



Field Building for Population-Level Change

How funders and practitioners can increase
the odds of success

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	5
Continuing Our Learning Journey.....	7
The Journey to Impact at Scale.....	10
Three Phases of Field Progression.....	10
Five Observable Characteristics	11
The What, When, and How of Field Building.....	17
Key Investments by Phase	17
Lessons Learned on the “How” of Field Building.....	24
Principles in Field Building	27
From Principles to Practice.....	34
Acknowledgments.....	36
Appendix.....	38
Literature scan.....	38

Executive Summary

Funders and practitioners are increasingly acknowledging that scaling individual organizations is insufficient to solve complex, evolving social problems. Achieving population-level change also often requires meaningful, intentional coordination across a field's actors—known as “building the field” to elevate and sustain its collective practice.

Despite this growing agreement, few efforts of this sort are achieving impact at scale. In reality, field-building work is extremely challenging—and not just due to the complexity of social problems and the dynamic context in which field builders operate. A lack of shared understanding about what it takes to advance fields and mismatches between fields' needs and common philanthropic practices are leading factors that thwart such efforts.

The Bridgespan Group spent six months studying the successes and struggles surrounding field building, in hopes of better understanding the chasm that often exists between its potential and its reality. Our research included an extensive literature review, analysis of more than 35 fields, and conversations with over 30 field leaders—all building on our direct experience working with funders and practitioners. This resultant report is intended to help equip all of us who believe that collaboration is key to solving our most pressing social problems with the common language, tools, and mindsets needed to achieve breakthrough results. Since relatively few fields have progressed to impact at scale, we also hope this work expands and emboldens perceptions of what field building is and can achieve.

To start, we define a “field” as a set of individuals and organizations working to address a common social issue or problem, often developing and using a common knowledge base. We define “field building” as the activities or investments that drive a field's progress toward impact at scale. It is important to note that these definitions, and this report, refer exclusively to social change—not other types of “fields,” such as professional practices (e.g., law) or academic study (e.g., political science). Additionally, although there are two distinct methods of building a field's capacity—strengthening organizations or strengthening connections and collaboration—this report is mainly concerned with the latter.

While every field's journey is unique, our research found certain patterns in how fields progress—which can help leaders, researchers, intermediaries, and funders diagnose challenges and opportunities within their fields of focus. Further, although there is no

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foolproof playbook for field building, the specific activities most likely to accelerate a field's trajectory tend to correlate with specific points of its progress.

These activities constitute the *what* of field building. Just as important to success, if not more so, is the *how*. In our conversations with funders and our review of fields that achieved population-level change (or close to it), funders consistently noted that *how* they did the work was a major factor in their success, or lack thereof. One critical dimension is whether the

work is grounded in equity. Our research found that a pitfall of many field-building efforts to date has been the exclusive leadership of a few funders and field leaders instead of inclusive leadership with seats at the table for those closest to the work—to the problem—and likely, to the solution. As John A. Powell (lowercase deliberate), director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, asserts in his theory of targeted universalism, there is no chance of achieving population-level change without designing solutions that serve the most marginalized.¹ Doing so requires that any approach to field building is inclusive of diverse identities and viewpoints.

In these equity-based efforts and more broadly, funders play a critical role in creating the conditions in which all field builders can thrive. Our research surfaced a set of key principles for funders:

- **Take a holistic view:** A big-picture lens that considers all actors in a field, including other funders, as well as related fields, systems, and movements, makes it possible to see connection points with other efforts that could enable or hinder progress.
- **Balance being proactive and being reactive:** Pursuing both efforts that “till the soil” to create conditions for change *and* those that capitalize on ripe “moments in time” unlocks the greatest potential for impact.
- **Problem-solve through inclusive decision making:** Empowering fellow travelers within the field, especially those closest to the problem, to co-lead and co-create solutions enables lasting change.
- **Commit to the long term:** Funding the work over an extended period (often at least a decade) enables the deep relationship building that powers field-based change and allows for the nonlinear progress that defines nearly every field success story.

Our conversations with funders affirmed a widespread desire to lean into these principles. Likewise, practitioners we spoke to viewed them as critical in order for field-building efforts to enhance their work.

However, translating these principles into effective and sustained practice is a challenge because it requires evolving current norms in philanthropy. To that end, we hope this report serves as a launchpad for further reflection and discussion among us all. We look forward to continuing to collaborate in pursuit of our ultimate shared aspiration: a society characterized by equity and justice for all.

¹ John A. Powell, Stephen Menendian and Wendy Ake, *Targeted Universalism: Policy & Practice*, Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, May 8, 2019, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism>.

Introduction

“Efforts in our field are so fragmented that it’s holding back progress. Everyone’s doing their own thing, and it’s not getting us where we need to go. What can we do about it?”

“We see a real need for field building to drive results at a population level. But how can we, as funders, best help make that happen? What should our role be?”

“How did fields that achieved breakthroughs do it? What approaches did they use to strengthen their fields? How did they succeed where we’re struggling?”

Over the past few years, The Bridgespan Group has heard these and other questions in our work across different fields. Funders and practitioners are increasingly acknowledging that scaling individual organizations is insufficient to solve complex, evolving social problems. Achieving population-level change also often requires meaningful, intentional coordination across a field’s actors—known as “building the field” to elevate and sustain its collective practice.

Despite this growing agreement, few efforts of this sort are achieving impact at scale. In reality, field building is extremely challenging—and not just due to the complexity of social problems and the dynamic context in which field builders operate. A lack of shared understanding about what it takes to advance fields and mismatches between fields’ needs and common philanthropic practices are leading factors that thwart such efforts.

How do we overcome these challenges to create fields that get results? What does it take to achieve population-level change? Our research is inspired by, and aims to build on, the vast body of existing literature that thoughtfully addresses these questions.² We studied more than 35 fields (see next page) and interviewed over 30 field leaders—all building on our direct experience working with funders and practitioners. This resultant report is intended to help equip all who believe that collaboration is key to solving our most pressing social problems with the common language, tools, and mindsets needed to achieve breakthrough results. Since relatively few fields have progressed to impact at scale, we also hope this work expands and emboldens perceptions of what field building is and can achieve.

But first, let’s start with some definitions. Debate over the definitions of “field” and “field building” served as an unnecessary distraction during some of our otherwise most meaty discussions in this research effort. In one conversation, a funder who, by our definition, is successfully doing field building in thoughtful and noteworthy ways, recoiled at the use of “field” in relation to his work, noting that his foundation does not use the terms “field” or “field building.” He told us, “I don’t have an allergic reaction to the term ‘field,’ but it dilutes and seems indirect to me because it is such a neutral term.”

Does it matter that this foundation does not consider themselves a field builder even if we would? Not really. What truly matters is what we can learn from their efforts. However, we hope that by establishing a shared language readers will be able to see that definitions

² See [Appendix](#) on page 38 for a selected list of previous publications on this topic.

We researched more than 36 fields

- Adolescent girls in India
- Affordable housing
- Bail reform
- Black male achievement
- Childhood obesity prevention
- Climate adaptation
- Climate change
- Climate mitigation
- Conflict resolution
- CPR
- Creative place-making
- Criminal justice reform
- Democracy
- Early childhood
- Eliminating capital punishment
- Environment
- Environmental conservation
- Food security
- Homelessness alleviation
- Hospice and palliative care
- Impact investing
- Linked learning
- Malaria eradication
- Marriage equality
- Microfinance
- Opportunity youth
- Polio eradication
- Public libraries
- Seatbelt usage
- Service learning
- Tobacco cessation
- Unintended teen pregnancy prevention
- Violence against women and girls prevention in India
- Whole child education
- Whole child pediatric care
- Women in technology

Note: Unless otherwise noted, research focused on the United States.

Source: The Bridgespan Group

should not be gatekeepers but instead are simply the beginning of the journey for all those who are interested in taking the ride. That is how we get further faster.

Therefore, we have developed working definitions of “field” and “field building” that derive from those used in existing literature, our conversations with leaders, and our experience working with funders and practitioners.

*A **field** is a set of individuals and organizations working to address a common social issue or problem, often developing and using a common knowledge base.*

An important distinction about this definition of a field is its emphasis on social change. While other conceptions focus on professional practices (e.g., medicine, law) or academic study (e.g., biology, political science), this report centers on fields that aspire to address complex social problems. From tobacco cessation, to unintended teen pregnancy prevention, to bail reform, to climate adaptation, to early childhood, fields function as ecosystems that encompass a range of actors and activities. As such, fields can create impact at scale in ways that scaling individual organizations or solutions often cannot.

Field building is the activities or investments that unlock a field's progress toward greater impact at scale.

In this definition, field builders work to enable a field's actors to co-design and pursue a field-level agenda. Note that a common usage of the term "field building" refers to strengthening individual organizations within the field; this report is primarily concerned with efforts to *strengthen connections and collaboration* across organizations.

Bridgespan highlighted a segment of field builders, we called "field catalysts," which do this work particularly well, in a 2018 *Stanford Social Innovation Review* article titled "How Field Catalysts Galvanize Social Change."³ The research revealed how these behind-the-scenes intermediaries help "multiple actors achieve a shared, sweeping goal." One field catalyst, Freedom to Marry, in 2005 led the development of a strategic road map for achieving nationwide marriage for same-sex couples within 15 to 25 years. Another, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, was born in 1995, and by 1997, the youth cigarette smoking rate began a steady decline from 36 percent⁴ to 8 percent in 2018.⁵ By maintaining a field-level lens, and persisting in forging consensus about the field's direction, these field builders catalyzed population-level change (or close to it). This report seeks to build on our prior research and address the broad set of organizations, individuals, and funders committed to field building.

Continuing Our Learning Journey

In 2009, Bridgespan joined forces with the James Irvine Foundation to publish *The Strong Field Framework: A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Nonprofits Committed to Large-Scale Impact*, which offered an approach to assessing the strengths and needs of a field.⁶ This report builds on that work, with a more recent literature and case study review as well as 10 more years of experience working alongside deeply engaged funders and practitioners.

As our data set of fields and field-building efforts has expanded, so too has our understanding of fields and their intricacies. Fields fall into two categories: those that are focused on a specific problem (e.g., achieving universal access to high-quality pre-kindergarten) and those focused on broad issue areas (e.g., early childhood). Despite the clear differences between specific problems and broad issue areas, both are still considered fields. An important consideration is that problem-based fields often overlap with others that reside within the same issue area. For example, the field of bail reform overlaps with sentencing reform and police reform, all of which reside within the broader field of criminal justice reform (see accompanying graphic).

3 Taz Hussein, Matt Plummer, and Bill Breen, "How Field Catalysts Galvanize Social Change," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2018, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/field_catalysts.

4 Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, "New Survey Shows U.S. Youth Smoking Rates Fell to Record Low in 2013," Press Release, June 12, 2014, https://www.tobaccofreekids.org/press-releases/2014_06_12_cdc.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Fast Facts and Fact Sheets: Youth and Tobacco Use," https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm.

6 *The Strong Field Framework: A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Nonprofits Committed to Large-Scale Impact*, The Bridgespan Group, July 8, 2009, <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/philanthropy/the-strong-field-framework-a-guide-and-toolkit-for>.

Example of nested and overlapping fields



Source: The Bridgespan Group

The work of field building requires advancing both types of fields. Janet Froetscher, president of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation (which does extensive field-building work in early childhood), warns, “If you don’t focus on the bigger issue piece, you end up with the problem-based fields fighting against each other.” For instance, without raising more public funding for general early childhood support, organizations working in the various related problem-based fields, such as achieving universal access to pre-kindergarten or improving home-based childcare, may end up competing for scarce resources.

