

# GEO Member Story



## *How the Southwest Florida Community Foundation creates meaningful and progressive change through a collaboration and engagement model called Tribal Alchemy.*

Understanding the importance of collaboration in grantmaking, the Southwest Florida Community Foundation incorporated a strategic change and design model into grantmaking to influence regional change and the outcome has generated, in their words, “*spontaneous awesomeness.*”

Tribal Alchemy (c. D. Fleming 2014) was designed by Chief Strategic Officer Dave Fleming. According to Fleming, the basic idea of Tribal Alchemy is to shift the focus to regional and community partnerships and create an environment where grantees can be more successful by organizing them around a mission they all care deeply about. By incorporating Tribal Alchemy, SWFLCF creates unprecedented collaboration opportunities for grantees and the Southwest Florida community.

Founded in 1976, the Southwest Florida Community Foundation supports the communities of Lee, Charlotte, Collier, Glades and Hendry counties and also acts as the regional convener and leader with firsthand knowledge of community needs. With assets of more than \$80 million, the community foundation has provided more than \$57 million in grants and scholarships to the communities it serves. Last year, the foundation granted more than \$4 million to more than 100 different organizations supporting education, animal welfare, arts, healthcare and human services, including more than \$400,000 in regional community impact grants and \$450,000 in scholarship grants.

For SWFLCF, the goal of Tribal Alchemy is to create the space for grantees to make the most out of their funding through collaboration. In following the Tribal Alchemy model, SWFLCF is able to innovate “in the box” by exploring ways to create greater impact with the resources they have. Each year, SWFLCF convenes four to five of these small tribes, each of which is focused on a specific mission or issue area — from education to animal welfare. These cohorts meet periodically throughout the year to share the work each member has done and to find ways to work together to grow their effectiveness.

An example of *spontaneous awesomeness* was at a recent convening of the Economic Empowerment Tribe where three participants (the Director of a county library system, the CEO of Dress for Success, and a Director of the Pine Manor Association) were talking about the overlap of their mission and how they could support one another in their respective areas. Through continued conversations, they are bringing their expertise together to pilot a mobile closet of professional attire for disadvantaged women in Florida.

Learning from the experience of previous tribes, SWFLCF recently changed the model to include all potential applicants at a single convening prior to submitting a proposal — over 100 people participated in this initial event. After submitting an initial letter of intent, 20 potential grantees attended a “compassionate shark tank,” where they were given two minutes to present their ideas to a group of philanthropists in the community (including SWFLCF), followed by 12 minutes of dialogue with the

philanthropists. The potential grantees who survive shark tank work closely with SWFLCF to design their applications for funding.

At a similar event in 2013, potential grantees presented proposals to SWFLCF staff and their peers also applying for funding. At the presentation, two potential grantees recognized that they were operating similar programs at the exact same school. Instead of continuing to work separately and compete for the same resources, the two organizations chose to collaborate together to create a more effective program at the school.

Fleming states the idea behind inviting other philanthropists to listen to potential grantees is that they will say *“that’s a cool idea – I want to fund that.”*

In addition to the approaches for grantee collaboration that generate *spontaneous awesomeness*, SWFLCF is reconstructing the definition of the relationship between philanthropists and community leaders — and whether an individual can be both. When appropriate, SWFLCF hopes that philanthropists are invited to have a seat at the community table to think strategically about regional change, not just about the funding of change.

As Fleming states, *“we believe that when you do great work and then you do it together, not only do you increase the effectiveness of that work but you also increase the awareness of your work to others who need to be a part of it.”*

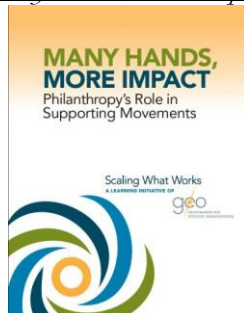
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To find out more information on Tribal Alchemy and SWFLCF, please visit <http://www.floridacommunity.com/>.

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## **GEO resources that relate to the topics covered in this member spotlight**

### *Many Hands, More Impact*



### *Great Power, Great Responsibility: Grantmakers' Role as Conveners*

#### **Great Power, Great Responsibility**

A GEO Briefing on Grantmakers' Role as Conveners

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### *Working Better Together*

