

# PREFACE

Character formation is one of the most vital and most overlooked needs in America today. It cuts across all walks of life, means somewhat different things to different people, and is not readily susceptible to the metrics by which we often define success. It is hard, vulnerable, interpersonal work. It is missing from many corners of modern life.

In 2016 The Philanthropy Roundtable stepped into this space with a new initiative led by Anne Snyder. Through intensive workshops, consultations, site visits, and a retreat, Anne has assembled a national network of inspired practitioners and a small but dedicated group of donors who have made character formation central to their vision.

Three years on, we are pleased to publish this new guidebook—which profiles some of the most exemplary organizations engaged in the difficult process of reviving the country’s moral consciousness, one small community at a time. Six of these are examined in great depth, with other noteworthy examples included, and the overarching principles that unite them explained in a usable toolkit.

As the stories in this volume show, it’s never too early or too late to invest in character formation. Some of the programs, like grade schools and youth clubs, work on instilling humane values when children are most receptive—a sadly lacking component of much education today. Others, like a rehab and workforce re-entry program, do the essential work of walking with ex-offenders and addicts on the long road back from their darkest point, putting grit and gristle into the American ideal of second chances. Then there are those that encompass multi-generational communities—such as a neighborhood revival now gone international—which illustrate how successful character-building is not just an individual but a truly communal effort.

As different as these programs are in their aims and methods, they all share certain elements in common. To draw those out, and consider how your own organization can model and encourage healthier behavior, turn to the 16 Questions: a potentially transformative tool for groups of all stripes—nonprofit, corporate, public service, and beyond. We invite you to join us in this character revival.

We are grateful to the Kern Family Foundation and the John Templeton Foundation for their invaluable support to launch and sustain this unique initiative.

The Philanthropy Roundtable exists to help American donors pursue their charitable goals as effectively as possible. If there is some way we can assist you in refining your giving, elevating fellow citizens, and strengthening our free society, please let us know.

And let us know at [Main@PhilanthropyRoundtable.org](mailto:Main@PhilanthropyRoundtable.org) or 202.822.8333 if you have colleagues you would like to receive copies of this book. (Print versions are also available at Amazon.)

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