Whether the field is broad or specific, its boundaries should always be porous; it must be able to adapt to changing priorities, funding, and other external factors. Actors may enter or leave a field at any time, and linkages with other fields may develop or disappear. Take early childhood, where some funders and field leaders are meeting regularly to identify solutions for implementing high-quality kindergarten readiness programs at national scale. In addition, smaller groups are convening to focus on specific issues, such as the workforce for early childhood needs, pediatric support for parents, and home-based childcare. The entire field is demonstrating a multifaceted and flexible approach to different needs, and so its collective work has evolved, grown, and thrived—instead of getting stuck.

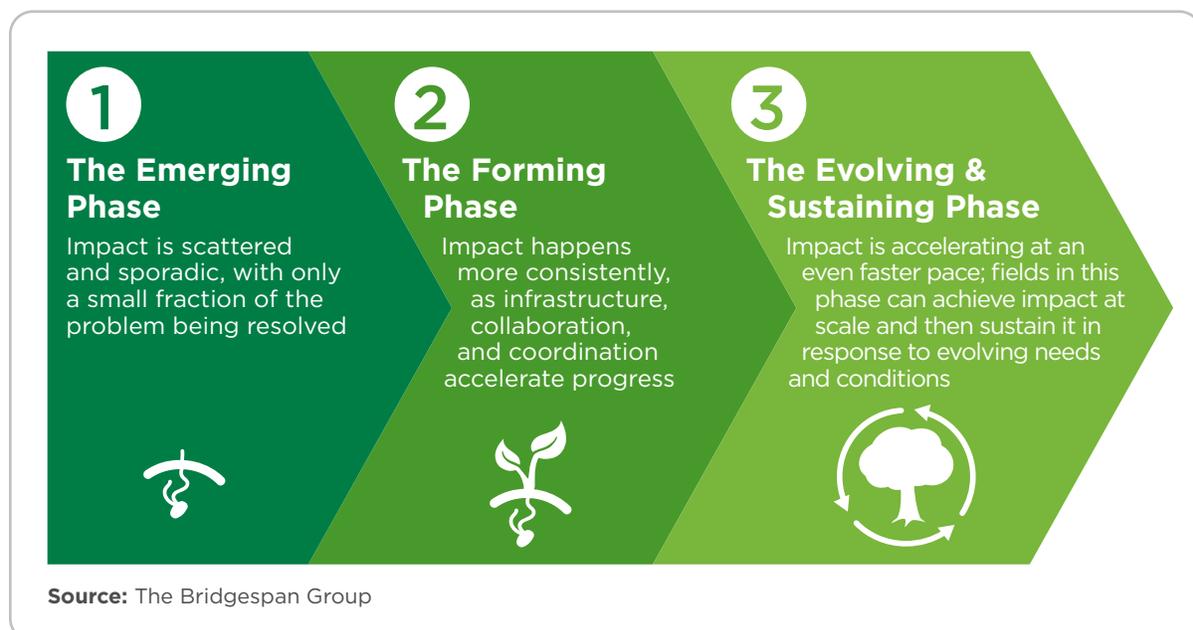
“The most effective tables are the ones that are not airtight. As issues evolve you need to be able to flex and expand,” explains Meera Mani, director of the Children, Families, and Communities Program at The David and Lucile Packard Foundation. Pritzker’s Froetscher adds: “It is impossible to impact a field with just one table. Sometimes you can have multiple tables set at narrower issues and then people from each of those tables come together and coordinate.”

The Journey to Impact at Scale

Fields are so varied and intricate, and their work and progress is so rarely linear, that skepticism toward drawing out parallels is understandable (i.e., if you've seen one field, well, you've *only* seen one field). If that were true, advancing the social sector's ability to build fields would seem an almost Herculean task. Fortunately, it's not true. In fact, our research found far more commonalities than we anticipated. In studying a wide range of fields, we observed several patterns in how they progress toward achieving impact at scale. While every field's journey is unique, certain universal practices can guide all types of field builders to success.

Three Phases of Field Progression

Our research builds on existing observations that fields evolve over time, and suggests that a field's progression happens in **three distinct phases** on its path to population-level change:



It is important to note that these phases of progression are not bound by time frames. Efforts have been underway for decades or more in several fields that remain in the Emerging Phase. Furthermore, the rate and direction of a field's progression are not entirely within field builders' influence, as the conditions in which the fields and field builders operate are often variable.

Take the sociopolitical environment, for instance, which can serve as either a positive or negative force. The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) notes in its *Smashing Silos in Philanthropy* report that "moving the needle and 'winning' in any field of interest must account for the social, cultural, and policy environment in which it is situated."⁷ In the case of the bail reform field, the Black Lives Matter movement has

7 Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski, *Smashing Silos in Philanthropy: Multi-Issue Advocacy and Organizing for Real Results*, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, November 2013, https://bjn9t2Ihlni2dhd5hvym7ljj-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Smashing_Silos_in_Philanthropy_Multi-Issue_Advocacy_and_Organizing_for_Real_Results.pdf.

brought public attention to the injustices of the money bond system, and propelled the field forward.

Another factor is the state of broader or connected fields. Take service learning, an education field in which community service complements classroom learning. Currently in the Evolving and Sustaining Phase, this field sprang from collaboration between youth education and community service practitioners. The field took advantage of the infrastructure and relationships already involved in its “parent” fields to scale its impact more quickly.⁸

Additionally, we found that taking an equity lens—regarding both racial equity and equity more broadly—and engaging proximate actors (i.e., those closest to the issue or problem at hand) is critical to progressing to population-level change. (We use the NCRP’s adapted definition of an equity lens: “a proactive, strategic approach to improving outcomes that accounts for structural differences in opportunities, burdens, and needs in order to advance targeted solutions that fulfill the promise of true equality for all.”⁹)

We consistently saw insufficient focus on equity holding back the progression of fields—per the voices of experts and actors engaged in those fields. For instance, an assessment of the climate adaptation field conducted for the Kresge Foundation notes that “while there is growing awareness of the disproportionate impact of climate change on the most vulnerable—and the need for equitable solutions—few adaptation actors understand how to incorporate equity into their work.”¹⁰ In the social and emotional learning (SEL) field, there has been criticism that some educators erroneously perceive SEL competencies as qualities that need to be “fixed” in students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. Actors in the field are now seeking to make explicit the intersection of SEL and equity.

Even the fields that are closest to impact at scale, like palliative care or unintended teen pregnancy prevention, have not yet achieved equitable results across race and other identity markers. Given that relatively few of the fields we studied have progressed to the Evolving and Sustaining Phase, there is still much more to learn about achieving equitable outcomes.

To help you diagnose the current state of your field of interest, we have created a tool as a companion to this report, which can be found at www.bridgespan.org/field-building-for-population-level-change.

Five Observable Characteristics

What, then, are the markers of progress across the three phases? Drawing from existing literature, our research shows that most fields share five observable characteristics that, individually and collectively, advance alongside the three phases to enable impact at scale: knowledge base, actors, field-level agenda, infrastructure, and resources. These characteristics serve as the foundation for the field and can mature with the right investment and support.

8 Lucy Bernholz, Stephanie Linden Seale, and Tony Wang, *Building to Last: Field Building as Philanthropic Strategy*, Blueprint Research + Design, Inc, 2009, <https://www.scribd.com/document/26742690/Building-to-Last>.

9 National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, *Power Moves: Your essential philanthropy assessment guide for equity and justice*, May 2018, <http://www.ncrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Power-Moves-Philanthropy.pdf>. NCRP sourced this definition from OpenSource Leadership Strategies and CHANGE Philanthropy.

10 Susanne C. Moser, Joyce Coffee, and Aleka Seville, *Rising to the Challenge, Together*, The Kresge Foundation, December 2017, <https://kresge.org/content/rising-challenge-together>.

Knowledge Base

Existing literature, including *The Strong Field Framework*, affirms the importance of a credible knowledge base. A field's knowledge base is the evolving body of academic and practical research that helps actors better understand the magnitude of the issues at hand, and identifies and analyzes shared barriers. In issue area-focused fields, the knowledge base also draws connections between problem-focused fields that reside within it.

As a field's knowledge base grows and incorporates an increasingly diverse set of viewpoints, it provides the data and information needed to design, implement, and adapt effective approaches. The knowledge base also serves as a common reference point for the field's actors, helping to harmonize their efforts. Critically, a field's knowledge base is never static but rather constantly evolving in response to changing conditions.

Actors

A field's actors are the individuals and organizations that together help the field develop the shared identity and vision that are required to achieve impact at scale. In issue area-based fields, the shared identity is typically looser. For example, the early childhood field's actors are broadly committed to kindergarten readiness, but are pursuing it with a wide variety of approaches.

In studying fields across the three phases of development, we observed that actors in more advanced fields were more heterogeneous. In particular, leadership from, and authentic engagement with, actors "closest to the ground" was a common ingredient. This term could refer to either the people who are most affected by the social problem or the direct-service practitioners working to alleviate it (including those trying to serve historically marginalized populations more effectively). These individuals, and the organizations closest to them, provide a distinct and necessary vantage point on the problem and are likely to have breakthrough ideas on solutions. Generally speaking, a diversity of actors playing distinct and complementary roles (e.g., research, policy, practice, intermediation, funding) is necessary for field-building efforts to drive change.

Field-level agenda

The "agenda" collectively refers to the most critical approaches that field actors will pursue to address barriers and develop adaptive solutions. These approaches are varied yet complementary, and bound by an overarching strategy that the field's actors co-create to guide progress. For issue area-based fields, the field-level agenda is typically looser and focused on shared barriers. Regardless of the field's type, the field-level agenda should be adaptive and responsive to lessons learned over time and the dynamic conditions within and surrounding social change fields.

In early-stage fields, isolated and sporadic experiments in point-based solutions dominate the agenda. At later stages, these efforts become more focused and coordinated. Continually adapting the field-level agenda in response to changing external conditions is key to progressing toward impact at scale.

Additionally, equity is borne out in the ways in which fields co-create the field-level agendas. Integrating the voices of those closest to the problem into barrier identification and solution development *from early on* is critical to achieving population-level change.

Infrastructure

Field infrastructure is “connective tissue” that strengthens each of the other four field characteristics as well as the complementarity between them. Infrastructure exponentially enhances the efforts of actors in the field by making them more coordinated, connected, and effective. Entities involved in infrastructure perform a variety of roles, including: fortifying the knowledge base with information on scaling best practices,¹¹ providing technical assistance to fill critical needs for the field’s organizations, hosting convenings to build a shared identity and accelerate learning among the field’s actors, and creating regranteeing entities to pool funds for the field. In issue area-based fields, the infrastructure loosely connects the various related problem-based fields.

Field infrastructure must also be responsive to changing conditions. It tends to become more formalized as fields progress (e.g., ad hoc gatherings may become structured convenings). It remains beneficial even in the Evolving and Sustaining Phase, in case any factors that have enabled success suddenly change. At each phase, it is critical to note who has access to field-level infrastructure and who does not, in order to ensure equity in the work and in the impact achieved.

