Connect Grantmakers.
Engage Leaders.
Inspire Collaboration.
The Network for Effective & Meaningful Philanthropy
Located precisely where Southern culture and philanthropic excellence intersect, the Southeastern Council of Foundations provides members with unique opportunities to increase and sustain the impact of their charitable investments. We are a diverse network of thinkers, doers, problem-solvers and leaders who bring a variety of perspectives together to serve one common goal – changing lives and transforming communities through effective, meaningful philanthropy.

What makes SECF different, and so very vital to our work and our region? Why do hundreds of foundations and thousands of staff and trustees consider SECF their “philanthropic family”?

The reasons are clear:

We support one another. Through our interpersonal and institutional connections, we share resources, expertise and ideas with one another to further our impact as individual foundations and as a field.

We build leaders. We cultivate the skills and knowledge of both seasoned veterans and up-and-comers, producing leaders who are ready and able to serve as visionaries and champions for our organizations and for philanthropy as a whole.

Our work is relevant. The South is a unique region with a deep history, pervasive challenges, changing demographics and abundant opportunity. We know this region well – we help ensure that Southern Philanthropy is on point and attuned to the nuances of this special place.

Our work is sustainable. We understand the hurdles that can arise for our field and seize opportunities to maintain our viability and effectiveness. We keep the lines of conversation open with policymakers and the public to help them understand and value the role of our philanthropic investment and leadership.

We are effective. We continually search for and evaluate best practices from each other, other regions and other fields to apply to our work. We also establish our own best practices that reflect our understanding of the South and our commitment to its progress. In doing so, we improve the abilities and impact of foundations throughout the Southeast.

As members of the SECF network, we understand the importance of connection and the value of place. We benefit from the interactions and connections fostered by SECF while also contributing to our network’s ever-growing strength. We know that by working together, we make a transformative impact on our communities, our region and the lives of its people.

A Grantmaker Network Like No Other

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A vibrant network: 58%

of SECF member organizations have joined within the last 10 years.

An experienced network: 57%

of SECF members have been involved in grantmaking for at least 10 years.

A strong network: 92%+

average member retention rate over the last five years.
A Source of Relationships & Resources
Regional & National Connections

SECF membership opens the door to an incredible community of philanthropic leaders – locally, regionally and nationally – which paves the way to more effective and transformational grantmaking. As an SECF member, you are welcomed and introduced to fellow philanthropic leaders from family, community, private, health legacy and corporate constituencies, all committed to improving our region and all supported by a staff that understands the need for convening, connecting and collaborating.

“SECF is rich with resources... it really helps you to understand where foundation work currently is and where it may be going in the future.”

Tarnika Williams, The Duke Endowment

Member-to-member connections are the spark that make so much of SECF’s work possible – we design our events and programs with the goal of fostering new relationships and strengthening those that already exist. Year after year, members report meeting new people and renewing connections at our events.

These connections begin with camaraderie, then extend beyond it to result in real opportunities for leverage, partnership and collaboration with grantmakers from across the country who are supporting communities in the Southeastern United States. SECF is the best positioned organization in the region, in terms of scale and scope, to facilitate these collaborations.

“There are opportunities to network and learn that you can truly take back to the work you’re doing.”

Tracey Grayzer, Impact Alamance

As the strongest, largest and broadest network of philanthropic leaders in our region, SECF creates a fertile ground for connections between grantmakers who call the Southeast home and is an essential conduit to national funders who recognize the needs and opportunities that exist here. Through our events and programs, we break down silos and bring together different types of foundations that otherwise may have never realized their shared visions.
Strengthening Existing & Future Leaders
Leadership Development

The success of philanthropy depends greatly upon men and women who possess integrity, confidence, courage and creativity, as well as the ability to make tough decisions, listen with compassion, motivate others and move a vision toward reality.

But these leaders need support and cultivation – that’s why leadership development and support is one of SECF’s top priorities.

We take an approach that is based on thought leadership, best practice, and creating opportunities for members to share their wisdom and learn from one another. No article or book can replace the chance to share experiences, ask questions and glean insights from people who deeply understand each other through triumphs and failures.

Our signature leadership program, the Hull Fellows Program, has spanned over 15 years and graduated over 250 Fellows – many serve as CEOs and in senior executive roles across the South today! We offer each Hull class the chance to connect with one another through a year-long series of in-person and virtual programs that explore the history of the South, the latest trends and best practices in the field and the major issues facing foundations today. Each Hull Fellow forms a strong relationship with a mentor, benefiting from their perspective and building long-lasting relationships.

