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COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS AND THE SDGS

A 17 ROOMS PLAYBOOK FOR COMMUNITY-SCALE LEADERSHIP

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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
The Center for Sustainable Development (CSD) generates cutting-edge research and empowers collaborative action to tackle the world's interwoven economic, social, and environmental challenges in all societies and at all scales.

ABOUT 17 ROOMS
A partnership between the Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings and The Rockefeller Foundation, 17 Rooms is an experimental method for advancing the economic, social, and environmental priorities embedded in the world's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SUMMARY

This report considers the potential value of 17 Rooms as a tool to help community foundations (CFs) advance a full range of environmental, social, and economic priorities embedded in the world's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the SDGs can help CFs pursue a more comprehensive approach to local-level action, many CFs report challenges around sustaining the scope and scale of this action over time. Based on case studies across five communities, we find that 17 Rooms can help (i) shape a common language for community-wide action; (ii) make diverse community assets visible and cohesive; (iii) make strategic plans practical; (iv) cultivate community-scale competencies; and (v) connect projects to population-level progress. The report includes a practical playbook to provide guidance for the broader community of CF leaders aiming to leverage 17 Rooms as a catalyst for more effective, community-scale leadership for sustainable development.

CONTENT

Hawai'i Green Growth's 2023 17 Rooms discussions in Room 7 (focussed on SDG7) informed a follow-up convening on May 8th, 2024 focussed on setting state-wide targets for the Aloha+ Challenge Clean Energy Transformation priority area. Image credit: Hawai'I Green Growth

PART 1.
INTRODUCTION

As the world approaches the 10-year mark of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), local-level policies, initiatives, and collective action have been an important component of implementation efforts. Faced with issues such as extreme weather, environmental conservation, housing, public health, and economic development simultaneously, local communities are at the frontlines of many of the environmental, social, and economic challenges embedded in the goals.

While the 2015 United Nations resolution that defined the SDG agenda gave limited attention to the role of local governments and institutions, subsequent independent Global Sustainable Development Reports in 2019 and 2023 highlighted local and subnational action as essential for achieving the goals. A great deal of attention has focused on strengthening the actions of municipal and subnational governments. However, the complexity of taking on multiple SDG challenges at once and dealing with their interdependencies demands a broader, "whole-of-society" approach that involves not just governments but also business, philanthropy, academia, and civil society. As the world approaches the 10-year mark of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), local-level policies, initiatives, and collective action have been an important component of implementation efforts. Faced with issues such as extreme weather, environmental conservation, housing, public health, and economic development simultaneously, local communities are at the frontlines of many of the environmental, social, and economic challenges embedded in the goals.

Few local institutions are purpose-built for such cross-sector collaboration, but community foundations (CFs) represent one important possible exception. CFs are charitable organizations that collect and administer financial resources from multiple donors, primarily for the benefit of the geographic community or region where they are located. CFs both raise funds and make grants, and they seek to build a base of assets that benefits a geographic community over the long term; thus, they generally have a set of relationships and activities that span the full range of a community's stakeholders and issue areas. With over 900 CFs in the U.S. alone managing approximately $149 billion in assets and granting over $15 billion in 2023, CFs hold significant potential for place-based progress on the SDGs.

In a marketplace where donor attitudes toward giving are shifting, and donor tools for pursuing philanthropic goals are expanding, community foundations are seeking ways to broaden and deepen their impact. CFs' growing ambition to drive comprehensive change on local priorities aligns well with the holistic perspective encouraged by the SDGs. This has led an increasing number of CFs across the globe to use the SDGs to map a community ecosystem of issues and stakeholders; identify gaps, priorities, synergies, and trade-offs

"Few local institutions are purpose-built for such cross-sector collaboration, but community foundations (CFs) represent one important possible exception."

around action within this ecosystem; and track community-level progress toward issues of shared importance. Internally, CFs have used SDGs to audit grantmaking, inform investments, and develop strategic plans. The SDGs are helping some CFs develop their capacity for community leadership—a concept that recognizes that the potential influence of CFs extends beyond grantmaking to encompass CF's convening power, ability to broker cross-sector partnerships, and long-term stewardship of community-level transformations.

However, many CFs find it a new challenge to take on the scope and scale of community-wide leadership that the SDGs demand. It is increasingly common for CFs to work at the system level on one issue, such as education, convening a range of stakeholders to address its multiple dimensions and facets. It is less common for CFs to connect the full range of efforts and stakeholders in education to those in health, jobs, or the environment—let alone integrate all activities into a unified strategy for community sustainability and well-being. Thus, CFs frequently move quickly from considering the SDGs as a whole to zeroing in on a smaller, more manageable subset of issues.

