports organizations that provide access and opportunity to the underserved so that they are empowered to help themselves and to experience a better quality of life. By the end of 2018, the foundation will have granted over \$46 million to more than 550 organizations, the majority of which are in the Chicago area, the region where Mr. Siragusa first found opportunity.

The Siragusa Family Foundation presents this publication about the history and evolution of its operations, governance and grantmaking programs. The intention is to share this journey with the field and to document for future generations the origins of the foundation's work in the community. We are proud of the legacy began by founder Ross D. Siragusa, and look forward to continuing to carry forward his values and vision in our work.

Learn more at www.siragusa.org.

A Timeline of Foundation Milestones

1950 Foundation established as a charitable trust to help those in need by Ross D. Siragusa and his first wife Irene O'Brien Siragusa, who passed in 1969.

First grants were given to organizations the founder was interested in the areas of the arts, religious causes, scholarships, medical research and social services.

1980 Trust converted into a not-for-profit corporation, The Ross D. Siragusa Family Foundation, with assets of approximately \$5 million. Ross D. Siragusa serves as chairman, president and treasurer. Board comprised of key advisors to the founder as well as founder's second wife, Martha Siragusa, and his children (second generation).

Family membership on the board is designated as such: Each of the founder's four children represents a family branch; each branch is allotted 2 seats on the board which are to be filled via appointments made by the founder's four children representing their branch.

According to Articles of Incorporation, the primary purpose of the foundation is to encourage and support the charitable activities of those organizations which improve social conditions and cultural development in the United States or elsewhere; promote peace and international understanding; increase and propagate knowledge through educational, scientific or literary endeavors in secondary, college and professional schools or otherwise; provide for special needs of children, the elderly or the disabled; improve the quality and availability of healthcare and healthcare delivery; and achieve other charitable purposes which the foundation from time to time recognizes as especially worthy of its support given current social, cultural and economic conditions.

1981 Name of the organization is changed to The Siragusa Foundation.

First of third-generation family members are invited to join the board.

Begin to establish grant guidelines outlining the purposes and objectives of the foundation. Health care and education, specifically in the Midwest, are discussed as primary giving priorities.

1980s Several third-generation family members are added to the board, often two serving at a time, joining their parents/uncles.

Grantees renewed year to year, with a few new organizations entering the grantee pool based on founder interests and community needs.

1985 Ross D. Siragusa (“Poppy”) falls ill and his son John R. Siragusa (“Uncle Jack”) assumes leadership, presiding over meetings as vice president and then becomes acting chair in 1987.

1990s Assets continue to increase and grantmaking follows. Grantmaking continues to focus on civic and cultural organizations, education, health and human services and interest in environmental organizations emerge amongst third generation family members.

Foundation adopts grant application form for board consideration of requests.

Assets increase to more than \$12 million, grantees grow to more than 80.

1996 Founder Ross D. Siragusa passes.

The addition of \$20 million from his estate raises assets to \$37 million.

At the prompt of John Siragusa, board decides to hire an executive director and administrative assistant, and begins to consider formalizing family board membership, a committee structure and a draft of first grantmaking guidelines is developed.

- 1997** Third generation family member Irene S. Phelps is appointed executive director and a non-voting board member. John Siragusa becomes chair and president.
- In an intentional effort to engage more third-generation family members, additional third-generation members are elected to the board growing to outnumber the second generation.
- Program areas defined: arts & culture, education, environment, health & medical research, and human services; board membership policy established; bylaws changed to ensure equal representation of four family branches on the board (two from each branch); executive and finance committees established. The executive committee would nominate new board members, be responsible for staff compensation, recommend possible new donations from requests received and develop the major family memorial gift.
- 1998** Staff begins to develop deeper relationships with grantees, implementing site visits and grant reports.
- Sample mission statement drafted.
- 1999** To mark its 50 years of giving, and to honor the founders Ross D. Siragusa and Irene O'Brien Siragusa and their daughter Mary Irene Siragusa Hicks, the foundation pledges a major gift totaling \$10 million to 9 Chicago area organizations: \$6 million to Lurie Children's Hospital and \$500,000 each to the Adler Planetarium, the Art Institute of Chicago, The Cradle, the Field Museum, the Shedd Aquarium, the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Newberry Library and Northwestern Memorial Hospital.
- Foundation receives the 1999 Distinguished Philanthropist Award from the National Society of Fundraising Executives, Chicago Chapter (now known as the Association of Fundraising Professionals).
- A [monograph](#) documenting story of Ross D. Siragusa's life is also published.
- 2001** Foundation pledges \$500,000 to Harris Theater and \$500,000 to Millennium Park joining fellow area philanthropists and to honor the founder's passion for civic and cultural life in

Chicago, a legacy which continues to be led by his second wife Martha Siragusa.

Fourth generation family members first start attending meetings and site visits in Chicago.

Board begins to discuss geographic dispersion and succession, difference between legacy and donor intent.

2002 Irene S. Phelps becomes president and CEO, a voting member of the board of directors though not taking a family seat.

