

Who is Working Well Together?

The Patterson Foundation

Florida foundation with unfettered charter focuses on how best to support partnerships and collaboration among nonprofits and other organizations.

Quick Grantmaker Stats

Type of funder	Private Foundation
Geography/Issue Area	Sarasota, Florida
When founded	1997, fully funded in 2009
Total assets (as of FY 2013)	\$222,423,695
Annual giving (as of FY 2013)	\$10,498,134
Number of staff	3
Website	www.thepattersonfoundation.org
Brief description of the program/ practice being discussed	Financial and capacity-building support for partnerships and networks.

1. Describe the situation or practice.

With a unique unfettered charter, that does not commit it to a specific geographic or issue focus, The Patterson Foundation works to build connections and strengthen nonprofit and philanthropic networks.

Debra Jacobs, the foundation’s president and CEO, uses the analogy of a mosaic when describing the foundation’s work, with the financial and intellectual capital of the foundation serving as the grout that helps partners join together and thrive.

“Rather than supporting existing programs that are already in place, we focus on helping others connect to additional resources — including strategic facilitation, communications and financial consultants — to create stronger impact,” Jacobs said.

2. What have you tried to do differently?

Jim and Dorothy Patterson were descendants of the founders of *The Chicago Tribune* and *The New York Daily News*. Following Jim’s death in 1992, Dorothy created the Patterson Foundation in 1997 with a corpus of \$3 million. Upon Dorothy’s death in 2007, the corpus grew to more than \$200 million.

In 2009, the foundation hired Debra Jacobs, a former banking executive and philanthropic leader, as its first president and CEO. After researching the Patterson family history, Jacobs identified several themes that would guide the foundation's early work, including issues in aging, education, media and more.

But rather than adopting a traditional, issue-based approach to its philanthropy, the foundation set out from the start to make partnerships and collaboration its focus. "We try to find collaborative networks that align with our work and values and build upon what we've already learned, so there is continuity," Jacobs explained. She added that the foundation specifically looks to contribute to areas that other funders are not supporting.

In addition to providing financial support for partner networks, The Patterson Foundation connects them to expert assistance and capacity-building resources in critical areas from strategic communications and fundraising to planning. Examples of projects supported by the foundation include: supporting the Arthritis Foundation Florida Chapter to increase statewide fundraising by more than 300 percent through strategic communications and sponsorship consulting; and working nationally with independent online community news publishers to create a virtual association called LION Publishers, which supports strategies to expand the "thrivability," readership and community impact of its members.

"Strategy Refreshes" Help Reduce Reporting Requirements

The Patterson Foundation works to embed continuous learning, reflection and adaptation throughout its partnerships, referring to these as "strategy refreshes" — a practice borrowed from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Through these activities, the foundation helps to reduce unnecessary reporting from grantees and instead focuses on learning through regular and open communication. This means monthly calls with partners and meetings with partners' staff and boards to understand the depth and breadth of what is being learned. "Engaging with multiple organizational levels provides an opportunity to truly understand our partners and to build trust throughout the organization," Jacobs said.

3. What has been the result?

The Patterson Foundation's support for a collaborative initiative spearheaded by the National Council on Aging provides a window into its approach and the results it is helping grantees to achieve. The Self-Management Alliance is a

collaborative of government, business and nonprofit organizations working to improve chronic care for older adults. The Patterson Foundation provided resources for a consultant to assist the collaborative to assess its progress and to refresh strategies to advance the goals.

“It was a wonderful gift of the right kind of help at the right moment,” said Jim Firman, president and CEO of the National Council on Aging. “The Patterson Foundation is the kind of partner that asks us what we need and how they can help us. In my career, I’ve received and successfully delivered on \$40 million in grants, but there have been exactly four times that a conversation with a funder began with them asking us what we needed.”

Firman said that working with [LevelSmart](#), an independent facilitator provided by The Patterson Foundation, helped the initiative readjust various workgroup priorities to move forward and achieve its goals. More insight can be found at <http://impact.blog.thepattersonfoundation.org/self-management-alliance-benefits-from-collective-impact-facilitation/>.

“We were pleasantly surprised about how quickly the group was able to move from a general feeling of needing to make a mid-course correction to a consensus about a new strategic direction,” Firman said of the facilitation process, which took about three to four months to complete.

“The Patterson Foundation values are embedded in how we work. We actively listen and contribute, not because we are experts in the issue, but rather by providing resources, intellectual and financial to propel impact.”
– Debra Jacobs, President and CEO

4. What are your key insights from doing the work?

When evaluating the possibility of a partnership, Jacobs said The Patterson Foundation looks for alignment between the foundation and the potential partner across all five of the following areas:

- Leadership — outcome-focused partners who have a passion for driving positive change and truly understand the value of collaboration.
- Willingness — partners who are enthusiastic about engaging dynamically to transcend the grant recipient role and collaborate for greater impact.
- Readiness — fully engaged partners who are excited about working together and ready to embrace new solutions.

- Capacity — partners who are committed to implementing strategic recommendations and collaborating with The Patterson Foundation to accelerate change.
- Culture — future-focused partners with a desire to drive positive change and a shared belief that applying the most effective practices create world-class impact.