This points to the need for new approaches that can help CFs increase their effectiveness in driving local-level SDG action.

17 Rooms is one such approach to community collaboration and problem-solving for the SDGs. A flexible way for community members to come together, share insights, and surface and accelerate collaborative action, over 70 communities across more than two dozen countries have experimented with 17 Rooms in a range of contexts, from municipalities to universities, schools, organizations, and regions.

From 2022 to 2024, we engaged with five distinct community contexts to understand how a cross-section of CFs across the U.S. utilized 17 Rooms to advance community-level priorities—in Cleveland, East Central Florida, Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and West Central Minnesota (see BOX 1). We did this from the perspective of the 17 Rooms secretariat and the Center for Sustainable Development at Brookings, which co-hosts and co-chairs the 17 Rooms initiative. We interacted with each local team before, during, and after its local 17 Rooms exercise. This included a range of pre- and post-event interviews with local organizers. Importantly, each local exercise was organized directly by local actors, with the 17 Rooms secretariat providing access to shared project tools and insights from previous 17 Rooms undertakings.

Our analysis of these case studies suggests that 17 Rooms may help CFs mobilize collaboration among a broader range of stakeholders on a broader range of issues while also helping align internal operations with external community engagement. Our overall finding is that 17 Rooms offered CFs the opportunity to more fully leverage the SDGs to strengthen their community leadership and establish new relationships, initiatives, and collective momentum on challenges facing the communities that they serve.

Community experiments with 17 Rooms

East Central Florida (May 2022): A cross-sectoral team of local leaders within the Central Florida Foundation, the East Central Florida Regional Resilience Collaborative (ECFR2C), the City of Orlando, and the University of Central Florida (UCF) used 17 Rooms as the core programming in a two-day "Partnership for the Goals" summit. 17 Rooms aimed to transform a regional sustainability planning process into actionable next steps over 12 months. Over 100 participants from eight counties gathered at UCF to brainstorm collaborative actions across 17 Rooms. The exercise produced a portfolio of practical collaborations associated with the region's Thrive Framework (see BOX 3).

Hawai'i (October 2022 and October 2023): Hawai'i Green Growth, a U.N. Local 2030 hub, incorporated 17 Rooms into their 2022 and 2023 annual convenings, each of around 250 participants. By elevating youth voices and highlighting salient local issues, 17 Rooms helped strengthen and accelerate existing collaborations toward the Aloha+ Challenge, a local framework for action aligned with the SDGs.

Cleveland: Following an initial mapping of existing grants to SDGs in 2022, the Cleveland Foundation planned to conduct 17 Rooms as an internal exercise to socialize the SDGs as a framework for the foundation to identify synergies and potential inefficiencies in grantmaking and community engagement. While the effort did not materialize into a formal 17 Rooms summit, the work surfaced several valuable learnings for how to approach internal CF coordination using the SDGs.

Puerto Rico (Nov 2023): Community Foundation of Puerto Rico convened over 40 participants at Sacred Heart University to activate and socialize the newly launched VLR with community stakeholders. The exercise featured a presentation on the VLR process, followed by breakout sessions in six Rooms focused on key themes like people, planet, prosperity, partnership, peace, and social and economic rights.

West Central Minnesota (June 2024): Over 170 local leaders across eight counties gathered at the University of Minnesota, Morris, for a one-day 17 Rooms summit to increase shared knowledge and build community around the SDGs. Convening 17 separate Rooms, one per SDG, the exercise surfaced concrete action items across a range of local issues, like conducting a poverty simulation to raise awareness among leaders (Room 1), promoting innovative housing solutions through storytelling (Room 11), and initiating an "adopt a river" river clean-up project, using the collected trash to create art (Room 14). A short video documentary and summary report can be found on The 17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota website.

Room 5 co-lead Elizabeth Pihlaja of Zero to Three shares a "rapid Room report-out" of Room 5's proposed action items to all event attendees in the culminating plenary session of 17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota. Image credit: West Central Initiative

PART 2.
FIVE LESSONS FROM 17 ROOMS EXPERIMENTS

Launched by the Brookings Institution and The Rockefeller Foundation in September 2018 as an experiment to stimulate new forms of action for the SDGs, 17 Rooms has since evolved as an annual global flagship platform focused on tackling international-scale SDG challenges and 17 Rooms-X, a widely accessible methodology to help local communities take practical steps toward local SDG priorities. In any 17 Rooms exercise, participants gather into working groups (or "Rooms"), usually one per SDG, to explore and advance actionable ideas and next steps relating to the SDGs. Action ideas are then shared to spot opportunities for cooperation that bubble up across Rooms.

