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## **Nonprofit leaders meet for launch of new capacity building cohort**

**February 19, 2020 (Sonoma, CA)** — Leaders from six diverse nonprofit organizations serving the Sonoma Valley gathered at the Lodge at Sonoma this month to mark the launch of a three-year team-building cohort. This grant program, in its second iteration since first launching in 2015, is made possible through Community Foundation Sonoma County's Sonoma Valley Fund.

The goal of this grants program is to create a network of nonprofits that are deeply committed to strengthening themselves and one another in service of delivering quality programs and services to Sonoma Valley residents.

The nonprofits selected to participate in the 2020 Strengthening Capacity, Connections and Community program are:

- **Friends in Sonoma Helping:**  
Sandy Piotter (Executive Director) and Beverly Seyfert (Food Room Coordinator)
- **Sonoma Community Center:**  
John Gurney (ED) and Steven Macrostie (Board President)
- **Sonoma Ecology Center:**  
Richard Dale (ED), David Morell (Board Chair), and Ellie Insley (Board Member)
- **Sonoma Springs Community Hall:**  
Seth Dolinsky (ED) and Laurie Gallian (Board Treasurer)
- **Sonoma Valley Youth & Family Services:**  
Robert Smith (ED) and Karen Smith (Board Member)
- **Vintage House:**  
Priscilla Call Essert (ED) and Paul Chakmak (Board President)

This is the second Cohort in Sonoma Valley, dedicated to advancing the quality of services for the community. The members of this new cohort will work together to share their best ideas, collaborating to solve the stickiest issues in their organizations, and in the community. The Sonoma Valley Fund grant offers funding for their participation time, as well as access to organizational development experts offering hands-on technical assistance and support. In the first year of the program, these leaders will conduct a thorough organizational assessment that identifies areas of strength and growth, and they will begin to map out a process to achieve the goals they identify—with continued funding from the Sonoma Valley Fund over years two and three.



At the launch meeting, Elizabeth Brown, President and CEO of Community Foundation shared her thoughts about how the investment in this effort represents community philanthropy at its best. “We are a room full of hope,” Beth said, “and we can thank Roland and Hazel Todd for that because their generosity provided the resources that makes this effort possible.”

Richard Dale, Executive Director of the Ecology Center noted, “We have an amazing community in Sonoma – and much of it is represented at this table. Sonoma is a unique microcosm of the larger region in that we have the riches of a ecologically, culturally, and economically diverse place, along with most of the challenges. That means, if we can solve our problems here, we may well be able to help solve them in other places.”

Sandy Piotter who serves as the volunteer Coordinator for the all-volunteer FISH, noted, “Being part of Cohort Two is already empowering us. Good things are bound to happen to and for FISH as a result of this, and so good things for those who rely on our services will happen as well.”

In 2015, the first cohort launched with leaders from Art Escape, Boys and Girls Clubs of Sonoma Valley, La Luz Center, Sonoma Overnight Support, Sonoma Valley Mentoring Alliance, and Teen Services Sonoma. Over the course of the grants program, Art Escape focused on growing their organization and were able to triple the number of youth enrolled in art classes, and double their donations. Sonoma Overnight Support was able to focus on food insecurity in Sonoma Valley, doubling the number of meals served, and donations to support their food security program.

Simon Blattner, board chair for the Sonoma Valley Fund said, “I am not sure that I have ever heard a more enthusiastic commentary on any program in the Valley that could exceed the high notes that were struck from Cohort One. Without exception, they were excited to be included, thrilled by what they learned, united by their new friendships, and looking forward to the opportunities presented by their inclusion in the Cohort. I have a profound belief in the benefits that this grant program will bring to the non-profits and the people of our Valley for years to come.”

Karin Demarest, Vice President for Community Impact for Community Foundation Sonoma County said, “This is the type of grantmaking that excites us the most, because it shows our trust in these leaders. As executive directors with decades of hand-on experience, they know best how they can improve their organizations when given the funding to dream bigger. The exact outcomes for each of these organizations are open ended, but the impact is certain. We’re proud to work with these leaders over the next three years as they work to create a stronger Sonoma Valley.”

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- **Photo 01:** Jill Blair and Lisa Korwin of Informing Change, with Elizabeth Brown, President & CEO of Community Foundation Sonoma County
- **Photo 02:** launch packet
- **Photo 03:** Katherine Fulton, board member for the Sonoma Valley Fund, with Ellie Insley and Richard Dale of Sonoma Ecology Center
- **Photo 04:** members of the new capacity building cohort

### **About Community Foundation Sonoma County:**

The Sonoma Valley Fund is a regional affiliate of Community Foundation Sonoma County. Community Foundation Sonoma County is the hub of philanthropy for the county, connecting people, ideas, and resources to benefit all who live here. Founded in 1983, and with over \$225 million in grants made in the community, CFSC works with individuals, families, and businesses to create philanthropic giving plans that will make an impact in our community and become part of their legacy.

More information: [sonomacf.org](http://sonomacf.org)