Early 2000s Historical grants data is catalogued and migrated into an electronic searchable database.

Foundation website developed with an internal password-protected area of site for board and family.

Code of ethics, conflict of interest, confidentiality and whistleblower policies are established.

Matching gifts program for third and fourth generations, including matching monetary, in-kind donations and volunteer hours, is established.

Begin issuing an internal family newsletter to keep family members informed about foundation and family news twice a year.

Handbook for board members (Board Resource Book) and new board member training created.

Foundation adopts policy to not accept unsolicited proposals in order to focus on existing grantees and planning for how to thoughtfully expand giving in a focused manner based on interests and needs.

Staff begins to chart administrative expenses to measure against industry standards and forecast future giving based on assets.

2006 In a planned succession and to create space for additional/next gen members, John Siragusa resigns as chair of the board; his brother and second-generation member Richard D. Siragusa is appointed chair.

Board is expanded to include a seasoned foundation executive from outside the family – James Durkan, then president and CEO of the Community Memorial Foundation.

2007 Foundation's first fourth generation family member John R. Siragusa, III joins board. John R. Siragusa and Ross D. Siragusa, Jr. resign from the board.

Fourth Generation members from around the country convene separately for the first time to begin to learn together about philanthropy, the nonprofit sector, the foundation and its history and grantmaking. They begin to explore interest areas and discuss ideas.

2008 Economic downturn causes portfolio losses and leads to difficult discussions and decisions to reduce funding across the board, an opportunity to seriously consider focusing giving areas for the first time. Strategic conversations around community impact, grant sizes, criteria to assess grantees, and establishing a review process for renewal grantees follow.

Mid-2000s Foundation's mission and vision are updated, theories of action are created, values and legacy statement are adopted, grantmaking priorities/rubric is drafted and grantmaking begins to be streamlined.

Board and committee job descriptions are developed, board self-assessments are implemented and additional policies such as document retention, board service, employee open door and disciplinary action are developed.

Bylaws are revised to include two rotating fourth generation seats which would encourage next gen family members to participate on the board regardless of existing family branch representation on the board.

Ongoing board education about the sector and field is introduced as is periodic grantee communications and hosting grantee educational and capacity building sessions.

Private family Facebook page created to easily share news and updates about grantees and issues facing the community and promote dialogue amongst board/family members about the topics and foundation's work.

Board books now available electronically.

2011 Upon resignation of Richard D. Siragusa as board member and chair of the board, first third generation family member John E. Hicks, Jr. elected as chair of the board.

Board member assessments introduced to evaluate their responsibilities and give staff a better understanding about board member dynamics and foundation activities. Moving forward, this will be administered every two years.

2013 Martha P. Siragusa passes away on January 17, 2013; memorial gift in her name made to Lincoln Park Zoo.

2014 Irene S. Phelps announces retirement; foundation hires from within the first non-family executive director, Sharmila Rao Thakkar. Colleagues from the field are brought in to share experiences and examples of family foundation transitions with the board.

Limits on the number of family members permitted to serve at the same time from the same family branch are dissolved to allow for additional family members and varying generations to serve on the board at the same time. Fourth generation family members are eligible to apply as full board members, serving three-year terms. New and renewing board members will be elected, not (re)appointed by senior members of their family. Those interested in serving on the board would complete an application, which would be voted on by the board. Provision that at least two-thirds of the members of the board of directors must be descendants of founder Ross D. Siragusa remains intact.

2016 Board convenes for offsite retreat to share legacy with next generations, discuss future planning and family leadership in the foundation.

Foundation renamed to The Siragusa Family Foundation to honor its longstanding legacy.

Grantmaking streamlining continues and priorities are consolidated to the following program areas: arts education – community-based and school-based, education – college success and career pathways/workforce development, and health – mental health/primary care and safe communities. Funding categories for special interests, partnerships/collaborative initiatives and board- and family-directed grants are also established.

2017 Board returns to family leadership appointing third generation member and grandson of the founder, John E. Hicks, Jr. as executive director upon Thakkar’s out-of-state move.

Board grantmaking committee re-established and new 3-year grantmaking cycle by program area introduced, to be slowly phased into the portfolio in the coming years.

2018 In November with the addition of 2 more fourth generation family members to the board, the fourth generation surpasses the third in number of trustees

“Giving back is part of being successful. Through this foundation, we will enrich and enhance the lives of others by funding programs that help people help themselves.”

– Ross D. Siragusa



The Foundation’s Early Days

Like many foundations, The Siragusa Family Foundation has evolved much since it was established by Ross D. Siragusa and his first wife Irene O'Brien Siragusa in 1950. But now more than ever, Siragusa's heartfelt pledge remains at the heart of the Chicago-based foundation's mission, which remains *to help people help themselves and achieve a better quality of life*. Over the past 68 years, the foundation has moved beyond “check book” philanthropy into a multi-generational professional grantmaking organization with established funding, operations and governance policies.