We observed a range of experimentations with 17 Rooms (see BOX 1). Some 17 Rooms efforts, like East Central Florida's, were more external (designed to mobilize community stakeholders), while other exercises were planned as a CF-internal process (e.g., Cleveland Foundation). In some community contexts, 17 Rooms was held as a standalone event (e.g., West Central Minnesota), while other communities chose to incorporate 17 Rooms with existing activities. For example, The Community Foundation of Puerto Rico used 17 Rooms to help launch its Voluntary Local Review (VLR); while Hawai'i Green Growth incorporated 17 Rooms as an activity in their annual meeting.

Having closely tracked these diverse activities as they evolved, we distilled five key ways 17 Rooms exercises can help advance community action. In particular, they can:

1. Help shape a common language for community-wide action

17 Rooms helped CFs develop a holistic narrative around local action using the SDGs. In their two-year regional planning process, East Central Florida's organizing team noticed that across the community, many stakeholders were working separately on similar objectives or working on different issues but using similar approaches. 17 Rooms facilitated community-wide cohesion among these actors while preserving space for diversity of perspectives and priorities. As East Central Florida organizer Jenifer Rupert explained in a learning interview, a more holistic narrative around community-wide action "allowed organizations to think in nontraditional ways about supporting initiatives and collaborations."

For other CFs, 17 Rooms helped activate the SDGs as a framework for local problem-solving. Amid community reservations about adopting global frameworks for local action,17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota helped the West Central Initiative demonstrate how the SDGs can be strategically valuable for addressing multiple issues simultaneously. At the same time, 17 Rooms demonstrated how the SDGs can provide a conduit for connecting regional priorities (e.g., regional housing availability, discussed in Room 8) to global knowledge and resources (e.g., globally recognized best practices for assessing and forecasting housing availability).

In Puerto Rico, 17 Rooms facilitated the prioritization of local issues within the SDG framework. Six "Rooms" were used: five based on the U.N.'s "5-Ps" (People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnerships, Peace) and one additional Room dedicated to "Social and Economic Rights." This local adaptation of the 17 Rooms approach allowed the Puerto Rico Community Foundation to highlight and elevate locally relevant issues of colonialism and justice as part of a conversation about SDG issues. 17 Rooms helped Hawai'i Green Growth zoom out on their local six-pillar Aloha+ Challenge framework to assess how existing activities associated with that frame-

work aligned with the 17 SDGs. In each of these cases, 17 Rooms helped transform the SDGs from something potentially abstract, distant, or irrelevant to an approachable, tangible, and meaningful coordinating device for local issues.

17 Rooms may also uncover the potential strategic value of the SDGs for CF's internal functions. West Central Initiative, for example, reported that organizing 17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota helped bring together their two major organizational functions—grantmaking and community development—that were previously divided. For the Cleveland Foundation, the aim was to use 17 Rooms as a conversation starter: an organization-wide activity to demonstrate the power of the SDGs as a common language to discover synergies and expose inefficiencies between CF grantmaking and community engagement (e.g., investments with co-benefits versus investments with fewer force multipliers across community issues).

2. Make diverse community assets visible and cohesive

17 Rooms created a platform for community stakeholders to access a range of perspectives, opportunities, and resources. For 17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota, West Central Initiative organizers prioritized holistic representation of voices and perspectives across a full range of sectors, constituencies, and counties. Gathering over 170 people together in one physical space helped communicate a cohesive community frame around diverse regional assets and positioned West Central Initiative as an orchestrator across those assets. In East Central Florida, 17 Rooms helped connect often-siloed community assets. As Central Florida Foundation organizer Sandi Vidal reflected in a learning interview, uniting people across all 17 SDG issues sparked a shared appreciation for engaging
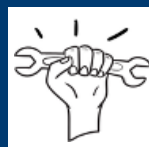
a breadth of community assets: "17 Rooms was a great way to get people from various sectors and positions in the same room for shared conversations and collaboration about how issues and activities can connect to people." By playing the role of convenor and connector, CFs can bring together diverse interests and connect unlikely allies to uncover new approaches to shared action.

