

USING CONCEPTS MAPS TO FACILITATE TRANSPARENT GOVERNANCE

Barbara Bowen¹ and Kristina L. Mayer²

¹ *See What You Know, bbowen@seewhatyouknow.com*

² *KLMayer Consulting Group, Kris@klmayer.com*

Abstract. This paper describes the use of concept maps, and webpage knowledge models, to facilitate transparent governance for a newly formed community foundation. The Philanthropic Consultant, charged with appointing the Board and guiding initial policy, identified concept mapping as a way for the Board to create shared vision, map core values, and to facilitate the high-level of transparent governance needed to build community trust. By providing access for any community member, including potential donors, to the Foundation's key business documents, webpage Cmaps are key to transparency. Investment policy, investment portfolio, business plans and other key business documents will be attached to the Cmaps as knowledge resources. The concept maps of the core values create the conceptual landscape that promotes understanding of Foundations policies and operations. This paper describes the preparation for the concept mapping session with the Board of Directors, the knowledge elicitation process and includes figures of the root map and a core value sub-concept map.

1 Introduction

Since the signing in July, 2002 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act with its focus on transparency in corporate governance, there has been a growing community expectation for non-profits to adopt more transparent governance practices. For non-profit Boards one risk exceeds all others—the risk of damage to reputation that renders it difficult or impossible for the organization to acquire the resources it needs to achieve its mission.

It is the “community’s collection of beliefs, perceptions, and experiences that either support or refute the values, principles, and worth of the organization in the eyes of the community” (Herman, 2003). Community Foundations, which often operate as catalytic organizations in the communities they serve, and which raise their funding primarily from those communities, are particularly sensitive to the influence of community’s perception and its trust.

The Philanthropic Consultant to the Jefferson County Community Foundation, targeted earning community trust as a key focus for the newly formed Foundation. The appointment of trusted community leaders to the Board of Directors, and the adoption of transparent governance practices were identified as two key strategies for accomplishing this goal. Concept maps created using CmapTools™ were judged to be especially useful to support transparent governance because of the capability the software provides to create web page versions of the concept maps in which the knowledge resources remain active and accessible. The concept maps create a conceptual ecosystem for the various documents.

The co-authors collaborated to design a group knowledge elicitation session with the Board to the elicit core values Board members wanted to use to guide the Foundation’s policy and decision-making. Concept maps offer a useful tool to make the core values visible and to show how each core value will be reflected in the Foundation’s business practices, investment policy, grant-making policy and operations.

In preparation for the meeting at which knowledge elicitation was to occur, Board members were asked to create a list of values they believed were candidates to be core values. Because there was limited time for the Board meeting, the co-authors designed concept map templates to scaffold the creation of the concept map of core values during the meeting. In a group knowledge elicitation session, Board members reached consensus on four core values: stewardship, integrity, diversity, and compassionate involvement. The root concept map of the core values is shown in Figure 1.

The icons on the concept nodes represent key Foundation business documents. The documents attached to the core values concept maps include: investment policy, a list of Frequently Asked Questions, and Board of Director job descriptions. As other policy and operations documents are written and created, they will be added to the Core Values Knowledge Model. The concept maps are available in webpage format on the Jefferson County Community Foundation’s website: http://www.jccfgives.org/chart_corevalues.html