“It’s such an amazing experience because these are people I will now have a relationship with for years to come and I’ll have a network of my Hull Fellow colleagues as I move forward in my career in philanthropy.”

—— Nora Ferrell (2014-15 Hull Fellow), Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

SECF supports existing leaders through its CEO Forum and trustee development opportunities. The CEO Forum provides a safe, intimate space for foundation executives to hold candid conversations around the challenges of leadership and management. Throughout the year, trustees benefit from events designed around the difficult questions they face, including issues of governance, stewardship, investment decisions, relationships with staff and ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of their foundations.

All of these leadership programs and events take place throughout the year and culminate in SECF’s Annual Meeting, where the questions foundation leaders face every day are thoroughly explored while reflecting on the work of the previous year and planning for what’s to come.
Embracing Our Region’s Unique Identity
A Southern Perspective

The 11 states in the SECF footprint are unified by much more than geography. Each shares a history and culture – one filled with deep pain and astounding progress as well as distinct customs and traditions – that may constitute the strongest regional identity in the country.

“We have people who every day wake up and think about the changing nature of this region and what the possibilities are.”

Mark Constantine, Richmond Memorial Health Foundation

The South’s demographics also set it apart from the rest of America. For 40 years, our region has been one of the driving engines of America’s population growth. No other region has experienced the variety of population shifts taking place in the South. Among its unique features is the steady remigration of the descendants of both African-American and white Southerners who fled the region during the difficult times of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The South continues to be burdened by crippling disparities in education, health care and economic opportunity – especially in its rural areas. These and other, more positive characteristics that make our region unique point to the need for regional philanthropic solutions. Indeed, if there is any region in the country that benefits from a strong association of grantmakers, it is the American South.

“I think a Southern degree of empathy is needed as we move forward in the area of philanthropy – a desire to know and to understand our grantees and the people that we’re trying to help.”

Langley Shealy, Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina

SECF members embrace this regional identity and continually seek an understanding of the connection between our past and our current challenges. To support grantmakers working in this environment, we provide access to public policy information, research, trends and data that place the work of philanthropy within a regional and cultural context and identify opportunities for further learning and collaboration.

53% of U.S. population growth between 2000–2010 was in the South.

33% of Southerners live in rural communities – compared to 25 percent nationally.

54% increase in the South’s immigrant population between 2002–2012.
Building Relationships, Improving Policy
Promote & Defend Philanthropy

From our inception in 1969, as an initial response to the 1969 Tax Reform Act, SECF has chosen to be proactive in the public policy space. “Strength in numbers” has been essential to breaking through gridlock in state capitols and in Washington. As part of the SECF network, members never have to worry about navigating the public policy arena alone. SECF members empower one another to mount a vigorous defense of philanthropy, educate policymakers on the power of grantmaking and promote the ability of funders to address issues they consider a priority.

SECF ensures the South is always well-represented in national conversations regarding philanthropy and public policy. Each year, we proudly convene the largest delegation of grantmakers in the country to attend Foundations on the Hill, where members meet with lawmakers and promote policies that preserve and strengthen philanthropy’s vital role in American society.

SECF members are engaged in public policy conversations year-round, supported by our Policy in Action programs that include in-district meetings, community site visits, public policy institutes and conversations with policymakers across our 11-state footprint. Foundations 101 events, co-hosted by members in their own communities, bring grantmakers and policymakers to the table together to learn from one another and foster stronger relationships.

“Because SECF believes that public policy is important, it provides both insightful programming on public policy issues and opportunities to come together with our peers to discuss those issues. There is simply no other forum in the region to meaningfully address the issues that are critical to our work.”

Robert M. Fockler, Community Foundation of Greater Memphis

SECF delivers vital legislative intelligence through policy and advocacy alerts, a quarterly Public Policy Digest and free access to StateScape, an online state legislative tracking service designed with foundations and their grantees in mind. Through our strong relationships with national philanthropic infrastructure groups, you will be kept well-informed on the latest developments in Washington, D.C.

With so much legislative activity happening at the state level, SECF supports local and state philanthropic networks, connecting them with the resources and expertise needed to be effective advocates for our sector.
Promoting Higher Performance, Improved Outcomes
Best & Next Practice

With more than 330 foundations and 2,300 trustees, executives and staff in the SECF network, it’s guaranteed that some members are trying something new, pursuing innovative strategies or pushing the envelope in an effort to make a greater impact – and if they’re not, they’re wondering how they can. SECF makes sure these two groups are brought together.