17 Rooms helped reduce traditional barriers to participation and decisionmaking. Viewing young people as future custodians of community, culture, and the environment, 17 Rooms-Hawai'i organizers centered youth perspectives in their 17 Rooms exercises. In 2022, each Room conversation included at least one youth participant, and prominent youth voices were featured in plenary panel sessions. This intentional dedication to youth participation in decisionmaking spaces helped focus Room discussions on matters of intergenerational significance including the importance of locally led environmental stewardship and the need for greater urgency around climate action. For 17 Rooms-Puerto Rico, Room discussions exposed the crucial role of civil society organizations to challenge government inertia in local priority areas such as child poverty or pollution. Meanwhile, the participation of several local mayors in 17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota helped affirm the importance of civic leadership and demonstrate that complementary interactions between formal democratic structures and citizen-led organizations can create significant momentum for grassroots action on SDG issues.

3.Make community plans practical

17 Rooms helped communities transform strategic planning exercises into tangible collaborations, partnerships, and workstreams. By asking each Room to identify one to three "next step" actions that can be taken over the next 12-18 months, 17 Rooms brings a practical orientation to community problem-solving. 17 Rooms encourages a focus on what "we in the Room" can and should do now, rather than getting stuck on excessively grand visions that might be several years in the making and involve many different parts and responsibilities.

The portfolio of actions and collaborations to emerge from the 17 Rooms-East Central Florida exercise demonstrated how Room discussions can bridge a community's strategic vision for shared progress and its practical implementation

(see BOX 3 for a range of local actions connected to 17 Rooms). Meanwhile, conversations during 17 Rooms-Puerto Rico reframed the community narrative toward practical action. As Puerto Rico organizers reflected in learning interviews, a focus on action helped shift the conversation from unrealistic frameworks like "how to abolish issue X?" to "how to plan for improvement in the next year?" After their initial summit, several Rooms continued gathering to pursue these realistic next steps. In each of their annual 17 Rooms exercises in 2022 and 2023, Hawai'i Green Growth produced a set of practical recommendations for strengthening and accelerating ongoing efforts to advance the local Aloha+ framework.

4.Cultivate community-scale competencies

For both organizers and participants, 17 Rooms helped build a solid base of knowledge and skills that can be deployed toward new forms of progress in the future. 17 Rooms is a comprehensive undertaking, requiring a significant up-front investment of organizer time and effort. CF organizers generally understood this investment as a fixed cost for developing ongoing community and organizational competencies. Through the organization of 17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota, West Central Initiative staff sharpened their skills and created new systems for convening at a regional scale across all SDG issues at once. Meanwhile, participants in the exercise were able to actively experience the practicalities of local engagement and problem-solving as a tenet of rural civic leadership.

17 Rooms-East Central Florida helped Central Florida Foundation demonstrate their unique value in shaping and integrating practical workstreams that prioritized action around issues of shared importance while managing trade-offs. 17 Rooms-Puerto Rico organizers reflected in learning interviews that the process of bringing people together sup-

ported the "capacity and consciousness" for an action-oriented approach to potentially abstract problems. These competencies—of organizers and participants—can be recruited and redeployed for future community-wide convening strategies, including for repeated 17 Rooms efforts, as seen by the example of Hawai'i Green Growth (2022 and 2023). Having completed the exercise once, Central Florida Foundation and West Central Initiative organizers are both currently considering replicating the event at regular (e.g., annual or bi-annual) intervals.

5.Connect initiatives to population-level progress

17 Rooms helped build a narrative around grant-making and community engagement within a broader context of advancing population-level outcomes. CFs are rightly wary of committing themselves to advancing population-level changes, given that their resources are limited and that they are just one actor within a system of community institutions and sectors. At the same time, their overall purpose is to improve and maintain high levels of community well-being. 17 Rooms has been helpful in balancing these competing interests.

17 Rooms-East Central Florida helped the Central Florida Foundation showcase its capacity to facilitate initiatives that addressed population-level priorities like economic security, liveability, and climate action. In 2022, collaboration across several Rooms led Central Florida Foundation to support the 2023 Fiscal Cliff Summit—a gathering to convey the implications of the scheduled minimum wage increase—and its impact on reducing public benefits (the "Fiscal Cliff")—for both businesses and employees. Building on the momentum of the summit, the Central Florida Foundation awarded a $100k grant to support women across the Orlando region most adversely affected by the Fiscal Cliff. This demonstrates the flow-through gains associated with 17 Rooms: identifying critical community priorities, championing grassroots solutions, and amplifying their impact.

