

Co-writer for the [Miracle Foundation's](#) successful grant application to Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center Conference Program (Fall 2018)



### **1. Title of Proposed Conference**

Destination Family: Transforming the Way We Care for Children

### **2. What are the purpose and goal(s) of your conference?**

We are in the midst of a profound paradigm shift in the way the world cares for our displaced children. Around the globe, governments and organizations are withdrawing support from orphanages and redirecting it toward placing children in homes with safe and nurturing families.

For many, this shift originated with the Romania orphanage crisis and the recognition that placing the world's most vulnerable population in the care of institutions can expose them to devastating abuse, with effects that stay with the child for a lifetime. As adults, these kids will be:

- 500x more likely to commit suicide [ii]
- 50x more likely to be in prison
- 10x more likely to be engaged in prostitution

These children are also susceptible to attachment disorders and mental health problems, and lose 10 IQ points on average. Young adults who are raised without a family are more likely to become victims of trafficking and to experience homelessness. Advocacy organizations report that even well-managed orphanages are no substitute for a safe, nurturing family.

Another powerful catalyst for this paradigm shift is the recognition that parents primarily abandon children to institutions because of poverty and disability, not for lack of love. Of the 8 million children living in orphanages around the world, 85% have a living parent who could, with the right support, care for them.

It's a thrilling time for those of us who advocate on behalf of displaced children. If we skillfully navigate this shift, we can eradicate the need for institutionalized care in our lifetime. Already, individual organizations are on the ground implementing the new model ("implementing organizations") in orphan-bearing geographies such as Russia, China, Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Often working with meager resources, these agencies have developed innovative practices by drawing upon local wisdom and experience, and forging strong ties with the surrounding community.

However, there are major challenges to realizing the full and timely potential of this shift. Scaling this new care model calls for all of the stakeholders in the orphan space to work together, especially the implementing organizations. As well-intentioned, passionate and experienced as these organizations are, they've tended to operate in silos. Disconnected from their peers and the mutual exchange of knowledge and best practices, these organizations are constantly having to reinvent the wheel.

The purpose of our Bellagio conference is to unify and align these implementing organizations and create an agreed-upon global strategy to accelerate the paradigm shift already underway. We are prioritizing the attendance of organizations in emerging and developing countries such as Rwanda, Ukraine, Cambodia, India, and Uganda. UNICEF will join us for policy input and government leaders will be invited as well.

Convening as soon as possible to align and agree upon our strategy is critical. More and more governments are calling for an end to institutionalized care, public awareness and support is growing, and the conversation about how we care for displaced children is taking place on the world stage. We must harness this momentum or risk losing the incredible opportunity at hand.

**3. Please explain how this convening fits into your organization's wider agenda of work. Include reference to other relevant convenings, programs, policies, research agendas, or funding commitments. If this convening is part of a series, please explain.**

As an implementing agency, we will be directly impacted by the outcome of our proposed Bellagio conference. Miracle Foundation is committed to a safe, nurturing family for all children by the year 2040, ending the need for orphanages and institutions.

To achieve our goal, we've launched three strategic initiatives:

- Transition orphanages from homes for children to community centers that strengthen families
- Build secondary systems in four states in India in partnership with UNICEF and State Governments
- Build a collaborative of Governments, Nonprofits, Corporates and Stakeholders to end the need for institutional care, in our lifetime.

Our work on the ground includes transitioning orphanages into community programs so children and families can get services without having to be separated. We're also working in collaboration with UNICEF and state governments in India focused on reuniting children with their families and preventing them from entering the orphanage system in the first place.

In August, Miracle Foundation hosted an international gathering that in many ways inspired our proposed Bellagio conference. Out of our growing awareness of the disconnect between our peer organizations, we invited 25 of them (operating in 40 countries) to join us in London for a collective dialogue. Incredibly, this gathering was the first of its kind. It was humbling to be in the presence of these organizations, representing over 600 years of experience in caring for the world's displaced children. Despite differences in methodology and cultural context, we unanimously agreed on the worldwide target of a safe, nurturing family for all children and the end of institutionalized care by 2040.