We observed that intermediaries most often provided the field’s infrastructure. These intermediaries could be catalysts working behind the scenes to quietly influence and augment the fields’ efforts,¹² or capability specialists focusing on filling a singular gap.¹³ Sometimes these intermediary organizations are created for short-term support and meant to disappear (such as Freedom to Marry in marriage equality) while others are designed to remain (Power to Decide in unintended teen pregnancy prevention), and evolve as the field develops and grows. In some cases, funders lead infrastructure efforts, such as by hosting convenings for their grantees or the field’s actors more broadly. Funder collaboratives also often play key infrastructure roles by pooling resources (financial and others) to support individual actors or to build capacity more generally in service of the field-level agenda.¹⁴

Resources

Resources may be financial capital or nonfinancial support, such as facilitating introductions between funders and organizations. Both forms are necessary during all phases to support the organizations doing the work and engender conditions for them to be most effective. In particular, funders need to ensure that leaders of color and other proximate actors are equitably resourced, given their disproportionate barriers to capital.¹⁵ Indeed, the distribution of resources, financial and otherwise, indicates the extent to which equity is embedded in the field’s other four characteristics.

11 Jeff Bradach, Emma Park, and Rayshawn Whitford, “Platforms for Scalable Learning in the Social Sector,” The Bridgespan Group, May 10, 2018, <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/transformative-scale/platforms-for-scalable-learning>.

12 Hussein, Plummer, and Breen, “Field Catalysts.”

13 Bradach, Park, and Whitford, “Platforms for Scalable Learning.”

14 Alison Powell and Susan Wolf Ditkoff, *Are Funder Collaboratives Valuable? A Research Study*, The Bridgespan Group, July 2019, <https://bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/value-of-collaboration-study-2019/bridgespan-2019-value-of-philanthropic-collaboration-research-study.pdf>.

15 Sean Thomas-Breitfeld and Frances Kunreuther, *Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap*, 2017, <https://racetolead.org/race-to-lead/>.

The exhibit below illustrates the progression of these characteristics in the unintended teen pregnancy prevention field.

Example: Unintended teen pregnancy prevention in the United States

	1 Emerging Pre-1996	2 Forming 1996-2015	3 Evolving and Sustaining 2016-Present
Impact	After increasing steeply in the mid- and late 1980s (e.g., teen birth rates increased nearly 25% between 1987 and 1991), the US teen pregnancy rate peaks at 11.7% in 1990 (117 pregnancies per 1,000 females ages 15-19). ^{i, ii}	The US teen pregnancy rate declines by 63% from 1990-2013, plummeting to 43 pregnancies per 1,000 females ages 15-19. The teen pregnancy rate declined in all 50 states and among all population groups regardless of age, marital status, race, or ethnicity, but declines are uneven among groups. ⁱⁱⁱ	The US teen birth rate continues to decline. In 2017, there were 18.8 births per 1,000 females ages 15-19—down 7% from 2016 (and 70% from its 1991 peak of 61.8). Although declines continue among all racial/ethnic groups, disparities remain by race, income, and location. ^{iv}
Knowledge base	Limited research shows the US experiences higher teen pregnancy rates than other developed countries. However, unintended teen pregnancy is not yet conceptualized as a problem that would benefit from social policy intervention. ^v In 1995, President Clinton describes teen pregnancy as the country’s “most serious social problem.” ^{vi}	Researchers analyze barriers to reducing unintended teen pregnancy rates (e.g., lack of access to information and contraceptives). Research links unintended teen pregnancy declines to increased use of contraception, decline in non-use, and delayed onset of sexual activity. Subsequent research questions the effect of delaying sex and instead emphasizes contraceptive use.	Knowledge continues to deepen and evolve, particularly on persistent disparities across racial groups and recognition that unintended pregnancy rates remain highest among teens aged 18-19 and women in their 20s. There is increasing recognition of the role of inequality in access to quality sexual health information and contraceptive services. Research highlights the benefits of girls having visible pathways to succeed beyond motherhood and of other social influences. Researchers explore how changing social norms and even the overall economy may also be contributing to progress.
Actors	Some actors within the broader reproductive health field do work that touches on unintended teen pregnancy prevention, but they do not have a sense of shared identity given that unintended teen pregnancy is not yet seen as a problem to address.	Clinton-era “Third Way” momentum drives conservative and liberal interest in unintended teen pregnancy prevention, drawing in political actors. In addition to existing actors, the field grows to include new actors as well; some focus on narrative change (MTV’s 16 and Pregnant), advocacy (ACLU), services (Planned Parenthood), and/or intermediary work (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy).	The field’s actors continue to work together to maintain and potentially further reduce the unintended teen pregnancy rate by increasing access to quality contraceptive services and information. Increased focus on communities of color is engaging actors who are more broadly focused on issues of race and social mobility.

	1 Emerging Pre-1996	2 Forming 1996-2015	3 Evolving and Sustaining 2016-Present
Field-level agenda	<p>The primary approaches in place are direct services, specifically providing sex education and access to contraceptives. Reproductive health groups lead these efforts, focusing not on unintended teen pregnancy but broader health issues (e.g., STDs).</p>	<p>Moving beyond abstinence-only education, The National Campaign launches in 1996 with a numerical goal for reducing the nation’s teen pregnancy rate and adopts a two-part, non-partisan strategy: (1) coordinating a grassroots movement with young people and (2) working through the entertainment media, faith communities, and other channels to influence social values. It convenes stakeholders, works to expand partnerships with those groups not necessarily focused on unintended pregnancy, and fills gaps for specific populations (e.g., joining with NCLR to launch an initiative in the Latinx community).^{vii}</p>	<p>The field’s agenda has been adapting to the changing political landscape that has threatened access to reproductive health care, counseling, and contraceptives. Actors receiving funding from the government-funded Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program have filed successful lawsuits to reverse sudden cuts in federal funding. There is intensified effort to preserve and protect contraceptive access and to support agency and consent for young people.</p>
Infrastructure	<p>Collaboration among actors occurs within the boundaries and through the channels of existing reproductive health organizations.</p>	<p>Intermediaries (most notably The National Campaign) play a key role in strengthening the field’s “connective tissue” by convening actors, publishing research, sharing knowledge, and building organizations’ capacity to scale. In 2005, The National Campaign expands its mission beyond teens to focus on unintended pregnancy more broadly.</p>	<p>Intermediaries continue to play critical roles as the field evolves and is forced to adapt to the changing political context. Funders are also playing a convening role in response to the changing context. Private philanthropy begins investing more heavily in protecting access to abortion rather than prevention given direct challenges to abortion access.</p>
Resources	<p>Public and private funding flows to reproductive health. The federal Adolescent Family Life program focuses on services for adolescent parents rather than pregnancy prevention.^{viii}</p>	<p>The field depends primarily on a mix of private and institutional philanthropy and, to a lesser extent, public funding to support its work. In 2010, Congress authorizes federal Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program and Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP), increasing public funding available to states, communities, and groups.^{ix}</p>	<p>Private and public funders continue to fund the field’s suite of approaches.^x However, public funding has become increasingly unpredictable given the political climate. The federal government is seeking to cut funding for the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program.^{xi} Litigants are ultimately successful in protecting funding for the program.</p>

Notes

- i Kathryn Kost and Stanley Henshaw, *U.S. Teenage Pregnancies, Births and Abortions, 2010: National and State Trends by Age, Race, and Ethnicity*, Guttmacher Institute, May 2014.
- ii Child Trends, “Key facts about teen births,” <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/teen-births>.
- iii Heather D. Boonstra, “Teen Pregnancy: Trends and Lessons Learned,” *Guttmacher Policy Review* 5, no. 1, (February 2002) <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2002/02/teen-pregnancy-trends-and-lessons-learned>.
- iv U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, “Teen Pregnancy and Childbearing,” <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/reproductive-health-and-teen-pregnancy/teen-pregnancy-and-childbearing/index.html>.
- v Ibid.; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, “2015 Annual Report,” <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/resource-library/2015-power-decide-annual-report>; Power to Decide, “Policy Brief: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Teen Pregnancy,” https://web.archive.org/web/20081029001746/http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/policymakers/PDF/Briefly_PolicyBrief_RacialEthnicDisparities.pdf; Power to Decide, “National Data,” <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/national-state-data/national>; Power to Decide, “Progress Pays Off,” <https://powertodecide.org/sites/default/files/media/savings-fact-sheet-national.pdf>.
- vi Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “National Campaign Helps Reduce the Rate of Teen Pregnancy by One-Third in 10 Years,” 2009, <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2009/02/national-campaign-helps-reduce-the-rate-of-teen-pregnancy-by-one.html>.
- vii Bedsider, “About Us,” https://www.bedsider.org/about_us; IDEO, “Building a Birth Control Support Network for Women,” <https://www.ideo.com/case-study/building-a-birth-control-support-network-for-women>; Power to Decide, “2017 Annual Report.”
- viii Guttmacher Institute, “Whatever Happened to the Adolescent Family Life Act?” 1998, <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/1998/04/whatever-happened-adolescent-family-life-act>.
- ix Personal Responsibility Education Program, *Launching a Nationwide Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Effort*, 2013, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/prep_eval_design_survey_report_102213.pdf.
- x Power to Decide, “Government Spending Budget Chart,” <https://powertodecide.org/what-we-do/information/resource-library/budget-chart>; Power to Decide, “Funders,” <https://powertodecide.org/about-us/funders>.
- xi Democracy Forward, “One Year of Successful Battles to Protect the TPP Program Against Trump Administration Unlawful Actions; Fight Remain as Administration Continues to Assault on Evidence,” <https://democracyforward.org/press/trump-administration-continues-unlawful-effort-to-dismantle-the-evidence-based-teen-pregnancy-prevention-program/>.

Overall, our research supports existing literature that suggests these five characteristics are interdependent,¹⁶ with the field’s resources and infrastructure enabling its knowledge base, actors, and field-level agenda. We also found that the characteristics evolve at roughly the same rate, and within fields that are achieving and sustaining impact at scale, reach clear points of maturity:

- A robust and evolving knowledge base
- Heterogeneous yet complementary set of actors with a shared identity
- A clear yet dynamic field-level agenda
- Adaptive infrastructure
- Sustainable and sufficient resources

16 Moser, Coffee, and Seville, *Rising to the Challenge, Together*.

The What, When, and How of Field Building

Our research uncovered patterns in the investments that funders make during each phase and how they aid the work of field building. Though the timing of investments matters, their efficacy hinges on funders' approaches and mindsets in engaging with practitioners and peer institutions.

We'd be remiss if we did not mention that the first step in investing right in field building is investing at all. The Bridgespan Group's recent in-depth study of funder collaboratives found that field-building efforts are one of the most valuable investments funders can make, but historically such efforts are the least funded.¹⁷ And, our 2017 study of philanthropic "big bets" found that field-building efforts received only 7 percent of gifts over \$10 million by US donors—and then, we defined field building much more broadly than in this report.¹⁸ Simply put, these efforts require significantly more money if they are to achieve anything close to their potential.

Key Investments by Phase

Although no standard playbook exists for field building, certain types of investments are common. While an investment at the right time can accelerate a field's trajectory, the inverse is true as well: failing to invest, or investing at the wrong time, can stunt progress. We found a number of field-building investments that should have been successful—such as backing a field catalyst—but still saw no significant results. Our research suggests that these efforts struggled because the fields were not yet equipped to handle the new investment.

Below, we capture key investments that funders can make by phase. This list is not intended to be comprehensive; rather, it offers a starting point for funders and field builders as they consider how they might advance the fields they care about.

Emerging Fields

Powerful ways to jumpstart an emerging field include: funding research, investing in leadership development, funding a wide range of solutions, and supporting coordination among related actors.