BOX 3

Actions and initiatives from 17 Rooms-East Central Florida.

ACTIONS TIED TO SINGLE ROOMS:

Room 2: Brainstormed ways to support community access to nutritious food, resulting in investments in community gardening spaces.

Room 3: Adopted a resolution for thriving communities, collaborated on health initiatives, and worked with the community to identify needs and leaders for focus groups.

Room 4: Identified the need to support early childhood care initiatives, including funding to boost the childcare workforce pipeline and assess childcare centers in Central Florida. CFF awarded a total of $80K in grants to these efforts.

Room 5: Incorporated consideration of gender-specific data into the region's "People, Places, Prosperity" framework.

Room 6: Supported "Critical Assets," a waste facilities project aiming to increase the rates of waste diversion throughout the system.

Room 7: Explored opportunities for capital investments in biosolids-to-energy conversion to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and applied for a Department of Energy grant for lithium-ion battery disposal.

Room 9: Developed a strategy to foster innovation clusters and received a grant to establish training in the green industry and solar deployment.

Room 10: Discussed Black leadership development and board placement, focusing on black-owned entities. A trust grant enabled software development for grant/loan matching for these issues.

Room 16: Discussed institutional alignment with the SDGs, leading one Room member to update their organization's strategic plan using the SDGs.

ACTIONS EMERGING FROM INTERACTION ACROSS MULTIPLE ROOMS:

Room 1 and Room 8: Collaborated on a summit on the fiscal cliff, leading to CFF providing over $100,000 in grants to support women with the potential to increase their income and overcome the fiscal cliff.

Room 7 and Room 13: Hosted webinar series to help local governments develop an informed transport fleet transition plan eligible to receive federal funding.

Room 7 and Room 13: Hosted webinar series to help local governments develop an informed transport fleet transition plan eligible to receive federal funding.

Room 14 and Room 15: Established a biodiversity-focused working group as part of the region's "year of biodiversity" (2023). The working group developed an action framework based on the Singapore Index and conducted exercises in 5 out of 8 counties to develop new conservation strategies and build a biodiversity hotspot data pool.

Participants in 2022 17 Rooms-Hawai'i's "Room 15" hold a for SDG 15 for Life on Land.
Image credit: Hawai'I Green Growth.

PART 3.
ANNOTATED PLAYBOOK

BOX 4

Organizing 17 Rooms in five phases

Step	Timeline	Tips and best practices
1. Prepare		
	~3-6 months	• Articulate primary objective. • Partner to expand resources and reach. • Secure community leader support.
2. Set up Rooms		
	~2-6-months	• Communicate clearly and early. • Prepare and empower Room co-leads.
3. Convene Rooms		
	17R summit = 1-2 days OR 17R series = several months	• Level-set with participants. • Use standard tools. • Facilitate Cross-Room exchanges. • Elevate the visibility of community priorities. • Pay attention to details. • Make it fun!
4. Distill insights and actions		
	~6 weeks	• Synthesize and coordinate across Rooms using a summary report.
5. Room follow-up and learning		
	Regular intervals (e.g., 6, 12, 18 months)	• Set a regular cadence for room action follow-up and support. • Identify successes and areas for improvement.

Having explored the value of 17 Rooms for extending and strengthening community leadership, this section offers prospective 17 Rooms organizers a playbook for implementing their own 17 Rooms.

Any prospective 17 Rooms organizer can access a standardized set of tools, including a comprehensive "17 Rooms guidebook for organizers" (The 17 Rooms guidebook), by completing an online introduction to 17 Rooms. Annotated with tips and best practices emerging from 17 Rooms experiments across the community contexts explored above, the following playbook is designed as a companion resource for CF and other community leaders seeking to leverage 17 Rooms to advance community-scale leadership using the SDGs. This playbook outlines five main steps for organizing a 17 Rooms session, spanning initial planning, preparation, execution, and follow-up (see BOX 4).

Step 1: Preparing for 17 Rooms

Careful preparation for your 17 Rooms event can help foster confidence among participants, increase enjoyment, and maximize the impact of this valuable experience for everyone involved.

TIP1.1: Be clear about your primary objective.
In the early stages of preparing for 17 Rooms, it is important for organizers to start with "why" before "how." Clearly articulating your "why" can provide a compass for streamlining design choices such as when to host 17 Rooms in your CF's journey of SDG adoption, how you adopt and adapt 17 Rooms the organizational structure (e.g., as a one-day summit or multi-month series of meetings), who you invite (curated or open tent), and key outputs.