But this is only a beginning. The Bellagio conference is the next step in translating the agreed upon target into sustainable action guided by a global strategy. By bringing together a representative sample of stakeholders including implementing agencies, care-leavers (children who have left institutionalized care), resource partners, policy makers, funders and strategists, we can map out a path that both honors individual approaches and prioritizes our shared mission of every child in a safe, nurturing home.

**4. Please explain why your organization is best positioned to host this convening in the context of the broader scope of work described above.**

Miracle Foundation is the first implementing agency to call attention to our lack of coordinated leadership, absence of communication among ourselves, and inconsistent messaging to the public, including potential donors. We gained this awareness during our own transition from an organization that supported orphanages, using our franchise methodology based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to one which supports family-based care.

As we retooled ourselves, top to bottom, we came into contact with many of the stakeholders and implementing organizations. We invited them to share both their

successes and challenges with us, and eventually with each other. Our hope was that by introducing our peer organizations to each other, we could work together to accomplish our shared goal of transitioning children from institutions to families.

We kept the momentum alive by hosting the London gathering and now intend to bring this initiative to its full expression with our Bellagio conference. Miracle Foundation is uniquely positioned to do this because we're already in contact with many of the stakeholders; and because we've already begun to model how collaboration and shared messaging might look. In early 2019, we will launch #DestinationFamily, a global awareness and advocacy campaign to raise awareness about this paradigm shift and invite people to pledge that they, like us, stand for every child to be with a safe, nurturing family by 2040. We invited implementing organizations and stakeholders to be a part of this effort and will be joined by UBS Optimus Foundation, Hopeland, Catholic Relief Services, ReThink Orphanages, and Forget Me Not, among others.

**5. Why would you like to host this convening at the Bellagio Center as opposed to an alternate meeting space?**

Many of our stakeholders have done extraordinary work on their own, especially the implementing organizations. Because of their passion, commitment, and laser-focus on the communities they serve, they've managed to have great impact with minimal resources and little or no outside operational or strategic input. However, in order to globally scale this new care model, the implementing organizations must work together, freely sharing ideas and best practices and being open as well to suggestions for change and improvement.

Creating this kind of collaborative exchange will require trust, patience, and mutual generosity. The Bellagio Center offers a unique opportunity for us to begin this process. The remote location, harmonious environment, and absence of outside distractions will encourage our various stakeholders to engage each other in the most human of activities — free and flowing conversation. Our simple commonalities can emerge as together we take in the surrounding natural beauty. From this starting point, trust can arise and relationships can form and deepen.

The success of our global initiative depends entirely on the forging of trusting relationships between our stakeholders. The Bellagio Center offers a transformative space where this process can begin, and where we can recognize each other as powerful allies in our shared goal of a safe, nurturing family for every child and the end of institutionalized care by 2040.

As well, the Bellagio culture inspires courageous and innovative thinking, unconstrained by the limitations of past discussions and “debates.”

**6. Please select the global region that is most relevant to your proposed conference.**

NOTE: This is a drop down menu and you can only pick one.

Global

Expected Outputs and Target Audiences: The evaluation of conference applications takes into account the nature and feasibility of the convening's expected outputs and their target audiences.

**7a. What immediate outputs do you expect to result from your conference? Please select all that apply.**

- Launch of a New Initiative
- Strategic/Organizational Plan
- Grant Proposal

**7b. Please explain the expected outputs selected above.**

Our new initiative will focus on unifying our disparate implementing organizations to accelerate the realization of our shared goal. This includes agreeing upon a global strategy, developing consistent messaging, and sharing ideas and existing best practices.