Fund research

Data on the magnitude of a problem and the effectiveness of approaches to address it can help anchor an emerging field. For instance, in the early childhood field, primary research in neuroscience and behavior indicated that a child's earliest years laid the foundation for educational achievement, economic productivity, and lifelong health.¹⁹ Subsequent

17 Powell and Ditkoff, *Funder Collaboratives*.

18 William Foster, Gail Perreault, and Elise Tosun, "Ten Ways to Make a Big Bet on Social Change," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, May 10, 2017, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/ten_ways_to_make_a_big_bet_on_social_change.

19 Pritzker Children's Initiative and The Bridgespan Group, *Achieving Kindergarten Readiness for All Our Children: A Funder's Guide to Early Childhood Development from Birth to Five*, 2015, <https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/images/articles/achieving-kindergarten-readiness/early-childhood-funder-guide-2015.pdf?ext=.pdf>.

research illuminated the magnitude of the problem, drawing attention to the millions of children across the United States who are estimated to not be ready for kindergarten.²⁰

The research also highlighted the long-term educational and economic repercussions a lack of readiness for kindergarten has on people’s lives. Janet Froetscher, president

of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Foundation, emphasizes the importance of this research: “The earlier reports on the importance of early childhood helped us understand why early childhood interventions matter in the short and longer term. The next step is getting clear on what works, for whom, and at scale.” Among other fields we examined that have achieved impact at significant scale—palliative care, conflict resolution, unintended teen pregnancy prevention, tobacco cessation—all were rooted in a shared understanding of the magnitude of the problem.

“The next step is getting clear on what works, for whom, and at scale.”

JANET FROETSCHER, PRESIDENT,
J.B. AND M.K. PRITZKER FOUNDATION

Invest in leadership development

Our conversations with practitioners and field builders suggest that investing early in both seasoned and emerging leaders is critical to the development of early-stage fields. In the Emerging Phase, cultivating leaders with diverse backgrounds and perspectives is essential, yet our research found that many fields have not done so, and have consequently slowed their own progress.

Matt Armsby, vice president of the Resources Legacy Fund (RLF), has seen this oversight play out in environmental fields, noting, “One of the challenges with environmental work is that the problems are sometimes only defined by funders or practitioners that do not represent a diversity of communities, experiences, or interests.” As a result, despite their best intentions, funders’ efforts fall short of benefiting the communities that are most affected by environmental problems. RLF works to address this discrepancy. In the climate adaptation field, it has “sought to elevate the voices of those most impacted by climate change yet historically not at the table to shape the field’s understanding of the problems and develop solutions to address them,” explains RLF Program Officer Alfredo Gonzalez.

Similarly, The Kresge Foundation’s Climate Change, Health, and Equity initiative makes strengthening community-based leadership a core priority, noting that “the most effective solutions are designed and implemented by those who know their communities best.”²¹ In the domestic violence field, the Blue Shield of California Foundation has invested in field leaders through cohort learning and capacity building programs, including a six-month “Reimagine Lab” that brought together 16 fellows representing a diverse set of experiences, identities, and vantage points. According to a report on the Lab, the fellows came together “to creatively explore what experiments and risks need to be seeded now to allow for this vision of a better future.”²²

20 Pritzker’s Children’s Initiative and The Bridgespan Group, *Achieving Kindergarten Readiness*.

21 “Climate Change, Health & Equity,” Kresge Foundation, <https://kresge.org/CCHE>.

22 *Reimagine Lab: Accelerating Ideas to Action to Prevent Family & Domestic Violence in California*, Gobee Group for the Blue Shield of California Foundation, January 2019, https://blueshieldcafoundation.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloadable/ReimagineLabFinalReport_Final.pdf.

Fund a wide range of solutions

Funding a variety of leaders to advance a wide range of point-based solutions—such as direct services, advocacy efforts, and education—accelerates learning about what works and holds the promise of working at scale. Common investments may include supporting an organization’s strategy development process, or providing growth capital to take its work to multiple sites.

Consider the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s (RWJF) work in the tobacco cessation field. When the Center for Public Policy Program Evaluation examined RWJF’s tobacco campaigns, it found that the foundation’s most successful investments included a range of diverse actions—deep policy research and advocacy, strategic communications, program development and assessment, leadership development, incorporation into academic research and curriculum, organizational capacity building, coalition-building and collaboration, mobilization, and long-term funding.^{23, 24} The Center’s report notes that RWJF’s “combination of tactics was as important as, if not more important than, individual tactics.”²⁵

As with all facets of field-building work, it is important to source and evaluate solutions with a focus on equity. For instance, when The Kresge Foundation sought new methodologies for climate resilience and planning that would directly benefit low-income communities, it developed the Climate Resilience and Urban Opportunity initiative to fund community-based nonprofits with deep roots in low-income communities in US cities.²⁶ Lois DeBacker, managing director of Kresge’s Environment program, notes, “Universal climate-resilience goals will not be met without targeted strategies to address the unique circumstances of low-income communities and vulnerable populations. We see a need to expand the cohort of individuals and organizations that approach climate-resilience work with a strong grounding in the experiences and interests of low-income communities.”²⁷

Support coordination among related actors

Connecting actors who are doing similar or related work—through convenings, introductions, investments, or programs—can help create a shared identity. For example, the Heising-Simons Foundation, RWJF, and the Pritzker Children’s Initiative support the Ounce of Prevention Fund in running the National Home Visiting Summit, which brings together systems leaders, researchers, practitioners, policy advocates, and others in the home visiting field.²⁸ Participants share knowledge about ways to increase service quality and improve child and family outcomes. Likewise, in the emerging field of whole child pediatric care, the funder collaborative Pediatrics Supporting Parents provided joint grants to researchers and practitioners, in order to conduct pilots that clarify what practices can support the integration of “whole child” care into pediatric visits for young children.

23 Janice Petrovich, *Building and Supporting Sustainable Fields: Views from Philanthropy*, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, July 2013, <https://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/reports/2013/rwjf407225>.

24 *The Tobacco Campaigns of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Collaborations, 1991-2010*, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, April 2011, <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2011/04/the-tobacco-campaigns-.html>.

25 Ibid.

26 “Climate Resilience and Urban Opportunity,” The Kresge Foundation, <https://kresge.org/content/climate-resilience-and-urban-opportunity-0>.

27 *Pathways to Greater Resilience: Transforming Cities in a Changing Climate*, The Kresge Foundation, January 2015, <https://kresge.org/sites/default/files/Pathways-to-resilience-2015.pdf>.

28 The Ounce of Prevention Fund, <https://www.theounce.org/>.

Forming Fields

In the Forming Phase, funders can help fields progress in ways such as: supporting field-level agenda development, investing in supportive infrastructure, and mobilizing peer funders.

Support field-level agenda development

The Forming Phase is the time to support field leaders as they develop a field-level agenda. Take marriage equality: in 2004, voters passed 13 state bans on same-sex marriage, a devastating blow that sowed fear and dismay among advocates. Some organizations questioned whether the time was still right to fight for marriage equality. In 2005, the Gill Foundation and the Haas Jr. Fund convened 26 leaders of LGBTQ organizations to assess whether a critical mass would recommit to the field's strategy. Funders of the movement watched as its leaders stood by their ambition to attain marriage equality nationwide within 15 to 25 years, and produced a report (*Winning Marriage: What We Need to Do*)²⁹ outlining a clear roadmap for the field to get there.³⁰ The Proteus Fund's retrospective *Hearts and Minds* study noted that "most everyone in the room believed that if everyone present, including the funders, did not collaborate on a deep level and come up with a common game plan, marriage equality was not likely to advance much further."³¹ As part of the convening, "there was also an explicit understanding that if the movement coalesced around a shared strategy, foundations would provide resources to implement it."³²

Invest in supportive infrastructure

It is also necessary at this stage to invest in formalized infrastructure—typically intermediary-driven—to help institutionalize connections and support. In the impact investing field, the Rockefeller Foundation developed the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN), a membership organization that aims to strengthen and grow the field by providing "information, tools, and networks."³³ Since its founding, GIIN has helped define the concept of impact investing, and has been integral to building its infrastructure, most notably by developing the Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (GIIN's catalog of generally accepted impact investing metrics) and ImpactBase (an online database of impact investment funds and products).³⁴ The GIIN network, which has grown to support its 280 members across 41 countries in 2018, continues to draw others into the space, including leading corporations, foundations, and nonprofit funds.³⁵ All of these efforts helped lay the groundwork for impact investing's expansion from \$2.5 billion in 2010 to an estimated \$12.2 billion in 2015.³⁶

29 Freedom to Marry Working Group, "Winning Marriage: What We Need To Do," July 21, 2005, [https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/ftm-assets/ftm/archive/files/images/Final_Marriage_Concept_Paper-revised_\(1\).pdf](https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/ftm-assets/ftm/archive/files/images/Final_Marriage_Concept_Paper-revised_(1).pdf).

30 Hussein, Plummer, and Breen, "Field Catalysts."

31 David Lewis, *Hearts and Minds: The Untold Story of How Philanthropy and The Civil Marriage Collaborative Helped America Embrace Marriage Equality*, Proteus Fund, November 2015, <https://www.proteusfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Hearts-and-Minds-CMC-Publication.pdf>.

32 Ibid.

33 "Building an Impact Practice," Global Impact Investing Network, <https://thegiin.org/tools/>.

34 Ibid.

35 MacArthur Foundation website profile of grantee Global Impact Investing Network, <https://www.macfound.org/grantees/9160/>.

36 Nidhi Sahni, Elena Matsui, and Lauren Hult, "When Building a Field Requires Building a New Organization," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, May 26, 2017, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/when_building_a_field_requires_building_a_new_organization.

Field intermediaries like GIIN require reliable funding to perform their roles effectively. Ginny Ehrlich is CEO of Power to Decide, an intermediary in the unintended teenage pregnancy prevention field. She connects the need for consistent funding with the “backbone,” or vital role, that intermediaries play in supporting the entire field: “This is not quick work, and it’s ongoing. No one lives well without a backbone over time. I think by definition, ‘backbone’ organizations need to outlive funding cycles.”

However, the experiences of many field intermediaries indicate that securing such financial support is a major challenge because funder grantmaking processes and criteria often misalign with the nature of intermediaries’ work. Rosanne Haggerty, president and CEO of the field catalyst Community Solutions, describes the dynamic: “We have played a catalytic role in getting hundreds of communities to engage with great results in the issue of homelessness. Most funders, though, do not understand these types of strategies and the crucial role various kinds of intermediaries play. We aren’t ‘unneeded infrastructure’ in the field...rather ‘but for’ [intermediary] institutions we wouldn’t see the changes we do.”

Mobilize peer funders

Engaging peer funders can not only attract more capital, but also expand the field’s network and create opportunities for advancement through funder collaboration. Funder collaboratives can play a distinct role in “setting the table” for field leaders to come together to align on strategy or pool funds to invest in infrastructure.

