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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation Announces Vision for a**

**Center for Nonprofit Support in Detroit**

*TechTown, Michigan Nonprofit Association and Community Wealth Partners to ‘build out’ the Center’s operations and early services*

**Detroit, MI (December 4, 2017)** – The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation announced its plans today to develop and pilot a yet-to-be-named Center focused on nonprofit support, located at the corner of Woodward Avenue and East Grand Boulevard in the New Center/North End neighborhood of Detroit.

Driven by the Foundation’s grantmaking focus in nonprofit support and innovation, the Center will offer a physical space and hub for nonprofit leaders and practitioners to gather and have access to a connected and well-informed network of resources aimed at accelerating solutions around the mission-related and sector-based issues they face.

“It’s our vision that the Center will build greater capacity and enhance capabilities within the organizations that we work with,” said David Egner, president & CEO, Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. “Over time, we also plan to add innovative problem-solving practices in the Center to assist nonprofits and social innovators in developing new approaches and delivery systems to address challenges in our region.”

After more than a year of research and conversations with nonprofit leaders and support organizations, the Foundation learned that while many nonprofit resources exist in Southeast Michigan, there is often a lack of coordination and awareness around them. At the same time, nonprofit leaders expressed a desire to connect with more peers and experts across different fields, which this physical space will allow to happen. The Foundation also reviewed a number of national models and consulted with national experts to construct this place-based model.

**The Partners**

To lead the overall management and day-to-day operations of the Center, the Foundation recently approved a three-year grant for $4,750,000 to TechTown. While TechTown is known as Detroit’s hub for entrepreneurs, its leadership and staff have more than 20 years of experience in building communities and networks of individuals to serve entrepreneurs and innovators in the private sector and social impact arenas.

“TechTown’s leadership and team have demonstrated adaptability and proven the value of activating a physical space devoted to fostering idea-sharing, education and network-building,” said Egner.

Drawing on this experience, TechTown will recruit and hire staff to manage the Center, which will include overseeing the operations, event planning, communications and marketing. It will also apply its proven practices within the nonprofit community and coordinate a networked delivery system of strategic services and resources for nonprofits, leveraging its close partnership with Wayne State University.

“Nonprofits, like entrepreneurs, need support to grow strategically and try new things,” said Ned Staebler, president & CEO of TechTown and vice president for economic development at Wayne State. “Our job will be to help connect them to the right people and the right resources so they can deepen their impact, building a stronger regional nonprofit network in the process.”

Through a grant of $315,000, the Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) will work as a key partner focused on the Center’s capacity building services, including nonprofit assessments, resource referrals informed by their current network of expert providers, and case management. MNA has relationships with more than 4,000 nonprofits, and a suite of tools and practices to help nonprofits become more efficient and effective at delivering on their mission. MNA’s staff will also schedule planned “office hours” as part of this work and will serve as a strategic partner as the Center’s service concept continues to evolve and grow.

“Boosting the capabilities of a nonprofit can make a world of difference in helping to advance the work in their communities. We are excited to be a key partner in this innovative vision to meet the needs of Southeast Michigan,” said Donna Murray-Brown, president & CEO, Michigan Nonprofit Association.

In addition to these grantees, the Foundation has contracted with Community Wealth Partners, a national expert in capacity and network building, to help with further planning and development to bring the Center concept to life. Through facilitation with partner organizations and concept review, Community Wealth Partners will provide a third-party perspective, insight into best practices and suggestions for continuous improvement.

“Nonprofits in the Detroit region are trying to solve large, complex problems. To do so effectively, they need better access to each other and to cutting-edge tools and resources,” said Sara Brenner, president at Community Wealth Partners. “We are committed to help the Foundation and its partners co-create a model that enables nonprofits to learn from each other, strengthen their effectiveness in serving the community, and coordinate efforts to solve major challenges together. We are honored to partner with the Foundation on this.”

**Early Operations & Services**

The Foundation anticipates the Center will begin limited operations and services in mid- to late-2018. The 7,500-square-foot space, which is located on the ground floor of the Foundation’s headquarters and leased from Midtown Detroit Inc., is currently being prepared for build out.

In early 2018, the Foundation and Center partners will begin to strategize the best design and layout to facilitate collaboration, service delivery and special events. In addition, the Center will also be led through a naming and brand identity development process.

In its early operations, the Center will focus primarily on grantees and potential grantees of the Wilson Foundation as the ‘first clients,’ and will offer some services, activities and events to fellow foundations and nonprofits. With the Center’s primary partners recently established, there are still many questions and operational details to be determined in the coming months as the Center gets up and running. More details will be shared closer to the Center’s launch later in 2018.

With the Center based in Southeast Michigan, the Foundation is also in the early stages of talking with partners across Western New York, its other region of focus, to determine the best approach for providing nonprofit support, based on the existing assets and activities already happening there.

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**About the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation:**

*The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation is a grantmaking organization dedicated primarily to sustained investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two areas reflect Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.’s devotion to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his Buffalo Bills franchise. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson requested that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the Foundation that bears his name. The Foundation has a grantmaking capacity of $1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires January 8, 2035. This structure is consistent with Mr. Wilson’s desire for the Foundation’s impact to be immediate, substantial, measurable and overseen by those who knew him best. For more information visit* [*rcwjrf.org*](http://www.rcwjrf.org/)*.*

**About TechTown Detroit:**

*TechTown is Detroit’s entrepreneurship hub, with a full suite of programs for both tech and neighborhood small businesses. TechTown works with businesses at all stages, helping startup, emerging and established companies develop, launch and grow. For more information, visit* [*techtowndetroit.org*](http://techtowndetroit.org/)*.*

**About Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA):**

*Incorporated in 1990, MNA is a statewide membership organization dedicated to serving the diverse nonprofit sector through advocacy, training, and resources. MNA manages multiple programs and affiliates and is a sponsoring organization for AmeriCorps VISTA. Visit us at* [*mnaonline.org*](http://www.mnaonline.org/)*.*

**About Community Wealth Partners:**

*Established in 1997 by the anti-hunger and anti-poverty nonprofit Share Our Strength, Community Wealth Partners is a social sector consulting firm offering strategy development and implementation, strategic capacity building, community collaboration and network building, and learning and evaluation services to foundations and nonprofits. At Community Wealth Partners, we dream of a world in which all people thrive. To realize this dream, we focus on long-term transformational change and helping our partners take the practical steps to solve social problems at the magnitude at which they exist. Visit us at* [*communitywealth.com*](http://communitywealth.com/)*.*

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