Ross D. Siragusa (also known to his family as “Poppy”), who was founder and director of the consumer appliance and electronics company Admiral Corporation, formalized his personal giving by establishing the foundation to support causes which helped people help themselves and enhanced quality of life. Having not attended college, he made funding education one of his top priorities. Today, The Siragusa Family Foundation continues awarding scholarships to students who would otherwise be unable to attend college. Additionally, it prioritizes college success and career pathways by funding programs that prepare underserved students to persist

through the first years of college and supports job training programs that increase economic opportunities for individuals and families.

Siragusa also supported many arts & cultural institutions, child development, medical, religious and cultural endeavors. With its founder's interests in mind, the foundation continues to fund arts education and access to health and human services.

In order to keep pace with the steadily evolving world of philanthropy and the ever-more pressing needs of the communities its grantees were serving, the foundation moved beyond the executive business model that served Ross D. Siragusa so well in turning a \$3,500 investment into a \$600 million success at Admiral. (Read more: [A Memorial to the Life of Ross D. Siragusa](#)).

His descendants at the family foundation realized that they needed to get to know their grantees on a personal level, to learn how they led and how their organizations served their communities in order to be a more thoughtful and meaningful funding partner. To ensure its long-term future, the foundation had to involve succeeding generations of the family in its work. Over the years the board, with leadership and guidance from Siragusa's second wife Martha Siragusa, was able to carry forward Siragusa's intent. As

the longest serving board member when she passed in 2013,



Martha Siragusa kept Siragusa's vision strong, helping to ensure his legacy through the work of the foundation and future generations.

That the foundation has become an integral part of Chicago's philanthropic community and established itself as a source of support for organizations serving the underserved is reflected in Siragusa's reputation in the city and beyond. Even as the foundation looks ahead, anticipating what further changes will need to be made, the family remains committed to the guiding principles on which it was established. The question "What would Poppy do?" is never far from anyone's thoughts, shares Melvyn H. Schneider, one of Siragusa's closest advisors from the start who served on the board until his passing in 2016.

Honoring Ross D. Siragusa's Vision

After Admiral Corporation was acquired by Rockwell International in 1973, Ross D. Siragusa devoted his time to running the foundation. It was converted into a nonprofit corporation with \$5 million in assets in 1980, having previously operated as a family trust. In 1985, when Siragusa fell ill and was unable to be actively involved in the day-to-day running of the foundation, his son John R. Siragusa (known as "Uncle Jack") began leading meetings as vice chair, eventually becoming acting chair in 1987 and president and chair in 1997. As assets increased to more than \$12 million and grantees to more than 80, he took steps to make the foundation's board of directors a more formal and purposeful body.

During these transitional years, the foundation's board supported the institutions that Ross Siragusa had funded. There were no records kept until 1962 and then, only a list of grantees. Since he left no mission statement, the foundation used the categories and actual donations to help establish a giving policy that would be in line with his philosophy. Rather than increase the number of grantees as its assets grew, the foundation increased the amounts it was giving to existing grant recipients.

Also, during this time, there was some uncertainty regarding the

involvement of future generations in the foundation. Not everyone involved with the foundation believed that succeeding generations of the Siragusa family would have the interest or the knowledge to keep enduring. There was discussion of sunsetting the foundation. Demonstrating an abiding belief and confidence in the foundation and the younger members of the family, Uncle Jack dedicated himself to attracting, educating and involving members of the third and fourth generation (Siragusa's grandchildren and great-grandchildren).

This proved to be no easy task, particularly with regard to the fourth generation. While the cousins of the third generation all grew up in the Chicago area and knew each other from a young age, the cousins of the fourth generation were spread around the country. They were not familiar with each other in the same way. They had not grown up knowing their great grandfather or Chicago, nor the philanthropic work that the foundation was involved in over the decades. In successfully reaching out to them, the foundation not only strengthened itself, but it brought the family closer together.

"Uncle Jack (John R. Siragusa) has done a marvelous job of getting everyone involved in the foundation," said third generation member Ross D. Siragusa, III, the foundation's current chair and president. "Without his efforts, we

wouldn't be where we are today.”

Taking the Next Steps: Professionalizing the Foundation

Upon Ross D. Siragusa's passing in 1996 and the addition of \$20 million to The Siragusa Family Foundation's assets (raising the total to about \$37 million), Uncle Jack with support and guidance of his brothers Ross D. Siragusa, Jr. and Richard D. Siragusa (also known as “Uncle Dick”) carried forward and eventually recognized the need for a leader to oversee the expanded operation and take the foundation to its next level. They also initiated a plan to expand the board and establish committees to increase family engagement.

In April 1997, Irene S. Phelps, Siragusa's eldest granddaughter, who had served on the board in the mid-1980s, moved from Los Angeles to Chicago to become executive director. An administrative executive in the entertainment and restaurant industries, she had long aspired to be more involved in the foundation.

When she arrived in Chicago, Phelps was surprised to discover that despite all of the foundation's grantmaking (just over \$700,000 through 1996), “No one had heard of us. We didn't get many calls.” She was charged with raising the profile of the foundation and improving operations.