Consider the Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO), which formed in 2000 to strengthen the field of youth advocacy. FCYO brings together 12 funders to increase support for youth-organizing efforts and to promote leadership of low-income young people and young people of color in social-justice efforts. Beyond funding individual grantees, FCYO convenes practitioners on its advisory board, advocates for additional funding, conducts research, and works to develop a shared narrative about the impact of youth organizing.³⁷ To date, FCYO, with its funding partners, has disbursed more than \$6.5 million and has worked with 75 foundations and youth organizing groups nationally to build the field of youth organizing.³⁸

In the marriage equality field, the funder collaborative Civil Marriage Collaborative and its partners helped set the table to create the field-level agenda that would ultimately guide their grantmaking. Through collaborative funding, Civil Marriage Collaborative was able to exponentially increase the impact of the \$153 million they put into the effort, including the \$20 million invested in the collaborative. “It was a very big deal for the LGBT movement to come together to support a bold, long-term vision for winning marriage equality,” said Stephen Foster, president and CEO of the Overbrook Foundation. “And it became even more important as the years went by to say this is the plan we agreed to, and we were going to stick with it.”³⁹

37 Powell and Ditkoff, *Funder Collaboratives*.

38 Funders’ Collaborative for Youth Organizing, <https://fcyo.org/about/our-mission>.

39 Lewis, *Hearts and Minds*.

Evolving and Sustaining Fields

Although the investment opportunities in the Evolving and Sustaining Phase tend to be fewer and less pronounced, they are no less important to the field's health and progress, or to the impact it can generate at scale. Priority investments include creating spaces for collective reflection and investing in adaptive infrastructure.

Create spaces for collective field-level reflection

During this phase, funders can create spaces for field actors to convene in order to deepen understanding of the field's needs and enable actors to adapt to shifting external circumstances. For example, the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), a field intermediary, regularly hosts conferences for providers and professional caregivers to share knowledge and reflect together. In 2001, only 7 percent of hospitals with 50 or more beds reported having a palliative care team; NHPCO helped the field grow this number to 72 percent in 2019.⁴⁰ However, access and utilization was not equitable across all populations. Of patients utilizing palliative or hospice care in 2013, only 7 percent identified as Hispanic or Latino and 8 percent identified as African American,⁴¹ compared to the general population at the time of which 17 percent of people identified as Hispanic and 12 percent identified as African American.⁴² In response, in 2015 NHPCO formed the Diversity Advisory Council, a group of hospice and health care professionals and experts who meet continuously to “provide information, guidance, and technical expertise to NHPCO and its members related to serving diverse populations with the goal of increasing access to universal hospice and palliative care services.”⁴³

In another example, following the decline of teen pregnancy rates by about 70 percent, Power to Decide has convened about 40 organizations across the health and social services spaces to ask “what's next?” for the broader field of reproductive well-being. “We know that the broader field focused on women and reproductive health is very fractured. Women have to go on average to three places for their basic health care,” says Ginny Ehrlich, CEO of Power to Decide (i.e., women may have to go one place for primary care, another for specialty care, and another for preconception or prenatal care). “We convened organizations and leaders across these spaces to see how we could collectively create and transform the system to follow the pathway of a woman versus the pathway of categorical funding or our own siloed professional industries.” The gatherings—which have included organizations ranging from the March of Dimes, to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, to the American Public Human Services Association—have resulted in a “blueprint for action” for reproductive well-being.

40 *America's Care of Serious Illness: A State-by-State Report Card on Access to Palliative Care in Our Nation's Hospitals*, Center to Advance Palliative Care and the National Palliative Care Research Center, September 2019, <https://www.capc.org/documents/download/2/>.

41 National Hospice Foundation, <https://www.nationalhospicefoundation.org/program/diversity>.

42 Population, by Race and Ethnicity: 2013, Pew Research Center: Hispanic Trends, 2013, https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/ph_2015-03_statistical-portrait-of-hispanics-in-the-united-states-2013_current-01/.

43 “NHPCO Forms Council to Address Lack of Utilization of Hospice Care in Diverse Communities,” NHPCO Updater, February 12, 2015, <http://nhpco.blogspot.com/2015/02/nhpco-forms-council-to-address-lack-of.html>.

Invest in adaptive infrastructure

Funders must also continue investing in adaptive infrastructure. In the marriage equality field, Freedom to Marry evolved its role in response to new developments. As a field catalyst, it set out to accelerate and influence national debate, provide resources to organizations in the field, and support local and state efforts with technical assistance.⁴⁴ Over time, Freedom to Marry recognized the need for a more robust on the ground campaign to galvanize public support. “There was a need for Freedom to Marry to drive the campaign and not just depend on what others were supplying,” founder Evan Wolfson recalls. “We shifted from being housed in another organization to an independent 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4). We hired a staff that had expertise in communications and campaigns, began raising more and different kinds of funding, while also continuing to work collaboratively with other organizations on the ground.”

A field catalyst’s life span depends on the needs of the field. Once the Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality nationwide, Freedom to Marry spent a year and a half focusing on implementation through partner organizations, redistributing its talent to other LGBTQ organizations, and even helping to create a new organization focused on securing LGBTQ anti-discrimination protections. In other fields, we see that “backbone” intermediaries remain critical even after major successes.⁴⁵ This is true of the Truth Initiative and The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, both intermediaries focused on teen tobacco use prevention and cessation, as e-cigarettes have emerged as a new threat. It is also true of Power to Decide, which helped massively reduce unintended teen pregnancies and

Priority field-building activities for funders, by phase of field progression

1 Emerging	2 Forming	3 Evolving and Sustaining
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund research on the magnitude of the problem and the effectiveness of emerging solutions, to anchor and unify the field around data • Invest in leadership development to strengthen key actors and cultivate diverse voices • Fund a wide range of point-based solutions, such as direct services, advocacy efforts, or education, that are led by diverse leaders, to learn what works at scale • Support coordination among related actors to share knowledge and begin to create a sense of shared identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support field leaders in developing a field-level agenda to enable greater focus and coordination • Invest in supportive infrastructure (e.g., field catalysts, regular convenings, technical assistance providers) to institutionalize connections and support • Mobilize peer funders to attract more capital, deepen networks and experience, and build collaborative partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create spaces for continuous, collective field-level reflection, to ensure key actors are able to adapt to the field’s evolving needs and shifting external circumstances • Continue to invest in dynamic and adaptive infrastructure to sustain progress and adapt to changing conditions

44 Interview with Evan Wolfson, the founder of Freedom to Marry.

45 Our thinking concerning the lifespan of field catalysts is evolving. While our Field Catalyst study found that these intermediaries are often “built to win, not to last,” perhaps some intermediaries need to remain to perform backbone roles for a field and respond to new dynamics and challenges over time.

now is increasingly focused on restrictions on contraceptive access among other reproductive health issues. CEO Ginny Ehrlich notes, “It is critical that funders really understand the importance of sustaining things that work over time. There is a need to fund things that are new, but also continue to invest in the things that are essential for the field.”

“There is a need to fund things that are new, but also continue to invest in the things that are essential for the field.”

GINNY EHRLICH, CEO, POWER TO DECIDE

Just as priority investments tend to vary by phase, so too does the extent to which funders should be leading the field building. In the Emerging Phase, their leadership is key; however, as momentum gathers in the Forming Phase, funders should consider transitioning authority

“When I see grantees ‘riffing,’ and building on each other’s work, and joining forces to get stuff done—that to me is the real sign that you’ve crossed the threshold with field building.”

DANIEL STID, DIRECTOR, WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION

to a field-level actor (such as a field catalyst) that can engage a range of funders and other actors to accelerate the field’s trajectory. This perspective is central to the “acid test” that Daniel Stid, a director at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, uses to gauge when field building is successful: it is when grantees start collaborating on their own. “When I see grantees ‘riffing,’ and building on each other’s work, and joining forces to get stuff done—that to me is the real sign that you’ve crossed the threshold with field building,” he explains.

Lessons Learned on the “How” of Field Building

After reviewing existing literature, analyzing the trajectories of dozens of fields, and speaking with practitioners, intermediaries, and funders committed to field building, we learned that funder mindsets and approaches can be just as important as their investments.

The Bedrock: Distributed Power

The “how” starts with funders navigating the inherent power dynamics that their engagement brings. Power is “the force that changes systems through organized people or organized money.”⁴⁶ Or as Rashad Robinson, president of the racial justice organization Color of Change, says, “it is the ability to change the rules.”⁴⁷ To state the obvious, it is very difficult for a proximate actor to offer input that contradicts the viewpoint of a funder on whom they are financially dependent.

Righting that power imbalance is essential to effective engagement and, eventually, to achieving population-level change. While funders have vital financial resources and a valuable vantage point on field-level trends, their limited ability to implement ideas

46 NCRP, *Power Moves*.

47 Adele Peters, “Power Is the Ability to Change the Rules: How Rashad Robinson Holds Companies Accountable,” *Fast Company*, October 25, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/40474488/power-is-the-ability-to-change-the-rules-how-rashad-robinson-holds-companies-accountable>.

(given that most are not operators) and their distance from “on-the-ground” perspectives means that they depend on others to inform and drive change. An overwhelming majority of the literature we reviewed emphasized the importance of distributing power, increasing participatory approaches, and building relationships rooted in trust.⁴⁸ Through this work, we hope to underscore the importance of these elements and lift up others’ thought leadership and efforts to model this paradigm shift that is so critical to field building.

Funders who resist the natural power imbalance start by recognizing their distinctive position in fields—a necessary first step to sharing and wielding their influence responsibly.⁴⁹ With that awareness, they invest in building relationships with peer institutions and practitioners, and they take deliberate steps to include and partner with those closest to the problems they seek to solve.

As Meera Mani, director of the Children, Families, and Communities Program at The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, observes, “To be at the table, you need to be willing to step back, cede power, and co-create.”

“To be at the table, you need to be willing to step back, cede power, and co-create.”

MEERA MANI, DIRECTOR, THE DAVID AND LUCILLE PACKARD FOUNDATION

This paradigm shift requires reorienting how philanthropy conceptualizes power at all levels. “There is no changing ‘the system’ without changing ourselves,” writes Crystal Hayling, executive director of the Libra Foundation, a family foundation focused on domestic human rights. “[At Libra] that means examining our role in perpetuating inequality—and taking proactive steps to promote equity and justice—at every level of the organization: with and among grantees, staff, and the board...In philanthropy we have to build new muscles for trusting and engaging.”⁵⁰ The Libra Foundation committed to bias and privilege training for board members, hiring new team members with “broad experience in and a healthy skepticism of philanthropy,” and finally, transforming grantmaking practices to “shift the responsibility for accountability and information” from grantees to the foundation itself.

The challenges surrounding power and proximate collaborators animate the Chorus Foundation’s fight against climate change. “We work with communities that have historically had power working against them, to help them recognize and unlock their own power,” explains founder and president Farhad Ebrahimi. To do that, Ebrahimi suggests sometimes funders have to “unlearn [our] own tendencies... Everyone wants good process, and we spend a lot of time developing processes that are intended to be equitable and inclusive. At the end of the day, though, those processes are only as good as our willingness to change them if we learn that they’re not working for our grantees. Our grantees aren’t shy with us, and we’re grateful for it; that’s what it looks like for them to hold us accountable.”

48 NCRP, *Power Moves*; Jagpal and Laskowski, *Smashing Silos*; Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski, *Real Results: Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice Philanthropy*, November, 2016, https://www.ncrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Real_Results_Why_Strategic_Philanthropy_is_Social_Justice_Philanthropy.pdf; *Resonance: A Framework for Philanthropic Transformation*, *Justice Funders*, <http://justicefunders.org/resonance/>.

49 NCRP, *Power Moves*.

50 Crystal Hayling, “Going Upstream: Philanthropy’s Role in Advancing Justice,” *Medium*, July 30, 2018, <https://medium.com/justice-funders/going-upstream-philanthropys-role-in-advancing-justice-28a1dcc0c11d>.

A clear set of principles can help guide the way towards a responsible balance of power and to field-building success. For some funders, these principles may not align with how they have historically approached grantmaking; for others, particularly movement-building and systems change funders, some or all of these principles may be familiar. (Please see the sidebar, “Movements and Fields,” below.)

