Title: A Survey of Gaps and Overlaps in Adirondack Philanthropy
Community Partner: Adirondack Foundation

A research project on effective nonprofit funding in the Adirondack region for students with an interest in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in general.

Project Description:
The Adirondack Foundation wants to learn where charitable gifts and grants are going– which organizations and causes receive funding from donors and foundations within and from outside the Adirondack region– and where that funding isn’t going. The Adirondack Foundation has convened a group of family foundations to form the Adirondack Funders’ Collaborative. The goals of this collaboration are to explore areas where funders can collaborate for greater impact, study needs in the area, and become better grantmakers. An important element of their deliberations will be understanding the gaps and overlaps in philanthropic funding of the nonprofit organizations (including schools and municipalities) that provide essential and enriching services to residents of the Adirondack region.

The Fellow will conduct a survey of the nonprofits across the region that work regionally and locally to learn more about their funding sources and their funding needs, in order to identify gaps. The research will result in a database, and a presentation that could be given to nonprofits and their funding sources. Once gaps are discovered, the Fellow will work with the foundation to discover why they are there. For example, is it the case that the organizations working in these areas need help with communications? Do they need support to become more effective? Are they not appealing for some other reason?

This analysis will document where philanthropy can make a difference in the Adirondack region. It will help the Adirondack Foundation attract new investment into the social and environmental needs of the region.

About the Community Partner:
The Adirondack Foundation is the community foundation serving the Adirondack region. They strengthen community through philanthropy in collaboration with donors and community partners who share a vision for a thriving region. In addition to providing stewardship of charitable funds and personalized donor services, the Foundation is interested in effective grantmaking and convening people to address pressing community needs. Donors wishing to increase the impact of their generosity entrust their charitable assets to the Foundation for stewardship and leverage, so their community can benefit from their generosity today and tomorrow. Total charitable assets of the Adirondack Foundation are $61M in over 240 charitable funds. Each year, they make assets available for discretionary grantmaking of approximately $1.5M, and since 1997 have granted $32 M in all.

Required Skills:
A student engaged in this work will need to be highly organized, love systematizing data and also love working with people. Because the Foundation will need this information to be presented clearly and effectively, the Fellow should be self-motivated, analytical, and capable of independent and competent work. This research would appeal to someone curious about the nonprofit sector and how charitable dollars make the whole sector work. The student will engage with a wide range of organizations, all staffed by people dedicated to making life better. The Adirondack Foundation’s staff is small and closely knit. The student will be part of this group and will be expected to attend weekly staff meetings and contribute as an equal.
Logistics:
This is a full-time paid research position (35 hours per week) to last approximately 10 weeks, conducted under the joint supervision of the Upstate Institute and the Adirondack Foundation at the Foundation’s office at beautiful Heaven Hill Farm in Lake Placid. The Fellow will be supervised by the Vice President for Communications and Strategic Programs and will have an office and access to staff and office machines. The Fellow will travel around the region to interview nonprofit organizations, so will need a U.S. drivers’ license to complete this work. Field School Fellows receive a research stipend of $4500. The cost of transportation will be covered by the Upstate Institute, and housing will also be provided and paid for by the Upstate Institute.

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