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February 1, 2009

New data center to offer help to metro Detroit charities

*BY CECIL ANGEL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER*

A new data center launched in metro Detroit hopes to gather and make available all types of information to charitable foundations about neighborhoods in Detroit and its suburbs that traditionally has been hard to come by.

The Detroit-Area Community Indicators System Center also plans to help nonprofits by sharing that data from governmental entities and its own analyses so groups will have better success at applying for grants.

Kurt Metzger, chief executive officer for the data center, which is located at the City Connect Detroit Inc. office downtown, said communities often do studies and gather demographic information on their residents.

"It never gets shared. It never gets out of city government," Metzger said.

His job will be to build relationships with municipal, county and state governments to persuade them to provide the data to the center so it can serve as a clearinghouse.

Initially, foundations and groups will have to contact the data center, but by the end of the year, information about communities is to be posted on a Web site and available to the public, Metzger said.

The project was made possible by a 3-year, \$1.85-million grant from the Skillman and Kresge foundations.

Marie Colombo, senior program officer for Knowledge Management at the Skillman Foundation, said information from the data center will help the foundation with its giving strategy.

"We have to make very critical decisions with reduced resources," Colombo said.

Rob Collier, CEO of the Council of Michigan Foundations, said: "There's a great emphasis on results. How do you know you're spending your resources effectively?"

Paul Propson, director of Covenant Community Care, called the data center a "very important step."

His nonprofit, which provides primary health care to uninsured and underinsured people in southwest Detroit, doesn't have the staff to collect the data it needs in applying for grants and planning.

"How does a small organization like ours get to that information?" he said.

*To contact the Detroit-Area Community Indicators System Center, call 313-963-9722. Contact **CECIL ANGEL** at 313-223-4531 or angel@freepress.com.*