Forefront (formerly the Donors Forum), an Illinois membership association serving funders and nonprofits, provided guidance via its new trustee and staff leadership training program. Phelps acquired valuable insight and information on finances and grantmaking at its workshops. The organization and area colleagues also helped her to assess the foundation's goals and devise a strategy to best meet them. Additional resources and opportunities to learn from the Council on Foundations, National Center for Family Philanthropy and the Association for Small Foundations (now called Exponent Philanthropy) were invaluable along the way.

During Irene's early tenure, three third generation members were elected to the Siragusa board, bringing the total to five. She instituted a change in the bylaws to ensure equal representation of each of the four branches of the Siragusa family. Executive, grantmaking and finance committees were established, board positions were redefined and described in detail and board training resource books were created. These measures helped to make the foundation a more professionally run operation.

Another one of the foundation's important moves was to expand the board to include a seasoned foundation executive from outside the family – James Durkan, then president and CEO of the Community Memorial Foundation,

was brought on in 2006. “That really made it clear that the foundation was open to learning how to organize and do what it took to operate as a family enterprise in a best-practice way,” said Valerie A. Lies, retired president and CEO of the Donors Forum. “They are so deeply committed to making change in the community; they will do and learn whatever it takes to get better.”

“We've evolved,” said John E. Hicks, Jr., former chair of the board and now executive director of the foundation. “We have become much more thoughtful and professional with guidelines, policies, and procedures to guide our grantmaking. A lot of initiative has been taken to build on the first several decades of our history.”

In order to develop a strategy to enhance the foundation’s grantmaking, the foundation needed to get a better handle on what grants were being made and how well those grants were fulfilling their grandfather’s intentions. This wasn’t always easy since there was previously not a mission statement nor electronic records of which grantees received how much and for what purpose. Phelps and her staff went through the foundation’s grantmaking history, charting its major areas of support over the years. This included a major project to catalogue and migrate into an electronic searchable database all grants given since inception. After

establishing a better grasp of who the foundation was funding, she instituted one of its most important reforms – conducting site visits and developing relationships with long-standing grant recipients.

“I felt site visits were a way to connect with the grantees, to understand the work they were doing, so we could create connections and be part of the community,” said Phelps. “And, of course, we could then discuss their efforts with the board. We believe we are partners with our grantees, but they’re the ones doing the heavy lifting.”

“With the lines of communication open, our grantees began to trust us, which then led to staff’s ability to provide technical assistance and capacity building with them, assisting with transitions, communications, strategic planning and other opportunities for collaboration,” shared Sharmila Rao Thakkar, initially hired by Phelps as a program officer and later served as executive vice president before being appointed the foundation’s first non-family executive director when Phelps retired.

It didn't take long to discover the importance of the site visits. “Some of the organizations we visited said grantmakers hadn’t come to see them,” Phelps said. “They hadn’t asked them about their programs or projects.”

“The Siragusa Family Foundation greatly values its relationship with grantees and cares about what you are doing,” said Simone Mitchell-Peterson, chief executive officer of Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly, a volunteer-based organization dedicated to alleviating loneliness among the elderly in Chicago. “They’re always looking to help you connect the dots and build capacity. Sometimes they suggest another organization you might want to partner with to your mutual benefit. We always look forward to what they might have to say.” The foundation has supported Little Brothers since 1962.

“What sets Siragusa apart is that they are genuinely excited to learn about what you’re doing,” said Rochelle Davis, president and CEO of Healthy Schools Campaign, a grantee since 2008. “We have donors who don’t want to hear from us or hear from us only on their terms. And when The Siragusa Family Foundation comes for a visit, we never feel like they’re checking up on us. It’s their money, but they are open to ideas on how to use it. They’re known for that.” The foundation has always believed that those leaders in the community doing the work know best how to use funds best, they are the experts.

A few years ago, the foundation committed early on to fund Space to Grow: Greening Chicago Schoolyards, a collaboration between Healthy Schools

Campaign, a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that all students have access to healthy school environments where they can learn and thrive, and Openlands, a conservation organization that protects the natural and open spaces of northeastern Illinois and the surrounding region to ensure cleaner air and water.

“Other funders may have pulled back, thinking we were usurping support for other programs,” said Openlands president and CEO Gerald W. Adelman, whose organization has been supported by the foundation since 1999. Instead, Siragusa doubled down and issued a small supplemental grant to each group to demonstrate its support for the pilot which aims to transform Chicago schoolyards into open, multiple-use green spaces.

“It’s a real partnership,” said Adelman. “They come to our events and invite us to seminars. Their support of professional development goes beyond the usual lines.”



Celebrating a Legacy and 50 Years of Giving

In the landmark year of 1999, in honor of Ross D. and Irene O'Brien Siragusa and their daughter Mary Irene Siragusa Hicks and in anticipation of its 50th year of giving, the foundation announced a major gift totaling \$10 million to be distributed over the coming ten years to nine Chicago-area nonprofits, mostly in the form of capital support.

