



WHY
REFLECTION
SERIES

WHY Sustainability Over Scale?

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



RELATIONSHIPS | OPPORTUNITY | LASTING IMPACT

Unlocking Opportunity. Unleashing Potential.





Why Sustainability Over Scale?

Why the Cranwell Family Foundation Believes Small Scale Does Not Mean Small Impact

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

[NOTE: In a previous reflection, we explored why the Cranwell Family Foundation increasingly prioritizes depth over breadth in our philanthropic work. We now explore why we believe small scale does not mean small impact.]

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:

When considering organizations to support, why not focus primarily on those that are already large or have the greatest potential to scale?

It is a fair question.

Why the Cranwell Family Foundation Chooses Sustainability Over Scale

In philanthropy, scale is often viewed as a measure of success.

Organizations are frequently celebrated for expanding their programs, increasing their budgets, opening new locations, or serving ever-larger numbers of people. Growth can certainly be a positive thing, and many organizations have achieved extraordinary impact because they successfully scaled their work.

At CFF, however, size is rarely the first question we ask. Instead, we find ourselves asking something different: *Is this organization building something that can endure?*

Because while scale may increase reach, sustainability creates the possibility for lasting impact.

Sustainability Creates Lasting Impact

Some of the organizations making the greatest difference in people's lives will never become household names. They may serve primarily one community rather than many. They may operate with modest budgets. They may intentionally remain highly focused rather than broadly expansive. Yet year after year, they continue changing lives.

Increasingly, CFF has found itself drawn to organizations that could be described in four simple words:

Small Scale. Big Impact.



Their influence cannot always be measured by organizational size. It is measured by the lives they change, the trust they build, the opportunities they create, and the communities they strengthen.

For us, those are often the most meaningful measures of success.

Sustainability Reflects Strong Stewardship

As we evaluate potential partners, we certainly appreciate innovation, vision, and growth. But we also look carefully for something else.

We look for organizations that demonstrate thoughtful stewardship of their resources, strong leadership, sound governance, financial responsibility, and a clear commitment to their mission.

We ask whether the organization is building the kind of foundation that allows its work to continue not simply this year, but for many years to come.

Programs can be replicated. Buildings can be constructed. Budgets can grow. But healthy organizational cultures, trusted leadership, and sustainable missions take years to cultivate. Those qualities often become the strongest indicators of long-term impact.

Sustainability Strengthens Partnerships

Choosing sustainability over scale also aligns naturally with CFF's commitment to depth over breadth.

Long-term relationships allow us to better understand not only what an organization does, but how it operates. Over time, we gain confidence in its leadership, witness how it responds to challenges, observe how it learns and adapts, and develop trust that extends beyond any single grant or project.

Those relationships often reveal strengths that are not immediately visible from annual reports or financial statements alone.

The longer we remain engaged, the more we are able to recognize organizations whose impact consistently exceeds what their size might suggest.

Sustainability Allows Impact to Multiply

One of the lessons we continue to learn is that sustainable organizations often create impact far beyond the communities they immediately serve.

A scholarship shapes a student's future. A student becomes a leader. That leader strengthens a community. A community creates opportunities for others.

The original investment continues creating value long after the initial gift has been made.

This kind of multiplication does not necessarily require a larger organization. It requires an organization capable of remaining faithful to its mission long enough for those opportunities to take root and grow.

Sustainability Requires Discernment

Choosing sustainability over scale also requires discipline.

There will always be impressive organizations with larger budgets, broader reach, and greater visibility. There will also be remarkable organizations doing extraordinary work with comparatively limited resources.

At CFF, we try not to confuse organizational size with organizational significance. Instead, we seek partners whose missions are clear, whose leadership is trusted, whose work is sustainable, and whose impact is authentic.

Those qualities are not always the easiest to measure. But over time, we have found they are often the ones that matter most.

Final Thought

Scale can be inspiring. Growth can be important. Both have an important place in philanthropy. But at the Cranwell Family Foundation, we increasingly believe that an organization's size is not always the best predictor of its impact.

Instead, we look for organizations that are built to last – organizations that steward their resources wisely, remain faithful to their mission, cultivate trusted relationships, and continue creating opportunity year after year. Some of those organizations are large. Many are not.

What matters most is not how big an organization becomes, but how faithfully and sustainably it serves its purpose. Because ultimately, **meaningful philanthropy is not simply about supporting organizations that grow larger. It is about investing in organizations that continue changing lives long into the future, proving that *small scale does not mean small impact*.**