“SECF is a unique and invaluable resource: It is the place where foundation staff and board members from across the Southeast come to learn about innovations, best practices, and what it takes to do the challenging and crucial work of philanthropy effectively.”

Phil Buchanan, Center for Effective Philanthropy

Through its events and programming, SECF ensures that grantmakers looking for the next big thing get connected to thought leaders who are already experimenting or leading the way – both in the Southeast and beyond.

SECF has strong, collaborative relationships with more than 50 philanthropic infrastructure organizations across the country. These partnerships have produced numerous in-person and virtual grantmaker education programs that have aided in the professional development of our members. SECF members have a direct link to a diverse set of regional and national thought leaders who possess expertise on the issues and trends shaping today’s grantmaking landscape.

“Every time we intersect with SECF we come away with a meaningful idea we need to apply to our work.”

Cabot Pyle, Dugas/Turner Family Foundations

SECF members have access to numerous peer-to-peer learning opportunities, where thoughtful – even challenging – questions and open dialogue are encouraged. SECF events and programs ensure members are not only made aware of the latest trends, but are also able to embrace them in their own work.

SECF has its finger on the pulse of the grantmaking landscape – if there’s a new success story or lesson learned, a challenge or even a failure that deserves to be shared, SECF members will be among the first to hear it.
Member Programs & Benefits
Our Signature Offerings

SECF’s Annual Meeting is the region’s premiere philanthropic event, bringing together hundreds of foundation trustees, executives and staff for three days of connection, insight and education. Highlights of the Annual Meeting includes keynotes by national thought leaders, sessions highlighting best practices, issues and trends, and plenty of opportunities to make and renew connections with colleagues from across the region and the county.

The CEO Forum is the region’s strongest ongoing leadership development program for senior executives working in philanthropy. Peer-to-peer interactions lead the way to candid conversations focused on personal and organizational values. The CEO Forum includes a half-day of content focused on the unique needs of health legacy foundation CEOs as well.

Our Essential Skills & Strategies for New Grantmakers, offered twice a year, connects those new to philanthropy with an experienced faculty comprised of SECF members. The two-day training delvers a curriculum designed to give attendees a greater understanding of the ins-and-outs of grantmaking.

Our suite of Policy in Action programs allows members to be informed and engaged in the public policy arena. Members have the opportunity to travel to Washington as part of the country’s largest Foundations on the Hill delegation, connect with lawmakers and staff through in-district meetings and site visits, and host policymaker education events.

The Family Foundations Forum, offered in even-numbered years, brings together family foundation staff and trustees, as well as family members, together to discuss issues unique to the management and effectiveness of family foundations. This conference offers sessions and interactive conversations for family foundation veterans as well as younger-generation members just getting involved in their family’s grantmaking.

The Conference on Investing, offered as an Annual Meeting preconference, is a one-of-a-kind gathering providing members the knowledge and insight to make informed, empowered and strategic financial decisions that will ultimately improve foundations’ investment portfolios and grantmaking opportunities.

SECF’s Hull Fellows Program is a unique opportunity for rising leaders in Southern Philanthropy to connect with one another over the course of an entire year while also building valuable relationships with experienced mentors. Fellows meet both in person and online to share experiences and collaborate on projects that explore challenges and opportunities in grantmaking.

Throughout the year, webinars allow SECF members to connect virtually for discussions of current issues in grantmaking. Previous webinar topics include economic performance, investing in nonprofit capacity and legal issues in grantmaking. SECF often partners with member foundations and national organizations to deliver these online gatherings.

A staff committed to excellence:

Members benefit from an exceptionally responsive and thoughtful staff that cares about supporting grantmakers as they strive for higher performance and better outcomes. The SECF staff is approachable, knowledgeable and dedicated to delivering events and programs of the highest quality while connecting members to a wealth of resources and insight on best practices and trends in philanthropy.

SECF members also receive:

- Discounted rates for all SECF events, as well as events presented in partnership with other organizations
- Access to professional experts for advice on legal, financial, accounting and compliance matters
- Legislative updates and policy alerts focused on relevant issues in Washington or Southeastern state legislatures
- Free access to StateScape, an online state legislative tracking service focused on bills relevant to foundations and their grantees
- Connect, SECF’s weekly newsletter highlights the latest trends, commentary and news in philanthropy, featuring both regional and national items
- Inspire, SECF’s quarterly magazine focused on telling the stories of foundations that are transforming their communities, as well as innovations and emerging best practice
- Discounts on products, subscriptions and memberships from various partners, including products like The Foundation Desk Reference and BoardSource
- And more!