Is your purpose for organizing 17 Rooms to help kickstart an internal conversation about the strategic value of SDGs (as with the Cleveland Foundation) or accelerate existing community efforts aligned with the SDGs (as with Hawai'i Green Growth)? Will 17 Rooms help transform a strategic

planning process into community-wide action (East Central Florida) or activate a VLR (The Community Foundation of Puerto Rico)? Or do you hope that 17 Rooms will cultivate shared knowledge of the SDGs as a comprehensive framework for understanding shared priorities (West Central Initiative)?

CFs often view 17 Rooms as a chance to create a shared understanding and spark collaborative action within their communities. This typically follows initial ecosystem mapping, strategic planning work, or participatory community assessments like a VLR, or else serves to accelerate existing initiatives. As a result, most 17 Rooms events were standalone summits lasting one or two days, bringing together a diverse group of community stakeholders (see TABLE 1 for the 17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota Organizer's timeline).

Following the success of their initial 17 Rooms summit experiments, CF organizers have sometimes indicated interest in repeating 17 Rooms as a multi-month convening to develop, refine, and execute more targeted action plans. Internally, the Cleveland Foundation planned a one-day 17 Rooms summit as a platform to start organization-wide conversations about the SDGs. A more extensive, multi-month 17 Rooms exercise, by contrast, could be beneficial for drafting a CF-internal strategy or even a community-wide strategic plan in which the CF can outline its specific contributions.

TIP 1.2: Partner with community stakeholders to expand resources and reach. Partnerships can be pivotal for CFs in reaching a diverse range of community actors and assets through 17 Rooms. Collaborating with other organizations can provide invaluable in-kind support, such as suitable meeting spaces or assistance in curating or sponsoring specific "Rooms." A wider partnership team also encourages participants to associate this gathering with the role of CFs in facilitating community leadership—distinct from their grantmaking capacity.

For example, the Central Florida Foundation co-organized its 17 Rooms exercise alongside local leaders from the East Central Florida Regional Re-

silence Collaborative (ECFR2C), the City of Orlando, and the University of Central Florida. Likewise, West Central Initiative organized 17 Rooms in close coordination with the University of Minnesota, Morris and the City of Morris's Morris Model.

BEST PRACTICE: Secure support from community leaders. 17 Rooms is a comprehensive undertaking that requires time and resources to plan and execute. For this reason, the execution of a 17 Rooms exercise can often hinge on the support of community decisionmakers. Ensuring the support of senior CF and other community leaders is foundational to a successful 17 Rooms exercise.

Step 2: Setting up Rooms

Having carefully planned your 17 Rooms exercise, the next phase is to recruit participants to advance collaborative actions for local SDG priorities.

TIP2.1: Communicate clearly and early. When communicating 17 Rooms to community stakeholders, the messaging matters. The narrative should be simple, practical, and locally relevant (the Guidebook contains suggested language for describing 17 Rooms that can be adapted to local settings]. In hindsight, almost all 17 Rooms organizers we spoke to reported wishing they had initiated communication about 17 Rooms earlier to build greater awareness and momentum around the effort.

Language around 17 Rooms should emphasize the onus on participants—the "we" in the Room—to take the SDGs into their own hands by identifying ideas for action and resources to advance them. CF organizers found it important to relay that 17 Rooms is a space that neutralizes power dynamics, an opportunity to "leave institutional agendas at the door" to focus on what is right for an issue, not a specific organization.

CF organizers tended toward a blended approach to publicizing 17 Rooms; broadcasting information (see, for example, West Central Initiative's fantastic website promoting participation in 17 Rooms) alongside narrowcasting the invitation to participate to key potential champions (the Guidebook contains a template of suggested invitation language for dedicated outreach).

BEST PRACTICE: Empower co-leads as extensions of the organizing team. One of the most important milestones when organizing 17 Rooms is recruiting and mobilizing Room co-leads for each Room. It is critical to help Room co-leads see how their participation in 17 Rooms can align with and further advance the work that they are already doing in the community. Enthusiastic Room co-leads help drive Room participant recruitment and contribution to the substantive focus of each Room. For this reason, it is important to start engaging prospective Room co-leads early to allow time for them to grasp the value of 17 Rooms and make time for 17 Rooms in their schedules.

When onboarding Room co-leads, it is generally important to create opportunities for (a) developing connections and a sense of shared identity between co-leads, (b) communicating the key community-level objectives of 17 Rooms as well as the potential value of participating in 17 Rooms to Room co-leads, (c) clearly describing co-leads' roles and responsibilities in executing the 17 Rooms exercise, and (d) providing opportunity for any questions or clarifications that co-leads might have.