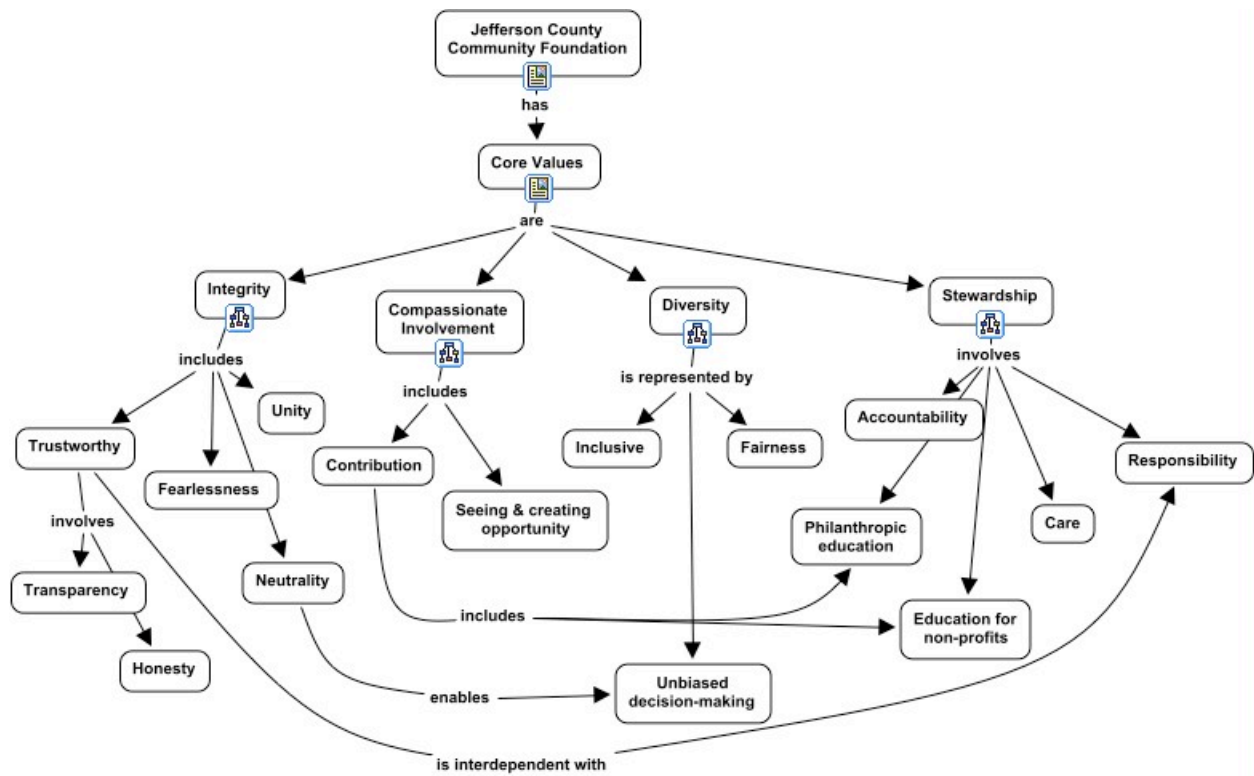


Figure 1: Jefferson County Community Foundation Core Values

An example of a concept map representing how a core value guides policy and influences business practices is presented in Figure 2.

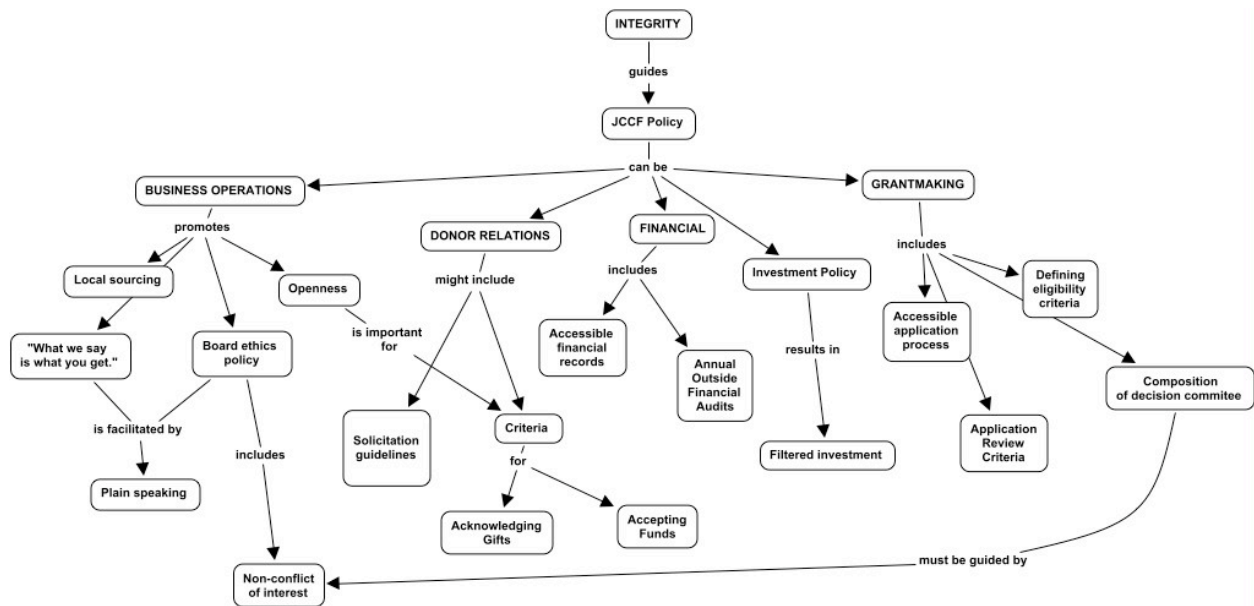


Figure 2: How Core Value of Integrity is Reflected in JCCF Policy

2 Summary

The Philanthropic Consultant to the Board of Directors of the Jefferson County Community Foundation selected concept mapping and CmapTools™ as an innovative contribution to transparent governance. The Foundation's new website contains webpage versions of the root core values concept map, and sub-concept maps showing how each core value will be reflected in business operations, investment policy, grant making policy, and public relations. A number of key business documents, including investment policy, are currently accessible via the webpage concept maps. As other documents are created, e.g., the portfolio of investment holdings, they will be attached to the appropriate concept nodes, and made publicly accessible via the webpage Cmaps.

References

Herman, Melanie L., et al. (2003). *Managing Risk in Nonprofit Organizations: A Comprehensive Guide*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. p. 133.