What was so different about how the board and family made its decisions was the manner in which they solicited proposals. As they were bringing third generation family members onto the board, they wanted to find a meaningful way to incorporate everyone's input in celebrating this anniversary and legacy. They created a list of every grantee that the foundation had supported and that family members had been involved with over 50 years – it was quite a list. The whole family – including 12 grandchildren of the founder, six of whom were not on the board at the time – voted for organizations that best represented the ideals of their grandfather, grandmother and aunt. The list was then narrowed to nine organizations.

Requests for proposals were sent to each of the nine organizations with the open-ended question: "If we gave you \$6 million, what would you do with it?" This was a different way of doing things at the time. Rather than directing organizations on what they wanted them to do with the funding or

fitting funding into existing programs, the foundation, realizing they were not the experts and that the nonprofits knew their needs best, asked the organizations to present their biggest and best ideas. The nine proposals were reviewed and voted on. Through the process of site visits, learning about the organizations' vision and plans up close, the board and family revised their original intention to make one grant of \$6 million. They decided to increase the total budget to \$10 million and to fund all the organizations.

Six million dollars was awarded to Children's Memorial Hospital (now known as Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago), providing a dramatic boost for the development of its pediatric transplant center. Lurie is home to one of the world's largest pediatric liver transplant programs and the first pediatric heart transplant program in Illinois.

\$500,000 was awarded to each of the following organizations: the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, The Cradle, the Field Museum, the John G. Shedd Aquarium, the Lincoln Park Zoo, the Newberry Library and Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

The Chicago chapter of the National Society of Fundraising Executives (now known as the Association of Fundraising Professionals) also capped this milestone by honoring The

Siragusa Family Foundation with its 1999 Distinguished Philanthropist Award.

According to Phelps, “This was a great process for our family – thinking about what we have supported, what the family has been involved in and what all members of the family wanted to prioritize and recognize. And, we had fun doing it – we got to go out and meet our grantees, and everybody had the opportunity to participate. Besides bringing us closer, it allowed us to shape that incredibly important work together. I would even say it formed the basis of our work in the years since.”

Sustaining Momentum, Maximizing Impact into the Future

While the major gifts had a purpose for its time, over the years the foundation has shifted its capital campaign support in favor of renewal grants – smaller grants dispersed regularly over time. “That’s something the foundation has come to be known for,” said Hicks. “It is extremely important to community-based grantees that have been supported for so long to be able to count on us. Our dollars can help sustain those smaller programs with defined goals, especially in a tough financial environment.”

The renewal grants had started under Jack Siragusa's leadership and they had become a trademark.

For a small family foundation with limited funds and staff, it had made sense. By the end of 2018, the foundation had given more than \$46 million to more than 550 organizations.

“Renewal grants have been making more of an impact, long-term, for the organizations we support,” explained Phelps. “We have heard numerous times how important they are to our grantees. They show that we support them. And, having The Siragusa Family Foundation as a funder has helped them secure additional funding.” Thakkar expands, “I’ve seen many times how a grant from us has helped smaller organizations leverage funding from other funders, sometimes even securing larger commitments.” Such grants also allow the opportunity to sustain a relationship with the grantee’s staff and leadership and assess how well it is meeting its goals beyond two or three years.”

“Staff at the foundation were advocates for us even before they started funding us,” said David Feiner, producing director of the Albany Park Theatre Project. “Irene and Sharmila started attending our youth theater ensemble, loved what they saw and became motivated to introduce our work to the board.” APTP productions are conceived, written and performed by youth from the surrounding multiethnic community who might not otherwise be able to share their

stories with others. The program also works with the young performers to help them gain admission to colleges and universities by highlighting their excellence and originality in theater. “Their support and understanding of the work we're doing has been huge for us. We try and devote as little of our budget to the act of fundraising, to hunting for new funding. Knowing that year in and year out we can continue to do our own core work is enormous.”

“Questions about checks and balances do not dominate the conversation with Siragusa,” said Little Brother's Mitchell-Peterson. “You can be honest about the challenges you are facing and what corrective action you're thinking of taking without being frowned upon and asked what kind of resources are going to be used.”

The foundation is also committed to maintaining long standing relationships with its larger partners, like Lurie Children's Hospital (formerly Children's Memorial Hospital of Chicago). Since 1983, when the Siragusa Transplantation Center received the first of more than 50 grants totaling nearly \$8 million, over 2,000 young lives have been impacted.

“In terms of value for the foundation dollar, the ongoing

medical care that the renewal grants have made possible, which is changing the face of the transplant field, can't easily be measured,” said Brian Stahulak, then a director of the transplant program. “The impact the funding has had in training the next generation of leaders in transplantation medicine has been equally important.”