There are several possible ways to do this. As a baseline, CF organizers can host a single 60-minute virtual (or longer in-person) workshop for co-leads to address and create the opportunities mentioned above (the Guidebook provides a suggested agenda for this workshop). For in-person convenings, hosting a welcome reception for co-leads before 17 Rooms can help create space for connection and knowledge sharing before the event.

Step 3: Convening Rooms

Having successfully recruited Room leads and assembled participants into Rooms, it's time to convene Rooms to advance practical actions, novel insights, and a sense of community for local SDG priorities.

TIP 3.1: Level-set with participants. Given the breadth of issues represented in the SDGs and their varied local manifestations, CF organizers found it important to provide participants with a baseline understanding of local progress on SDG priorities. For example, on Day 1 of their two-day summit, Central Florida Foundation introduced their community scorecard system and curated several seminars outlining the status of local issues according to the Central Florida Foundation's "Thrive framework" (economic stability, healthcare, liveability, education, and community and social connection). The Community Foundation of Puerto Rico's VLR report on local progress against the SDGs provided a natural basis for grounding Room discussion, while West Central Minnesota curated a succession of "context-setting" panels on the morning before the 17 Rooms.

BEST PRACTICE: Use standard tools for execution, feedback, and learning. The "Action Agenda Template" is a simple one-page tool that Room co-leads can use to facilitate Room meetings, capture insights from cross-Room exchange, and structure their final 60-second rapid Room report-out presentation (Organizers receive the Action Agenda Template as part of their packet of materials after expressing interest in organizing 17 Rooms).

Capturing participant insights and feedback is a crucial part of CF's ability to learn and generate lasting value from the 17 Rooms exercise. Along with the Action Agenda Template, the 17 Rooms secretariat has also developed a standard onboarding and debrief survey template that organizers can easily deploy to capture participant impressions and feedback before and after the exercise.

TIP 3.2: Use the cross-Room exchange session to foster cross-constituency awareness. By providing participants an opportunity to discuss and engage on how the actions in their Rooms might link up and reinforce actions being planned by other Rooms, the cross-Room exchange session can help cultivate insight and awareness about the full range of issues, stakeholders, and assets that exist across the community.

TIP 3.3: Use the culminating Room report-out session as a platform to elevate community priorities. The final plenary session in 17 Rooms provides an excellent opportunity to elevate strategic community priorities. Important community stakeholders and decisionmakers can be invited to participate as "VIP listeners" to Room report-outs and invited to share practical responses and suggestions to the action ideas presented across Rooms. For example, youth voices and interests were elevated in Hawai'i Green Growth's 17 Rooms exercise in 2022. To conclude East Central Florida's 17 Rooms, distinguished UCF professor and former member of Congress, James Bachhus drew attention to how the outcomes of the day's 17 Rooms exercise demonstrated grassroots democracy in action.

BEST PRACTICE: Rehearse the details. Convening a 17 Rooms summit will come down, in part, to logistics: For example, you will need a big enough venue for plenary sessions and up to 17 separate conversations, depending on the number of participants you plan to invite. Literal rooms are ideal, but if the acoustics are right, tables will work just fine. Rehearse as many of the small details of the day in advance. For example, has the audio-visual equipment been tested beforehand? Also, consider how you might align these small details with the spirit of community priorities and the SDGs–like sourcing ethical materials and vendors.

TIP 3.4: Don't forget to make it fun! Above all, when convening 17 Rooms, prioritize fun and enjoyment. Find ways to bring energy to each session. West Central Initiative took particular care in this regard by organizing a dedicated MC for the day and pairing his on-stage presence with

high-quality audio-visual production (see photo). The final rapid report-out plenary offers a natural opportunity for shared enjoyment and celebration of the achievements of the day—be sure to hit the high notes at the end and create time for a moment for socializing and networking afterward.

Step 4: Distilling insights and actions

Following a successful 17 Rooms summit (or series of Room conversations), it is time to capture and communicate the insights and proposed actions.

BEST PRACTICE: Synthesize and coordinate across Rooms using a summary report. To consolidate the value of bringing people together, a summary report is an opportunity to record action ideas in each Room while also synthesizing themes across Rooms. West Central Minnesota's summary report is an excellent recent example. (The 17 Rooms Guidebook provides a suggested format for the report). This process can help explore interdependencies and potential cross-issue partnerships, building on different ways cross-issue collaborations have already been attempted, including what works and what is hard about it. Pursuing this analytical work after a 17 Rooms exercise can help position CFs as a thought leader and convenor across a range of distinct but connected local issues.