Movements and Fields

In our conversations with funders and field leaders, some used the terms “fields” and “movements” interchangeably. Others insisted that movements are inherently different from fields, specifically in being people-powered, taking on multiple issues, and focusing on disrupting and transforming power structures. We underline these nuances not to draw boundaries between the terms, but rather to acknowledge the distinctions embraced by those who are doing the day-to-day work of advancing these efforts.

Our research is heavily influenced by the principles and practices of those who consider themselves “movement funders” and seek to transform systems.⁵¹ We are inspired by how these funders work with grantees, and see a unique opportunity for field builders to learn from their approaches to sharing power and placing those closest to the problem in key leadership roles.

In our conversations, we also heard a concern that labeling “movements” as “fields” could put movements in jeopardy of being co-opted by those with institutional power. This concept of co-opting is related to the work of Dr. Megan Ming Francis, visiting associate professor at the Harvard Kennedy School and associate professor at the University of Washington. Her research explores the power of funders to change the direction and priorities of organizations. She uses the phrase “movement capture” to describe how well-intentioned funders can pressure social movements to change course.⁵² For example, in the early twentieth century, bending to funders (particularly The Garland Fund) led to a major shift in the NAACP’s priorities. To secure financial support, the NAACP had to shift from a primary focus on fighting anti-Black violence to school integration and economic opportunity instead—altering the goals of the entire civil rights movement.⁵³

Dr. Francis urges funders to avoid “capture” by “funding movements—not issues.” She calls on funders to recognize that solving complex social problems often happens at the intersection of multiple issues. She describes the NAACP example as a cautionary tale, with The Garland Fund’s misstep being its rigid focus on education despite the interests of the organization that it was trying to support.

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51 Barbara Masters and Torie Osborn, “Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building,” *The Foundation Review*, November 2010, <https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Masters-Movement-Building-.pdf>; *Many Hands, More Impact: Philanthropy’s Role in Supporting Movements*, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, November 7, 2013, <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/26020/26020.pdf>.

52 Megan Ming Francis, “The Price of Civil Rights: Black Lives, White Funding, and Movement Capture,” *Law & Society Review* 53, no.1 (March 2019): 275-309.

53 Ibid.

(continued from the previous page)

We see clear connections between Dr. Francis's movement-capture concept and field building. Not only does her research serve to directly encourage funders to embrace field building despite the difficulties, but also to do so by respecting and listening to the fields they care about.

Principles in Field Building

In our review of field-building examples and existing literature, we saw very few examples of population-level change, even among fields that have made the most progress. A common and crucial pitfall has been inadequate attention to equity and inclusion. At Bridgespan, we believe that the social sector can only achieve impact through decisions that promote equity and foster inclusion. Otherwise, we will never achieve the impact we all seek. As John A. Powell (lowercase deliberate), director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, asserts in his theory of targeted universalism, there is no chance of achieving population-level change without designing solutions that serve the most marginalized.⁵⁴

This need becomes particularly blatant in field building because of the complexity of social issues these efforts address, the magnitude of change that fields seek, and the collective effort required to see it through. If we do not design with diverse identities and experiences in mind, the solutions we create will never reach their full potential. Therefore, each of the following four principles of field building share a core concern for equity. The principles identified in this section derive from those that guide movement, systems, community-driven, and responsive funders.⁵⁵ We are also greatly influenced by NCRP's work, particularly its thinking around power in its *Power Moves* report and discussion of multi-issue philanthropy in its *Smashing Silos* report.

Take a Holistic View

When funders take a narrow, static view of field-building work, such as focusing on a specific program or tightly bounded set of investments, we often see consequences such as blind spots, overinvestment in areas that aren't critical to the field's success, and missed opportunities caused by multiple funders working in parallel silos.⁵⁶

A big-picture lens illuminates connection points for funders between their work and other efforts that could enable or hinder it.⁵⁷ Funders with a holistic view consider, and are in dialogue with, all the actors in a field (including other funders) and are able to place their field of interest in the context of nested and adjacent fields as well as related systems and movements.

54 John A. Powell, Stephen Menendian, and Wendy Ake, *Targeted Universalism: Policy & Practice*, Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, May 8, 2019, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeteduniversalism>.

55 National Center for Responsive Philanthropy, Justice Funders, Movement Strategy Center, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Lucy Bernholz, FSG.

56 Jagpal and Laskowski, *Smashing Silos*.

57 Ibid.

For example, California Civic Participation Funders is a collaborative effort among a set of foundations that began “because they all recognized that it’s going to take more than the same old siloed approach to achieve true progress on the issues they care about.”⁵⁸ Despite each funder’s specific interests—ranging from immigration reform to economic justice—they realized that all of their focus areas suffered from a lack of sustainable policy wins. As a result, the collaborative has a single shared purpose: working in four regions of California to bolster civic participation among communities of color and other historically underserved communities. California Civic Participation Funders partnered with community-based organizations to co-develop strategies and best practices that could engage “more immigrants, African Americans, women, young people, and other groups as active participants in community and civic affairs.”⁵⁹

Hewlett’s Daniel Stid points out that even when funders are aligned on a field’s overall needs, misalignment of the *types of grants* they are giving can undermine field-building success. Stid leads the Madison Initiative, which gives unrestricted grants in the democracy field. He explains: “It’s really hard to work collaboratively to support a field if one funder is providing multiyear general support, and the other funder is writing highly specified project grants that force the same grantees to do particular things, in particular ways and time frames. That actually can result in funders working at cross-purposes even if we are in sync in terms of what issues we think are important for the field to address and how best to get there.”

To obtain a broad perspective, funders can invite practitioners and communities to challenge them to look beyond the boundaries they have drawn for their own work. This may take the form of sharing observations about where they are seeing momentum in related fields and movements, or asking questions that examine how the funder’s boundaries align with the lived experience of people directly affected by the issue. This input and feedback from practitioners and communities only works if funders actively solicit, listen, and engage with the insights from these groups.

In the climate adaptation field, insufficient attention to key social issues has led advocates to push the field to integrate equity into the work. The Kresge Foundation commissioned an assessment of the field in 2017 and was noticeably inclusive in its outreach—for example, interviewing more than 80 people who represented the public, private, and nonprofit/NGO sectors as well as academia. The field assessment indeed found “a pronounced gap between the literature and practice: differential social vulnerabilities have been recognized by academic researchers at least since the 1970s, but well-established work is rarely acted upon in adaptation plans and policies.”⁶⁰ Kresge’s broad focus has revealed linkages between the climate adaptation field and related social movements, further integrating an equity lens into its field-building work. These movements include climate justice (centering those most vulnerable to climate impacts) and just transition (ensuring an equitable transition from an “extractive” to a “regenerative” economy).⁶¹

58 William H. Woodwell, Jr., *Bolder Together*, California Civic Participation Funders, April 1, 2012, <https://www.haasjr.org/sites/default/files/resources/BolderTogether.pdf>.

59 Ibid.

60 Moser, Coffee, and Seville, *Rising to the Challenge, Together*.

61 Ibid.

Sometimes this holistic view surfaces opportunities to advance the funder’s field of interest by supporting adjacent areas. The Ford Foundation, for instance, observed several years ago that its work in criminal justice reform was not realizing its full potential because it overlooked activity inside prisons—a major influence on recidivism rates. To promote conditions for reform, Ford organized tours for US practitioners and thought leaders of European prisons, which are generally more focused on rehabilitation. Tanya Coke, Ford Foundation’s director of the Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Justice program, refers to this work as spreading “fluoride in the water,” as she hopes it will seed new ways of thinking across the field.

Additionally, funders can proactively engage with and walk alongside other funders. To buttress its work in criminal justice, the Ford Foundation started the Criminal Justice Funders Group to help funders self-organize by the states in which they are targeting reforms. This group has become a space for building relationships, creating community, and hopefully, sparking informal collaboration. In the environmental field, ClimateWorks created the Funders Table, an affinity group of foundations that have made significant investments in climate issues, as a way to reach across institutional barriers and encourage collaboration in the philanthropic community. In the education field, the funder forum Grantmakers for Thriving Youth has articulated a goal of continuous dialogue so members can proactively learn from each other and identify opportunities to advance the field.

Balance Being Proactive and Reactive

Historically, funders have tended to overemphasize proactive approaches to field building (i.e., “tilling the soil” to create conditions for change) and underemphasize reactive approaches (i.e., taking advantage of ripe “moments in time” to make headway).⁶² In practice, balancing these opportunities unlocks the greatest potential for impact. It fosters healthy field building and is also consistent with good grantmaking practices. Foundations can also increase reactive activity by working indirectly through grassroots regrantors and nonprofits that may be able to quickly identify and address opportunities on the ground.⁶³

Ford’s work in the criminal justice field has benefited from balancing proactive and reactive efforts. The foundation has long focused on reducing mass incarceration through state-level sentencing reforms. In 2016, it sensed a moment of opportunity to advance bail reform, an issue that affects pretrial detention in local jails. People in high-incarceration neighborhoods—especially female relatives forced to scramble to raise cash bail for their loved ones—began calling for measures to end “poverty jailing.” Led by Ford grantee Southerners on New Ground, in 2017, these community groups organized a series of “Mama’s Bail Out” days across the country to call attention to the thousands of presumptively innocent people—many of them parents of minor children—who languish in jail before trial for lack of funds to secure their release. These bailouts, along with lawsuits challenging money bail as economic discrimination against poor people, captured public

62 Lucy Bernholz and Tony Wang, *Building Fields for Policy Change*, MacArthur Foundation, June 1, 2010, <https://www.scribd.com/document/45111709/Building-Fields-for-Policy-Change>; NCRP, *Power Moves*; Jagpal and Laskowski, *Smashing Silos*.

63 NCRP, *Power Moves*.

attention, creating pressure for systemic reforms. The foundation leaned in with resources and networks to accelerate the bail reform field's progress, making a series of grants to both grassroots and government actors to help court officials change ingrained practices. Ford and the Art for Justice Fund together pledged \$1.5 million to launch a pooled fund for supporting local advocacy, which quickly attracted \$5 million from other donors, adding momentum to the effort.⁶⁴

The field saw a major breakthrough in 2018, when the California legislature voted to eliminate its cash bail system. However, the decision was clouded with controversy. Many organizations that initially supported this measure wound up opposing the law because of its reliance on pretrial algorithmic risk assessment and judges' discretion—factors that, critics worried, could be plagued with racial bias.⁶⁵ Since the law's passage, Ford has stepped back to allow time and space for tensions to subside and the field to regroup, as an effort grows by commercial bail bonding companies to repeal the law. (The 2018 law was supposed to take effect in the fall of 2019 but instead will appear as a ballot initiative before California voters in 2020.)⁶⁶ The foundation's approach demonstrates the importance of tailoring strategy to the moment and the value of being nimble.

The need to balance proactive and reactive approaches extends to how funders engage with field-building grantees. In general, this means allowing grantees ample flexibility to seize opportunities as they appear. Common grantmaking practices, like requesting detailed multiyear plans and setting granular performance indicators, are often incompatible with adaptive approaches. In other words, conventional strategy and metrics can undermine field-based efforts. Rebecca Onie, co-founder, with Rocco Perla, of The Health Initiative, captures this tension: "We had a funder who fell in love with our strategy but then asked for a two-year workplan. I said, 'I can make that for you, but it's going to change every month.' That's just not how this work works."