Carrying On: A Focus on the Next Generation

One of the greatest challenges family foundations face as they move into the future is acknowledging and adjusting to the views and interests of succeeding generations. The style of philanthropy favored by one generation may not be that favored by the next. Research has shown that the next generation of philanthropists is strongly inclined toward giving in ways that produce measurable change, often more immediate and visible. They want to be involved more hands-on with the groups they give to and could be driven by differing values and priorities. At the same time, younger family members want to reflect the ideals and sense of commitment of their elders, which were impressed upon them when they were growing up.¹

Balancing the original intent of the donor and senior family members with the passions and interests of

¹ “Next Gen Donors: Respecting Legacy, Revolutionizing Philanthropy,” a collaboration of 21/64, a consultancy practice specializing in next gen and multigenerational strategic

philanthropy, and the Frey Chair for Family Philanthropy program at the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy.

the current and future generations is a very real and common topic of discussion for many family foundations. Instead of presenting as a challenge, for the Siragusas it presented an opportunity. It was a shared understanding among all generations that maintaining Poppy's legacy was paramount. And doing it in a way that addressed today's needs in the community was key.

During his childhood, John R. Siragusa, III (known as Jack), a fourth-generation family member and now treasurer of the foundation, visited Chicago every summer with his family. While he didn't always attend board meetings, his grandfather taught him about the foundation and gave him a strong sense of its importance. The older young Jack got, the more interested he became in its workings.

While he was attending college, his grandfather often discussed joining the board. "I looked at that as an honor," said Jack, who by then had spent time at the foundation during summers and participated in meetings. "Through his teaching and talking about all the board does, the connection to the family and legacy, it was a natural next step when I joined the board in 2007."

Jack was the first fourth generation member to sit on the board. Both as an officer and as a liaison to other members of his generation, he has

proven to be an invaluable addition. In discussing his experiences on the board, he focuses on the older members' openness to new ideas. "They have always listened and sought out our opinions; it feels very welcoming when your voice is being heard," explained Jack.

While growing up in California Isabel Siragusa, another fourth-generation member on the board, looked forward to her family's trips to Chicago for annual board meetings. "From the time I was in third or fourth grade, I remember it as such a special part of my life," she said. "I felt proud of what the foundation did. I knew it was something I wanted to do."

"Being on the board could be a bit intimidating at first, but every time I bring something up, we talk about it and consider our options fully," said Isabel. "You feel like you're part of the decision-makers, just like you feel you're part of the family." The foundation has worked hard to create and build this trust, these open lines of communication and understanding.

Equally committed to the foundation has been Caitlyn Hicks who became the youngest member of the board at age 20. She even joined the foundation staff as administrative assistant/grants administrator for a few years after college. While there, she helped enhance processes and procedures especially those regarding board and next gen engagement, bringing

insight from her service as a board member. Additionally, she shared her story and provided valuable perspective about next generation engagement in family philanthropy, stepping up as a leader in this emerging field.

The diversity of the next generation's backgrounds and interests speaks to the continuing evolution of The Siragusa Family Foundation as an organization dedicated to keeping up with the times. When the fourth-generation members came on the board, they benefited from some of the formal changes introduced by Thakkar, who with Phelps built the foundation into a more professionally managed and organized operation over the years. In addition to upgrading the board resource book, a guide to educate and onboard new board members, they implemented board self-assessments and board member and committee job descriptions.

"I wanted to explore with the board what being a board member meant, why they were involved and what they expected to get out of it," said Thakkar. "It was important to first understand the role of the board and how they saw themselves functioning individually and together, as a unit, to achieve common goals."

"We're lucky the fourth generation is so engaged," said Alisa Perrotte, who well remembers her grandfather's strong desire to involve his grandchildren and their

children. "To hear Caitlyn and Isabel talk about coming here and



MY EXPERIENCES HAVE GIVEN ME IMPORTANT INSIGHT ABOUT PHILANTHROPY: THE SINGLE-MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF PRESERVING A FAMILY FOUNDATION OVER SEVERAL GENERATIONS IS INSTILLING THE SPIRIT AND THE PRACTICE OF PHILANTHROPY IN A YOUNGER GENERATION AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.
– IRENE PHELPS, FORMER PRESIDENT/CEO OF THE FOUNDATION.

wanting to be part of things – it's so important to the future of the foundation. And it's so important to the family. In addition to wanting to help the undeserved, he started the foundation as a way to keep the family together. With everyone living so far away from each other, that hasn't been easy. Seeing all the fourth-generation cousins getting to know each other has been truly meaningful," shared Alisa.

Putting it into Practice: Operationalizing Vision & Values

While not a formal program in the early days, it was certainly the foundation's open invitation to all family members and encouragement that board members bring their children to board meetings and site visits that seeded next gen engagement in the foundation's work. Space was created for them to convene separately, as well as with the board. Fourth generation meetings and other gatherings not only allowed them to get to know each other, they allowed a safe place to learn about philanthropy, the

nonprofit sector and the foundation, and perhaps most importantly, to ask candid questions and toss around ideas.

What does the foundation do?



Staff launched a pilot inviting the fourth generation to explore their areas of interest together, using the ideas generated to bring back relevant organizations for their consideration. Through the process, the fourth generation learned how to review a nonprofit and how to make funding decisions. They in turn presented recommendations to the board – their debut in showing their parents, aunts and uncles what they cared about and how they wished to have the foundation dollars make a difference. Ten years later, some of the organizations introduced then are still being supported.

