

New Leaders Bring Fresh Focus to Area Foundations

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Five large Twin Cities-based foundations have appointed new top executives in the past three years - a rate of turnover that doesn't often happen in a community - and they're changing the way foundations do business in the metro area.

The top bosses at the McKnight, Minneapolis, Bush, Otto Bremer and Northwest Area foundations are leading their organizations through major strategy shifts as they seek more effective ways to give money during the recession.

The five executives also are forging collaborations between their organizations. Kevin Walker, a former Michigan foundation executive who became president of the Northwest Area Foundation last year, said foundations haven't done much of that up to now.

"We've all come to the challenge fresh and we're all aware that our goals can't be achieved as just one organization," Walker said.

Aaron Dorfman, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, said the situation in the Twin Cities is unique because foundation heads elsewhere in the country have often been in place 15 to 20 years. Dorfman thinks the new leadership here is good for foundations as they deal with fewer resources.

"It gives Minnesota foundations the opportunity to take a fresh new look at how they do grant making," Dorfman said. "It creates some exciting opportunities."

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