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REBECCA ONIE, CO-FOUNDER, THE HEALTH INITIATIVE

Problem Solve through Inclusive Decision Making

Our research revealed that funders often prioritize the input of a small set of actors who cannot fully represent the field's diverse perspectives. In its 2017 study of philanthropic practice, for instance, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) found that only 20 percent of grantmakers delegated decision making power to representatives of recipient communities or grants.⁶⁷ While selective input may seem more efficient,

64 Correspondence with the Ford Foundation.

65 Madeleine Carlisle, "The Bail-Reform Tool That Activists Want Abolished", *The Atlantic*, September 21, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/09/the-bail-reform-tool-that-activists-want-abolished/570913/>.

66 Michael McGoug, "The fate of California's cash bail industry will now be decided on the 2020 ballot", *The Sacramento Bee*, January 17, 2019, <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/article224682595.html>.

67 *Is Grantmaking Getting Smarter? A National Study of Philanthropic Practice*, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, November 1, 2017, <https://www.geofunders.org/resources/is-grantmaking-getting-smarter-968>.

it frequently leads to failed, or only short-term, solutions. GEO's report, *Do Nothing About Me Without Me*, notes, "for grantmakers, it can be risky to have those who are privileged or removed from the direct experience of discrimination and poverty making decisions on behalf of people who are experiencing those issues. Decision makers who are not directly connected to the challenges facing disadvantaged communities will likely have gaps in worldview and experience that ultimately can lead to ineffective or failed programs, broken relationships and community disagreement."⁶⁸

Effective field builders recognize that inclusivity can open the aperture of creative solutions, leading to sustainable change for all those affected by the core problem.⁶⁹ They empower fellow travelers in the field and those closest to the problem to lead and co-create strategies. Working together with a diverse set of actors—especially those most marginalized or even seen as "dissenting"—can be time-intensive and challenging, but is often inseparable from finding solutions.

The Chorus Foundation sees creating an environment that welcomes dissenting opinions as critical to its work. "Challenging feedback can only make us a better grantmaking institution," says Chorus President Farhad Ebrahimi. He explains, "My goal is to cultivate the kinds of relationships where grantees can call me at 11:00 p.m. to tell me that we're making a bad decision." While Ebrahimi does not expect after-hours calls to become the norm, he hopes that grantees feel empowered to give authentic feedback at will. In his words, "We know we are doing our job well if grantees are not afraid that honesty will cause them to lose their next grant."

“It is critical to think about who you need around the table to make the issue move. We as funders can use grants to bring stakeholders into the field who might not otherwise come in.”

TANYA COKE, DIRECTOR OF GENDER, RACIAL, AND ETHNIC JUSTICE PROGRAM, FORD FOUNDATION

There are several ways that funders can make decision making inclusive, but the most foundational may be in how they "set the table." In a field's early stages of development, funders often lead efforts to bring core actors together to connect, share knowledge, and make field-level decisions. This approach establishes the ongoing working relationships that enables all other aspects of field building. However, funders should carefully consider whether *they* should set the table, or instead support existing coalitions. The NCRP's *Power Moves* report highlights the importance of knowing "when to fund organizing or be the organizer."

Ford's Tanya Coke thinks a lot about the importance of inclusive table-setting. "It is critical to think about who you need around the table to make the issue move. We as funders can use grants to bring stakeholders into the field who might not otherwise come in," she explains.

Ford did this in the school discipline field. When the foundation started working on the issue in 2009, the field consisted largely of civil rights organizations focused on the

68 *Do Nothing About Me Without Me: An Action Guide for Engaging Stakeholders*, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, June 30, 2010, <https://www.geofunders.org/resources/do-nothing-about-me-without-me-an-action-guide-for-engaging-stakeholders-688>.

69 Cynthia Gibson, *Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come?*, Ford Foundation, 2017, https://www.fordfoundation.org/media/3599/participatory_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf; *Do Nothing About Me Without Me*.

disproportionate numbers of Black and brown children who are suspended or expelled from school each year. Ford saw a need to broaden the set of actors. The foundation convened educators and principals, given that their disciplinary decisions can lead to students dropping out of school. Ford also helped broker connections with criminal justice experts, including judges, since dropping out of school can lead to involvement in the criminal justice system. *Tilling the Field: Lessons About Philanthropy's Role in School Discipline Reform*, a 2015 study of the field, hails its overall progress: “This is a story about how transformative social change can happen. About how an alliance developed among public school students and parents, civil rights advocates, academics, policymakers and government. How they brought attention to the millions of children being disciplined through exclusion from US public schools and catalyzed action to stop it. And how philanthropy worked alongside them—as partner, facilitator, and investor—in advancing reform.”⁷⁰

Some foundations formalize the inclusion of a full range of voices in decision making. For example, the Chorus Foundation has co-designed multiple grantmaking programs that include its grantees in decisions—if not hand the decisions over entirely—and looks to its strongest grantee relationships to pinpoint the needs of each community. In one instance, Chorus funded a visioning process led by Alaska Native grantees that convened community leaders and allies to determine how to allocate the foundation’s resources. The grantees ultimately decided to create two new intermediaries, Native Vision and Native Peoples Action.

Other foundations take different approaches. The Boston-based Hyams Foundation, for instance, includes local community organizers on its board and brings in other community stakeholders during strategic planning. The environmental organization Building Equity and Alignment for Impact reserves a majority of seats in its various institutional bodies (including every working group) for grassroots representatives.

Even some of the greatest field-building success stories, like marriage equality, offer lessons learned the hard way about how much inclusion matters. In the 1990s and early 2000s, most nationally known LGBTQ organizations had almost exclusively white leadership.⁷¹ While marriage equality was one concern for the LGBTQ community, some leaders wonder if this narrow focus deprioritized other crucial issues that would ensure full acceptance and just treatment of all LGBTQ people.⁷² For instance, for lower-income LGBTQ people, trans people, and people of color, it is unclear if marriage outweighed other forms of inequality they face(d). In the years since the 2015 Supreme Court ruling recognizing same-sex marriage, the nation has been engulfed in a debate about trans people and public restroom use, murders of transgender women of color have risen across the US,⁷³ and the protection of LGBTQ people from workplace discrimination has been under

70 *Tilling the Field: Lessons About Philanthropy's Role in School Discipline Reform*, The Atlantic Philanthropies, July 2015, <https://www.edfunders.org/resources/research-from-the-field/tilling-the-field-lessons-about-philanthropys-role-in-school>.

71 Frances Kunreuther, Barbara Masters, and Gigi Barsoum, *At the Crossroads: The Future of the LGBT Movement*, Building Movement Project, 2013, <https://buildingmovement.org/reports/at-the-crossroads-the-future-of-the-lgbt-movement/>.

72 Ibid.

73 “Violence Against the Transgender Community in 2019,” Human Rights Campaign, 2019, <https://www.hrc.org/resources/violence-against-the-transgender-community-in-2019>.

threat by the courts. Because the field had specifically targeted marriage, its powerful infrastructure no longer existed in the same way after the Supreme Court success. Despite its redistribution to other organizations, some LGBTQ leaders were left wondering where the donors were to support the other fights for equity facing their communities.

This leaves Butch Trusty, a principal of Bridgespan and board member of Equality Illinois, wondering about the possibilities for the field if more inclusive tables had helped define it: “Marriage equality is seen as a success and the end for a field. Instead, maybe it should have been seen as a means or step toward full LGBTQ civil rights.” Evan Wolfson, founder and president of field catalyst Freedom to Marry, admits that there was never a point at which the entire LGBTQ movement agreed on the focus on marriage, but argues that it was necessary to achieve anything at all. “It’s not about getting everyone to agree; you need a critical mass. We were able to get a critical mass to commit to a strategy. Of course winning marriage was never the whole thing for the movement, no one ever thought it would be. But we are now fighting in a much stronger place with more allies, more public support, more business support, more Republican support, more money, than we were before the marriage work started.”

Commit to the Long Term

In keeping with their institutional priorities and demands, funders tend to back field-building efforts by making short-term program grants or a series of incremental commitments over time. Unfortunately, such approaches have often led to inconsistent support of critical needs in numerous fields.

Given the complexity and often systemic nature of social problems, funders need to commit funding over extended periods to see results in field building. The changes in the field of hospice and palliative care (detailed on page 21) took 20 years.⁷⁴ The fight for marriage equality took over four decades—and the broader LGBTQ-rights field continues to battle systemic barriers and threats to progress. Former president of the Ford Foundation Susan Beresford notes that strong fields and institutions require “patient philanthropy [in which advances] don’t come on a schedule, and they don’t come as a result of a tight business plan. They require patience, donor flexibility, and a belief in the core function that takes time to gain traction.”⁷⁵

The long-term commitment also affects how funders approach grant cycles. For instance, the Irvine Foundation thinks about field building as part of all its initiatives, some of which are scoped as seven-year cycles (e.g., Better Careers and Fair Work), while other areas of its grantmaking take an even longer-term view (e.g., Priority Regions Work). The Chorus Foundation thinks about field building in 10-year horizons, meaning it is willing to make 10-year general operating commitments. Field actors need this kind of assurance in order to plan with enough ambition to break through social challenges. It can also release these actors from the distracting treadmill of cultivating short-term grants. Crucially, it enables

74 Patricia Patrizi, Elizabeth Thompson, and Abby Spector, *Improving Care at the End of Life: How the RWJF Foundation and Its Grantees Built the Field*, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, <http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/reports/2011/rwjf69582>.

75 Petrovich, *Exiting Responsibility*.

the deep relationship building that powers the work and allows for the nonlinear progress that defines nearly every field's experience.

This long-term commitment, however, should be balanced with a mindset of urgency that encourages funders to respond quickly to changing landscapes and challenges. Cedric Brown, chief foundation officer at the Kapor Center, calls this balance “the stew and the popcorn” (i.e., a stew simmers on the stove for hours while popcorn transforms from hard kernel to edible snack in minutes). In particular, field builders should look for opportunities to build off the work of others in adjacent or related fields, as Ford did in their criminal justice portfolio.

In addition, funders should be careful to not let successes displace their long-term commitment. “Part of the challenge quite honestly, traditionally, in the funding world has been success,” says Bill Albert, chief innovation officer of Power to Decide. “If you're using a measure of reducing rates of unintended pregnancy and you have seen a 70 percent decline in teen pregnancy, it is understandable for some funders to say ‘well, this problem has been solved—mission accomplished. Now let me move on and invest in something else.’ So in some ways, success, depending on how you measure it, can be a barrier for funding.”

From Principles to Practice

Our conversations with funders affirmed a widespread desire to embrace these principles to support field building to more lasting change. Likewise, practitioners acknowledged them as critical to enhancing their work. However, living into the principles is still difficult, as they contradict current practices in philanthropy.⁷⁶ Writing in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, foundation insiders Kristi Kimball and Malka Kopell criticize the culture and norms of foundations for inadvertently inhibiting social change. They write, “Too often, funders insist on controlling the ways in which social problems are solved...To make steady forward progress solving problems in dynamic environments of complexity and uncertainty, foundations must shift from centrally planned, narrowly focused grantmaking strategies to more decentralized, diversified strategies that are better able to catch the waves of effective leadership, distributed wisdom, and innovation.”⁷⁷

It takes a purposeful and concerted effort to work against the mindsets, structures, strategies, and measurement approaches that can stymie field-building success. Over the past several years, the James Irvine Foundation has done just that.⁷⁸ When Irvine first began investing in field-building efforts in the late 2000s, its strategies were emblematic of funding trends in that era—including launching new intermediaries (to coordinate efforts, standardize practices, and foster a shared identity among the diverse actors), and branding initiatives (to bring cohesion and boundaries to complex, systemic social problems). The Bridgespan Group provided support for many of these efforts,

76 Alison Powell, Willa Seldon, and Nidhi Sahni, “Reimagining Institutional Philanthropy,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2019, <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/big-bets/unleashing-big-bets-for-social-change/reimagining-institutional-philanthropy>.