When more of the fourth generation began to develop an interest in the foundation and in joining the board, staff led the board/family through a series of values and vision/mission exercises and then related it to the foundation’s historical giving/

legacy. Utilizing tools from multigenerational family philanthropy consultancy 21/64, including the *Picture Your Legacy* and *Motivational Values* decks of cards, the board and family articulated their individual ideas for the future and developed a shared set of values across generations that would lead to meaningful and fulfilling giving together.

This work led to drafting the foundation’s first legacy statement (comparable to a donor intent statement, which they did not have) and a set of values to help guide the foundation as they refined their vision and grantmaking priorities in the years to come. Looking at these values and legacy statements in light of the theories of action developed a few years prior and making adjustments as needed led to creating a grantmaking priorities rubric to guide grantmaking at the time. Several organizations or funding areas dropped out. Grantees were immediately notified, giving them about two years notice until termination, via a step down process.

This process has ensued over the years as streamlining efforts reflect current board giving priorities and community needs. Showing that this is an ongoing process – continually checking in with board members interests and placing them in context of what is happening in the sector, in the communities being supported – the foundation further refined its grantmaking priorities in recent years. At each

stage, staff and board carefully consider programs that may not fit but have relevance to the foundation's legacy and/or family's long-term relationships. Ultimately, these have been categorized as board- and family-directed grants and updated primary and secondary giving areas and focuses have been established.

Realizing the once trademark renewal process may hinder new initiatives needing support and that might very well align with the generations coming onboard, the foundation recently introduced a new cycle process – and also reintroduced a board grantmaking committee. New energy is being cultivated and engaged at all levels – from staff bringing in new organizations and programs to board members developing closer relationships with grantees.

“The family has done a great job of being guided by its founder's goals and objectives without being restricted or curtailed by them,” said James Durkan. “Ross Siragusa responded to the needs of his time. Now we are able to respond to the needs of our time.”

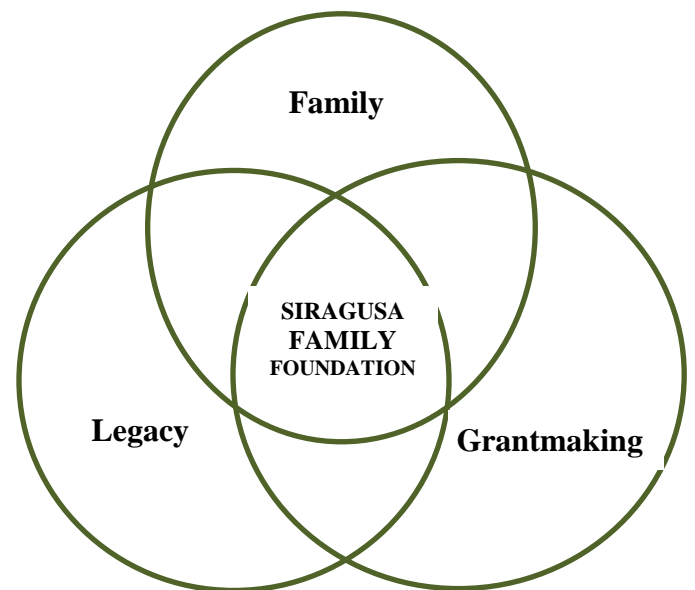
Preparing for Leadership Transitions: What's Next...

As the foundation prepared for Phelps to step down, the family was left with a strong legacy of their grandfather and uncles for the coming generations to build upon. In the years leading up to her retirement in 2014, Phelps ensured

that the board and staff were ready to assume the role. Carrying on the same leadership development and mentorship she received from her uncles and colleagues in the field, she supported efforts and provided additional opportunities for Thakkar to grow leadership and management skills, both inside and outside the foundation.

There were conversations with the board to prepare them for any changes to come. For example, stepping up to take on more

Why are we involved?



oversight and exercise their own leadership. With a family member at the helm since inception, the board and family needed to understand what their role would be as the foundation moved to be managed by a non-family staff. In the years before the transition, staff led several workshops with the board. They invited other family

foundations and family philanthropy advisors to share their experiences around succession – what should the staff and board think about ahead of time, what challenges/pitfalls/opportunities could they expect –what would be the new division of roles and responsibilities, how could they best work through the changes. However subtle, the conversations about the potential and possible helped ensure a smooth transition along the way.

Additionally, the years before this were filled with revisiting the mission, values and grantmaking philosophies of the various generations of board and family members. Having solid principles to guide future grantmaking, seamless transition for staff, board and grantees was now the goal. That meant that funding didn't stop.

For the foundation it meant deepening the grantmaking and sustaining its role in the community, figuring out new ways to engage the family through geographic dispersion and life events (for example, updating the bylaws to dissolve family branches), re-activating an executive committee, instituting frequent check-ins with the board chair, and engaging the finance committee in a more active role in investment management. The transition also presented space to introduce new thoughts and strategies around grantmaking. Staff conducted interviews and

surveys of board and family members to develop a revised funding framework and updated grantmaking guidelines that more accurately reflected current giving priorities.