The Strategic/Organizational Plan will be a global strategy to achieve our collective 2040 goal while giving individual organizations the latitude to implement the strategy within their own local or regional cultural context. We've identified four conditions necessary for achieving our goal:

1. Political will: What leaders and policies do we need to work with?
2. Know-how: We have the know-how in different cultural contexts, but how do we share promising practices with each other?
3. Capacity on the ground: Leveraging and training existing local workforces
4. Money: Analyzing costs and identifying donors

Our grant proposal will include a detailed costing analysis for achieving the four conditions, including organizing the implementing agencies and disseminating the strategy.

**8. Who is the target audience for the outputs of your conference? Please also speak to which audiences, if any, beyond your immediate field/network, that you hope to inform and influence with your conference.**

From USAID to UBS, from Save the Children to J.K. Rowling, Colgate to Unilever, 1000+ individuals, companies, multilateral and aid organizations and NGOs will have an opportunity to participate, get information on next steps and join us as we change history and end the need for orphanages and institutions.

Public awareness will also be an important output as the average person is unaware of the current paradigm shift and the data and theory behind it.

We will also intend to target institutions and orphanages still operating under the old care model. Rather than making them wrong, or labeling them as obsolete, we'd like to create pathways of transformation to the family-based model for those who are willing and able. For the rest, we'd like to offer supportive protocols for closing operations that leave no child behind.

**9. How will the outputs of your conference be disseminated to the target audiences above?**

We will use Workplace, a work collaboration tool powered by Facebook, to present and disseminate our outputs to all stakeholders and keep in touch on our collective progress. We will also continue to use Better Care Network for all our resource information.

In addition, we will organize a series of regional meetings to present and disseminate our outputs into our existing alliances. The meetings will be facilitated by a fundraising manager or staff member. Reaching out to individual global alliances, we'll also host a series of meetings focused on implementation of regional strategies.

**10. Please comment on any longer term outputs you expect to result from this proposed convening.**

Our most significant long-term output will be to put ourselves out of business, which should be the goal of every nonprofit. We are committed to doing this by eradicating the need for institutionalized care for children — in our lifetime.

Secondary long-term outputs will also likely occur from the “trickle-out” effects of empowering families to care for displaced children, such as an increase in wellbeing in the community as whole.

The Center has a strong interest in conference proposals that align with The Rockefeller Foundation's efforts to promote the well-being of humanity, particularly through topics that have a direct impact on the lives of poor and vulnerable populations around the world. These topics include but are not limited to health, economic opportunity and jobs, urban resiliency, food and agriculture, access to clean energy, the field of philanthropy, and innovation for development.

**11a. Please select the topic(s) that most closely align with your proposed conference.**

- Economic Opportunity
- Health
- Innovative Finance

**11b. Please describe how your conference aligns with the topic selected above.**

Poverty and disability are two of the primary drivers of child institutionalization. The Bellagio conference will help us to reorient resources away from expensive institutions that largely harm children, to cost effective programs that strengthen families. (We can serve an estimated 6 to 10 children through family supports for every one in an institution). Our programs are based on detailed case management approaches that are designed to determine the best interests of the child, and to refer children and families to available resources and services. These will typically include household economic strengthening and economic opportunity, along with psycho-social support and health services.

Children with disabilities are, without question, among the most vulnerable of all. Miracle Foundation devotes extensive resources towards assisting this population, which includes comprehensive approaches to address stigma, health needs, inclusive education, parental support, economic opportunity, and other related areas.

We would use the Bellagio conference to discuss innovative financing approaches that can help bring our activities to scale and contribute to this paradigm shift. These, in particular, will include discussions on the possible use of development impact bonds that will provide financing for social objectives based on the achievement of agreed targets. This is a relatively new area of financing that we believe may be attractive given the global scope of our program.

The real engines of change are the implementing agencies. These organizations are storehouses of local knowledge, fluent in the cultural contexts in which they operate, and are licensed by the government. Our final global strategy will mobilize funding partners, resource partners, policy/advocacy partners, and marketing partners to stream resources directly to these agencies. This approach was developed in the U.S. and deployed with great success, resulting the nationwide legalization of same-sex marriage.