Step 5: Room follow-up and learning

The final phase of organizing 17 Rooms involves tracking progress, evaluating effectiveness, and learning from the experience to inform future iterations.

BEST PRACTICE: Set a regular cadence for Room action support and follow-up. The ultimate aim of 17 Rooms is to encourage each Room to take ownership of the implementation of their proposed action ideas. CFs can be catalytic in this regard, as shown by the support provided by the Central Florida Foundation to establish a portfolio of action streams. Regularly following up or recon- vening with Room co-leads, e.g., at 3, 6, 12, and 18 months, to track and understand progress can help support Rooms in their proposed actions.

TIP 5.1: Identify successes and areas for improvement. It is important to consult a range of participants and perspectives to understand what worked well and what could be improved upon in future convenings. Participant surveys, debrief interviews with co-leads, and an after-action review with the core organizing team can all serve as valuable sources of learning.

Anne Schwagerl of the Minnesota Farmers Union facilitates conversations in Room 15 (a working group for SDG 15: Life on Land) as part of 17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota. Image credit: West Central Initiative.

Participants in 17 Rooms-East Central Florida's Room 1 (SDG1: No Poverty) collaborated with participants in Room 8 (SDG8: Decent Work and Economic Growth) to coordinate a "fiscal cliff" summit explaining how the scheduled increase in the minimum wage reduces public benefits for businesses and employees. Image credit: Central Florida Foundation

PART 4.
CONCLUSION

CFs are uniquely placed to be leaders of comprehensive local-level action for the SDGs. As they continue to evolve in their efforts to drive social, economic, and environmental progress in the communities they serve, the SDGs offer CFs a framework that reflects the breadth of issues they are taking on. Yet, it is the very breadth of the SDGs that makes them challenging for CFs looking to systematically advance population-level outcomes.

As the pioneering use cases profiled in this report demonstrate, CFs can use 17 Rooms to cultivate new forms of community-scale leadership using the SDGs. As a flexible and practical tool, 17 Rooms can help establish new terrain for CFs and community stakeholders to work together as agents of systemic and sustainable change. By helping local stakeholders create connections across sectors and issues that are often rigidly defined, while breaking large global issues into actionable, locally relevant chunks, 17 Rooms can offer a basis for the networks and knowledge needed to incubate and launch new partnerships and initiatives.

Organizing a 17 Rooms exercise requires substantial effort from CFs, including committed leadership and dedicated staff resources. Future research should explore how streamlined implementation tools can help reduce the organizational burden and enhance the accessibility of the approach. For 17 Rooms to grow into its own as a meaningful tool in the evolving CF toolkit, CFs will also need clearer methods for measuring how the approach supports innovative local actions as well as the contributions of these actions to community-level outcomes. Initial pilots recognized these challenges, but attempts to address them remained nascent.

Political considerations may arise as CFs explore application of 17 Rooms and the SDGs in their particular contexts. Several of these pilots occurred in politically diverse locations, where CFs navigated sensitivities around the U.N. and multilateral agendas by employing tailored communication and convening strategies. A deeper understanding of how CFs seek to reconcile the political accessibility of the SDGs with their utility as a comprehensive framework for pursuing local challenges would be helpful for informing how to communicate the value of 17 Rooms to prospective 17 Rooms organizers.

Looking ahead, as more and more CFs experiment with 17 Rooms and other approaches to making the SDGs practical, there is an opportunity to capture and share these learnings throughout a growing network of CFs globally as a basis for new forms of local action for global progress on the SDGs.

TABLE 1

17 Rooms-West Central Minnesota: Organizer's timeline

	Time	Action
	2022	
		Completed CF strategic plan using the SDGs
		Observed 17R-East Central Florida and Hawai'i
	2023	
1. Prepare	June →	Commenced planning for 17R summit
	Aug →	Secured venue for 17R summit
	Nov →	Engaged key stakeholders
	Dec →	set date for 17R summit
	2024	
2. Set up Rooms	Jan →	Launched website
	Feb →	Recruited co-leads and sponsors
	Mar →	Invited participants
3. Convene Rooms	June →	17 Rooms WCM
4. Distill insights and actions	July →	Summarised Room actions
5. Follow-up and learning	Aug →	Supporting Room follow-up

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