



Why Depth Over Breadth?

Why the Cranwell Family Foundation Prioritizes Going Deeper Rather Than Wider

"The Cranwell Family Foundation prioritizes depth over breadth, sustainability over scale, and ripple over splash in our approach to philanthropy."

As the [Cranwell Family Foundation](#) (CFF) continues to grow in impact and clarity of purpose, we regularly reflect on the "why" behind our philanthropic priorities, partnerships, and approach to giving. One question CFF is occasionally asked is this:

Why focus so deeply in a relatively small number of places, partnerships, and initiatives instead of spreading support more broadly?

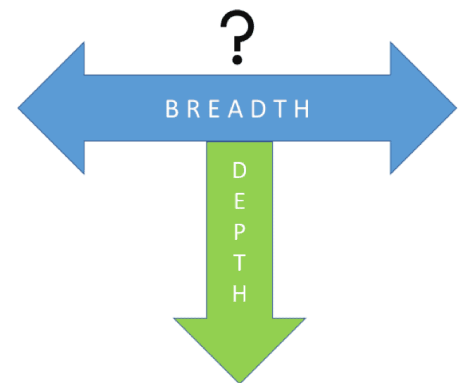
It is a fair question.

Why the Cranwell Family Foundation Chooses to Go Deeper Rather Than Wider

The needs in the world are vast, urgent, and seemingly endless. Every day presents new opportunities to engage, new organizations doing meaningful work, and new communities facing real challenges.

In that kind of environment, breadth can feel compelling. Breadth allows a foundation to support many organizations, touch many communities, and respond to a wide range of needs. There is value in that approach, and many organizations pursue it effectively.

But at CFF, we have increasingly found ourselves drawn toward something different. Toward depth. Not because we believe breadth is wrong, but because we believe lasting transformation often requires something more than momentary engagement. It requires staying.



Depth Requires Presence

Depth is not simply about giving repeatedly to the same organizations. It is about presence. It is about taking the time to listen carefully, understand context, build trust, and develop relationships that grow stronger over time.

At CFF, some of the most meaningful opportunities we have encountered did not emerge at the beginning of a relationship. They emerged later after deeper understanding and mutual trust had been established.

This has certainly been true in CFF's relationships with organizations such as the African Leadership Academy (ALA), Elimisha Kakuma (EK), Virginia Tech's Center for Refugee, Migrant, and Displacement Studies (CRMDS), and the Center for Rural Education (CRE).

Over time, these partnerships evolved beyond individual gifts or projects. They became collaborative relationships rooted in shared values, ongoing dialogue, and long-term commitment.

As trust deepened, new possibilities emerged. A scholarship became a pathway. A conversation became a partnership. A partnership became an ecosystem of opportunity.

That kind of growth rarely happens through shallow engagement alone. Depth creates the conditions for it.

Depth Allows Us to Learn

Another reason CFF values depth is because depth creates understanding.

Communities are complex. Organizations are complex. Human challenges are complex. Meaningful engagement requires humility and patience.

When philanthropy moves too quickly or too broadly, there is a risk of remaining perpetually at the surface, responding to symptoms without ever fully understanding context, history, relationships, strengths, or barriers.

Depth slows us down in important ways. It allows us to learn alongside the people and organizations we support. It allows us to see not only needs, but assets. Not only challenges, but potential. Not only problems, but possibilities.

That understanding helps shape wiser, more thoughtful engagement over time.

Depth Strengthens Relationships

Increasingly, CFF has come to believe that transformational philanthropy is deeply relational. Relationships cannot be mass produced. They require time. Consistency. Trust. Shared experiences. And often, a willingness simply to keep showing up.

This is one reason why CFF places strong emphasis on relationship-building across its philanthropic work locally and globally.

We do not want our partnerships to feel transactional or temporary. We want organizations and individuals to know that we are genuinely invested – not only in outcomes, but in people.

That philosophy shapes how we engage with students, nonprofit leaders, educators, university partners, and communities. And over time, those relationships often become the most meaningful part of the work itself.

Depth Creates Alignment

Depth also helps create coherence.

At first glance, CFF's portfolio may appear broad: rural education, international education, refugee pathways, global leadership, community engagement, clean water, study abroad, scholarships, and more. But underneath these initiatives is a common thread. Each reflects CFF's commitment to unlocking opportunity and unleashing potential through relationship-centered, long-term engagement.

By going deeper in selected partnerships and focus areas, connections begin to emerge naturally across the portfolio. Virginia Tech partnerships intersect with refugee pathways. Rural engagement intersects with global learning. ALA partnerships intersect with future university access. Local relationships create global opportunities.

Depth allows these connections to strengthen organically over time.

Depth Requires Discernment

Choosing depth also requires discipline.

As a family foundation, CFF recognizes that we cannot do everything, everywhere, all at once. There are many worthy causes. Many compelling opportunities. Many important needs.

Depth requires us to make difficult choices about where we can be most meaningfully engaged.

Sometimes that means saying no to good opportunities in order to remain committed to the right ones. That is not always easy. But we believe thoughtful focus ultimately creates stronger stewardship and more enduring impact.

Final Thought

In philanthropy, breadth can be appealing. It allows you to touch many places, support many initiatives, and respond to many needs. There is real value in that kind of reach.

But depth asks a different question: Not simply, “How much can we support?”, but “How meaningfully are we willing to engage?”

At the Cranwell Family Foundation, we increasingly believe that transformational impact is rarely created through wide but shallow engagement alone. It is more often built through focused investment, trusted relationships, and a willingness to remain deeply engaged with the people, organizations, and communities we believe in most.

Depth requires discernment. It requires focus. And at times, it requires the discipline to resist spreading ourselves too thin.

CFF believes depth creates the conditions where trust can grow, partnerships can mature, and opportunities can expand in ways that would not otherwise be possible. Because ultimately, **meaningful philanthropy is not simply about reaching more places. It is about going deeply enough in the right places to help create lasting transformation.**