77 Kristi Kimball and Malka Kopell, “Letting Go,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2011, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/letting_go.

78 Powell, Seldon, and Sahni, “Reimagining Institutional Philanthropy.”

and collaborated with Irvine on the *Strong Field Framework*. However, Irvine’s current approach to field building looks very different than its beginnings.

- **Mindsets**

Sharing power with field actors requires shifting foundation mindsets (of both leaders and staff) about where “answers” originate. That change is central to authentic inclusion. Yet, as Irvine CEO Don Howard notes, “It’s hard to let go of the idea that if you have the money, you have the best ideas. We know that the best ideas are outside of our building—they’re in the communities.”

In an effort to invest in ideas that emerge from a field, Irvine funded Third Sector’s Better Careers Design Group—a collaborative effort, bringing together government agencies and grantees of Irvine’s Better Careers initiative—to design solutions for systemic workforce challenges. Over 18 months Design Group members are partnering with the people and communities they serve to identify problems and develop plans to respond to barriers.

- **Structure**

While many funders organize their efforts by program area, this structure tends to reinforce artificial silos within and across institutions, making it more difficult for funders to see connections with adjacent or intersecting fields or movements. This observation led Irvine to do away with program areas entirely and instead organize around a single institutional goal (“a California where all low-income workers have the power to advance economically”) and several supporting initiatives. This approach enables the foundation to focus on effecting long-term change by working across multiple fields.

- **Strategy**

The laudable pursuit of being “strategic” can result in strategies that contradict core tenets of field-building work. Specifically, strategies can be too prescriptive to respond to adaptive needs or to empower field actors adequately. At times, Bridgespan has been complicit in helping foundations (including Irvine) develop strategies with these very shortcomings. Given what we know today, we would now advise these funders quite differently. As Irvine CEO Howard notes, “You can be strategic in philanthropy and not tell people what to do. That’s what real strategic philanthropy is.” Irvine now allocates 15 percent of each of its initiative budgets for key direct-service and intermediary players to support opportunities to strengthen the field.

“You can be strategic in philanthropy and not tell people what to do. That’s what real strategic philanthropy is.”

DON HOWARD, CEO, JAMES IRVINE FOUNDATION

- **Measurement and evaluation**

Institutional funders are typically tied to short-term measurement cycles and specific outcome measures, which rarely accommodate the messy, meandering, process-focused work of field building. Ongoing measurement and evaluation *is* central to field building

but requires a different paradigm. For the Irvine Foundation, listening to grantees and community members is essential to understanding what is working, what is not working, and what needs to change to create impact. Prior to launching the Better Careers initiative, the foundation spent a year listening to the field through face-to-face interactions and surveys, with plans to continue such efforts to authentically listen—and change as a result—throughout implementation. CEO Howard says: “We have to hear, and we have to be willing to change our points of view and to truly incorporate the wisdom of the community into the grantmaking we do.”

Overall, turning principles into effective and sustained practice will require redefining the institutional expectations and priorities that have shaped the social sector to date. As with building our fields, transforming our sector will require a collective commitment to establishing relationships across silos and continuous learning and improvement in order to foster a new culture that achieves and sustains population-level change.

To that end, we hope this report serves as a launchpad for further reflection and discussion among us all, and we look forward to continued collaboration in pursuit of our ultimate shared aspiration: a society characterized by equity and justice for all.

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Appendix

Literature scan

This report draws from and builds upon the following publications. These resources are of great value for those interested in further reading on this topic.

Title	Author(s)	Organization/Publisher	Year
Leading Systems Change: A Workbook for Community Practitioners and Funders	Heather McLeod Grant and Adene Sacks	Open Impact and the With/In Collaborative	2019
Measuring Social Change	Alnoor Ebrahim	Stanford Business Books	2019
Reimagining Institutional Philanthropy	Alison Powell, Willa Seldon and Nidhi Sahni	The Bridgespan Group	2019
Resonance: A Framework for Philanthropic Transformation	Justice Funders and The Resonance Collaborative	Justice Funders and The Resonance Collaborative	2019
Adapting our Philanthropy in Trying Times	Larry Kramer	The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	2018
As the South Grows so Grows the Nation	Ryan Schlegel and Stephanie Peng	National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Grantmakers for Southern Progress	2018
How Field Catalysts Galvanize Social Change	Taz Hussein, Matt Plummer, and Bill Breen	<i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	2018
Journey Towards Intersectional Grant-Making	Mari Ryono	Funders for Just Economy	2018
Value of Collaboration Research Study	Alison Powell and Susan Wolf Ditkoff	The Bridgespan Group	2018
What Love Looks Like in Philanthropy: Shared Power and Transparency	F. Javier Torres and Leila Tamari	<i>Inside Philanthropy</i>	2018
Audacious Philanthropy	Susan Wolf Ditkoff and Abe Grindle	<i>Harvard Business Review</i>	2017
Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come	Cynthia Gibson	Ford Foundation	2017
Rising to the Challenge, Together	Susanne C. Moser, Joyce Coffee, and Aleka Seville	The Kresge Foundation	2017
What Exactly Do We Mean by Systems?" (Dan Vexler, SSIR)	Dan Vexler	<i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	2017
What it Takes to Build or Bend a Field of Practice	Spark Policy Institute	The Kresge Foundation	2017
When Building a Field Requires Building a New Organization	Nidhi Sahni, Elena Matsui, and Lauren Hult	<i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	2017
Putting Systems Thinking into Practice	Srikanth "Srik" Gopal and Hallie Preskill	FSG	2016

Title	Author(s)	Organization/Publisher	Year
Systems Grantmaking Resource Guide	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Management Assistance Group	The David and Lucile Packard Foundation	2016
Hearts and Minds: The untold story of how philanthropy and the Civil Marriage Collaborative helped America embrace marriage equality	David Lewis	Proteus Fund	2015
I2L2: Impact = Influence + Leverage + Learning: A Formula for Change	Jane Reisman PhD, Anne Gienapp, and Tom Kelly	ORS Impact and The Hawai'i Community Foundation	2015
Pathways to Resilience: Transforming Cities in a Changing Climate	Movement Strategy Center, Movement Generation, The Praxis Project, Reimagine! RP&E	The Kresge Foundation	2015
Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	2015
Systems Change: A guide to what it is and how to do it	Rob Abercrombie, Ellen Harries and Rachel Wharton	NPC	2015
Systems Thinking Toolkit	FSG	FSG	2015
Tilling The Field: Lessons About Philanthropy's Role in School Discipline Reform	The Atlantic Philanthropies	The Atlantic Philanthropies	2015
The Dawn of System Leadership	Peter Senge, Hal Hamilton, and John Kania	<i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	2015
What Are Different Ways to Engage Stakeholders?	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	2015
Beyond the Pioneer: Getting Inclusive Industries to Scale	Harvey Koh, Nidhi Hegde, and Ashish Karamchandani	Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India Private Limited	2014
Freedom Funders	Sean Dobson	National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy	2014
Strategic Philanthropy for a Complex World	John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Patty Russel	FSG	2014
At the Crossroads: The Future of the LGBT Movement	Frances Kunreuther, Barbara Masters and, Gigi Barsoum	Building Movement Project	2013
Building and Supporting Sustainable Fields: Views from Philanthropy	Janice Petrovich	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	2013
Cracking the Network Code: Four Principles for Grantmakers	Jane Wei-Skillern, Nora Silver, and Eric Heitz	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	2013
Eyes Wide Open: Learning as Strategy Under Conditions of Complexity and Uncertainty	Patricia Patrizi, Elizabeth Heid Thompson, and Julia Coffman, Tanya Beer	Evaluation Roundtable	2013

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Many Hands, More Impact: Philanthropy's Role in Supporting Movements	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	2013
Pathways to Grow Impact: Philanthropy's Role in the Journey	Kathleen Enright	TCC Group, Ashoka, Social Impact Exchange, Taproot Foundation, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	2013
REAL RESULTS: Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice Philanthropy	Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski	National Center for Responsive Philanthropy	2013
Seeding the Field: The Creation and Growth of the Center for Working Families Approach	Susan Gewirtz and Tom Waldron	Annie E. Casey Foundation	2013
Smashing Silos in Philanthropy	Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski	National Center for Responsive Philanthropy	2013
The Strategic Plan is Dead. Long Live Strategy	Dana O'Donovan and Noah Rimland Flower	<i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	2013
Bolder Together	William H. Woodwell, Jr.	California Civic Participation Funders	2012
Unstill Waters: The Fluid Role of Networks in Social Movements	Robin Katcher	<i>Nonprofit Quarterly</i>	2012
Assessing California's Multiple Pathways Field	Don Howard and Pat Wu	The James Irvine Foundation	2011
Catalyzing Networks for Social Change: A Funder's Guide	Diana Scarce	Monitor Institute and GEO	2011
Collective Impact	John Kania and Mark Kramer	<i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	2011
Exiting Responsibly: Best Donor Practices in Ending Field Support	Janice Petrovich	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	2011
Improving Care at the End of Life: How the RWJF Foundation and Its Grantees Built the Field	Patricia Patrizi, Elizabeth Thompson, and Abby Spector	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	2011
Learning From an Adaptive-Consultative Approach (FSG)	Srikanth "Srik" Gopal, Hallie Preskill	FSG	2011
Letting Go	Kristi Kimball and Malka Kopell	<i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	2011
The Tobacco Campaigns of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Collaborators, 1991-2010	Center for Public Policy Evaluation	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	2011
Building Fields for Policy Change	Lucy Bernholz and Tony Wang	MacArthur Foundation	2010

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Building to Last: Field Building as Philanthropic Strategy	Lucy Bernholz, Stephanie Linden Seale, and Tony Wang	MacArthur Foundation	2010
Do Nothing About Me Without Me: An Action Guide for Engaging Stakeholders	J. Courtney Bourns	Interaction Institute for Social Change, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations	2010
Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building	Barbara Masters, Tori Osborn	Foundation Review	2010
Building to Last: Field Building as Philanthropic Strategy	Lucy Bernholz, Stephanie Linden Seale, and Tony Wang, MacArthur Foundation	Blueprint Research + Design Inc. and The MacArthur Foundation	2009
Field Building—Does it Matter What Field?	Lucy Bernholz	<i>Stanford Social Innovation Review</i>	2009
The Strong Field Framework: A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Nonprofits Committed to Large-Scale Impact	The James Irvine Foundation and The Bridgespan Group	The James Irvine Foundation and The Bridgespan Group	2009
A Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy	Jane Reisman PhD, Anne Gienapp, Sarah Stachowiak	Annie E. Casey Foundation	2007
Listening to The Stars: The Constellation Model of Collaborative Social Change	Mark Surman and Tonya Surman	Singapore Management University Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University	2008
Taking on Tobacco: The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Assault on Smoking	James Bornemeier	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	2005
The Hewlett Foundation's Conflict Resolution Program: Twenty Years of Field-Building	David Kovick	The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	2005
Ideas in Philanthropic Field Building: Where They Come from and How They Are Translated into Actions	Larry Hirschhorn and Thomas North Gilmore	The Foundation Center	2004

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