



WILLIAM CASPAR GRAUSTEIN
MEMORIAL FUND



GEOProfile

The William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund's mission is to work collaboratively to improve education in Connecticut, inform the public debate on education issues and strengthen parents' involvement. With this focus on collaboration, the Memorial Fund realizes the importance of stakeholder engagement but wanted to more fully understand what this key value means for how it operates.

In its latest report, *Observing Values in Action: Stories and lessons from the work of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund*, authored by Sally Leiderman from the Center for Assessment and Policy Development, the Memorial Fund considers the role of values in its work. This reflective piece shows how the Memorial Fund's values drive a grantmaking process, while also opening up a conversation within the philanthropic sector about a deep approach to engagement and learning.

The report opens by posing the question "What are our values?" Identifying the values of *partnerships* and *relationships* reinforces the Memorial Fund's practices of collaboration and engagement with Connecticut communities. Still, naming these values is quite different than seeing how they actually unfold. "One of the big tasks in life is trying to act in closer and clearer accordance with our values. This is as true for organizations as it is for individuals. At the Memorial Fund, we spend a lot of time asking ourselves how to translate our values into action, and seeing whether certain strategies uphold our values," explained Executive Director David Nee.

By exploring core values, the Memorial Fund's staff was able to identify their "operating beliefs," nine ways the values are manifested. For instance, the first operating belief, "never quit on anyone," describes the foundation's persistence in helping a community in need. One community's superintendent of schools declined applying for funding, as he "was not interested in the opportunity." However, the Memorial Fund continually followed-up with the community's leaders, letting them know the funding was available whenever they were ready to apply. Two years later, the community applied and was granted the funds they needed. Discussing these opportunities, challenges, questions and stories allows the Memorial Fund to truly put its work into perspective.

Additionally, an important emphasis in this report is the encouragement the Memorial Fund gives to other grantmakers to reflect on their methods and values, now more than ever. Like many, the foundation felt the difficulties of the economic recession; yet, the Memorial Fund says that this climate should be seen as "an opportunity to clarify our values and actions." Taking the time to assess the past, present and future of an organization provides a sense of clarity and awareness to both staff and their beneficiaries.

To download the whole report, visit the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund's publication page at <http://www.wcgmf.org/publications.php>.