An offsite weekend family and board gathering and retreat was the perfect venue to revisit the history of the foundation, learn more about the Siragusa family legacy and share these ideas. The voices and perspective of the second generation and long-time board members were key during this time. “Listening to my grandfather’s longtime friend and advisor Mel Schneider and uncles Jack and Dick recount the foundation’s early years and tell stories about Poppy and our family was really important to strengthening the family’s connection to the foundation’s legacy, especially for the fourth generation,” recalled John Hicks. The convening resulted in interest and re-engagement of several family members.

When Thakkar announced a family move out of Chicago, the foundation faced another transition, which led to deeper conversations around the future of the foundation, including operations and staffing structure, the role family and board members would have in leading, how they would maintain their legacy, and how they would streamline the grantmaking that had begun while maintaining their connection to the community and sector as responsive grantmakers.

It provided the opportunity to reflect upon and re-affirm what is enduring and relevant about their work together.

After much consideration, board chair and third generation family member John E. Hicks, Jr. was appointed the next executive director in 2017. Having served on the board of the foundation since 1992, and six years as chair of the board, Hicks brings the vision of the family full circle. He will be leading during a critical time of generational leadership changes and streamlining of the foundation's operations and grantmaking. "I am honored to be taking on this role at such a critical juncture for the foundation. We have had wonderful leadership over the past two decades, resulting in truly meaningful partnerships with our nonprofit and philanthropy colleagues. I look forward to working with our board and staff to deepen our relationships to address community needs here in Chicago and to strengthen my grandfather's

legacy and philanthropic vision," said Hicks upon his appointment.

The Siragusa Family Foundation's successful journey through multiple transitions and the evolution of its operations, governance and grantmaking has been possible due to a deep commitment to respect and understand each other, a shared legacy, and the communities they have served. At each stage, they have carefully considered various questions and perspectives. Their thoughtful and intentional work has allowed them to engage fully with the roots of the foundation as they chart next steps. The Siragusas hope the time they have invested in cross-generation and ongoing education and communication will be a strong model they continue to hone and implement. For them, finding joy in giving together and doing it well as a multi-generational family, while honoring founder Ross D. Siragusa's philanthropic legacy, is what it's all about.

About the Foundation

The Siragusa Family Foundation, established in 1950 by Ross D. Siragusa, is a private family foundation that is committed to honoring its founder by sustaining and developing Chicago's extraordinary nonprofit resources. Governed today by his descendants and non-family board members, the foundation supports nonprofit organizations in the Chicago area.

Our Mission

To help underserved people in the Chicago area help themselves and experience a better quality of life by funding organizations in the following program areas: arts learning, education and health.

Our Vision

To work in partnership with organizations, communities and other philanthropic entities to connect those in need of services, bridge people to opportunities, and engage them as valued individuals in a caring society with the purpose of fulfilling basic needs, enhancing quality of life and fostering a sense of community.

Our Funding Priorities

Arts Learning

School-Based Arts Learning

Support arts organizations to create and apply deep multi-week school-based arts education programming that promotes the artistic, academic and social-emotional development of youth.

Community-Based Arts Learning

Support arts organizations that bring arts outreach and learning opportunities to under-resourced communities.

Education

College Success

Support organizations that prepare underserved college-bound students to apply for and persist through the first years of college by providing academic counseling, quality instruction and social emotional support.

Career Pathways

Support jobs training and placement programs that increase the economic opportunities of disadvantaged individuals by providing job readiness skills, employment experiences, certifications and supports to help them succeed in work and life.

Health

Health & Well-Being

Support access to services that improve health and wellness for youth and families in disadvantaged communities, specifically mental health services as integral to primary health care.

Safe Communities

Support organizations that reduce and prevent community violence by providing intervention, restorative justice, leadership development and social-emotional support to youth.

Our Legacy

The Siragusa Family Foundation honors its founder Ross D. Siragusa by engaging future generations of family members as philanthropic leaders and stewards of his charitable legacy -- a legacy which is aimed at continuing the original philanthropic intent of the founder to meet the current needs of the communities that the foundation supports.

Following in Mr. Siragusa's philanthropic footsteps, the foundation supports organizations that provide access and opportunity to the underserved so that they are empowered to help themselves and to experience a better quality of life.

Our Values

Through its giving, The Siragusa Family Foundation seeks to fulfill its mission of supporting efforts that help people help themselves and experience a better quality of life. Fundamental to all foundation grantmaking are the following values:

Effectiveness & Accountability

Building sustained relationships with organizations that use best practices will lead to stronger organizations that can better serve their communities.

Compassion & Respect for Human Dignity

The foundation is committed to enhancing the lives of the underserved by helping people to help themselves so that they may achieve a better quality of life.

Opportunity & Belief in Human Capacity

Providing access to opportunities will allow people to self-determine their life goals and chart a path that they choose.

Self-Empowerment & Community Impact

Empowering individuals will lead to the strengthening and transformation of communities.

Leadership & Trust

The foundation seeks to lead by investing in organizations that know best how to fulfill their goals of making positive changes in their communities.

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