SCALING SOLUTIONS TOWARD SHIFTING SYSTEMS: APPROACHES FOR IMPACT, APPROACHES FOR LEARNING

ROCKEFELLER Philanthropy Advisors

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Executive Summary

Realizing that the world's pressing challenges are becoming more complex, and often seemingly intractable, many philanthropic funders are reflecting on how to create more transformational impact. They wonder whether they are putting their resources to best use, and what they could do differently to create more sustainable solutions to the challenges they aim to address.

To help answer that question, the *Scaling Solutions toward Shifting Systems* (Scaling Solutions) initiative was launched in 2016 as an inquiry: Can we encourage funders to work more collaboratively to place longer-term, adaptive resources to fund and accelerate scalable solutions targeting systemic changes around pressing global issues? Since then, the initiative's Steering Group and team, with representation from the Skoll, Ford, and Draper Richards Kaplan Foundations, Porticus, and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, have examined when, how, and why certain solutions were able to grow and achieve the system-level shifts that were anticipated.

The initiative's first report in 2017, *Scaling Solutions toward Shifting Systems*, highlighted organizations that had scaled solutions and how funders had helped or hindered the

1 https://www.rockpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/05-18_RockPA-ScalingSolutions-WEB.pdf

process, and made five recommendations.[1] It found that funders can help grantees "**SCALE**" toward shifting systems by:

Streamlining processes for application and reporting

Collaborating more effectively

Accelerating impact through non-monetary support

Learning more about systems change

Empowering grantees by intentionally shifting the power dynamics between the givers and receivers of funds

In 2018 our research delved deeper into two questions that enable scaling solutions: how and why funders have successfully moved from endorsing approaches such as those above to actually *improving* their policies and practices around them; and what we can learn from existing funder collaborative models that aim at shifting systems, or as it is more commonly called, systems change. Studies have shown that funder peer-to-peer influencing and networked approaches are the best routes to improving practice in the philanthropy sector, so this report highlights many of the best practices we have found, and illustrates the kind of funder collaboratives that are gaining momentum and fostering the ecosystem for solutions to scale.

METHODOLOGY

Our research included interviews of about three dozen individuals in either funder collaboratives or organizations that aim for significant scale to shift systems. We also conducted secondary research and held many discussions to road-test our findings and explore these themes in a variety of contexts. Emerging ideas were shared with funders and grantees across 15 conference sessions and workshops in almost a dozen countries, including in emerging markets where the national philanthropy sector is flourishing. Our initiative confirmed what others have found: funder behaviors that undermine grantees' ability to achieve their missions are norms not grounded in formal policies, tax laws, or governance requirements, but rather practices that have nonetheless become ingrained in the sector. On the positive side, when funders do things differently, the sky doesn't fall—instead, new possibilities for collaboration are opened, and grantees are buoyed by a pattern of support that enables their solutions and impact to scale.

FINDINGS

The first section of the report describes more than a dozen positive examples of funders at work to 1) release organizations with a track record from the treadmill of fundraising and reporting; 2) prioritize practices and mechanisms that value feedback, listening, and responsiveness; 3) focus applications and reports on what the grantee is learning and changing, not on activities and outputs; 4) build on and share due diligence on potential grantees; and 5) allow grantees to determine the best use of funds.

The second part of the report summarizes findings from some 25 funder collaboratives spanning geography, size, age, duration, and form. It illustrates how those aimed at systems change operate, what they are learning, and their achievements and challenges. What unites these funder collaboratives ranges from defined long-term goals to geography to partnering with social movements. Yet across them, **seven clear findings** emerged that should be helpful to those considering collaboratives as an approach to transformational change.

1. For funders seeking systems change, collaborations can be more effective and rewarding than going it alone.

   Funders interested in systems change tend to expand their participation in collaboratives once they have tried it because they find them effective, conceptually stimulating, and sometimes more efficient.

2. Organic growth of the collaborative based on pre-existing relationships provides certain benefits and a stronger growth trajectory.

   Most systems change collaboratives start with a small number of funders with existing relationships and grow from there. Organic growth keeps the emphasis on creating learning and impact rather than negotiating process details.

3. Identifying and supporting strong leadership is an important foundation for collaborating on long-term systems change.

   Collaboratives need good leaders who are able accountable to the collaborative's purpose, and can balance a range of competing institutional and sometimes individual interests. More efforts should be made to identify and support individuals taking on these roles.

4. Collaboratives united by geography or supporting specific population groups are characterized by thoughtful, responsive practices that can serve as models to be adopted more widely.

   These collaboratives emphasize community-based dialogue, listening, and deep conversations between funders, grantees, and communities. But any collaborative can build these strengths with intentionality.

5. Aligning on theory of change (TOC) and embracing the complexity of systems change translate to a higher likelihood that funders can and will successfully pool funds.

   There may be one overall TOC, or TOCs around specific issues or regions. Appreciating how to craft and measure them, and embracing the complexity required, helps funders provide aligned support.

6. Funder collaboratives want to delve more into monitoring and evaluation processes for assessing systems-level progress and results.

   More guidance on measurement of systems change was a common and largely unmet need. Funders need to invest more as a systems change *funder community*, as well as within each collaborative, in exploring effective and appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems.

7. Systems change collaboratives frequently experience the same set of obstacles, and resolving these creates a stronger basis for success.

   Common challenges to be overcome include limitations on length of funding commitments, different appetites for risk, diverse institutional approaches to what should be measured, and heavy reporting and relationship-building responsibilities put on a small number of staff at the center.

THE WAY FORWARD

Our initiative identified two broad areas as next steps. First, funders interested in scaling solutions toward shifting systems must intentionally double down on improving their internal policies and practices with grantees and other funders. Second, a more structured network for learning about funder collaboratives is needed. This report is meant to encourage funders to continue to explore these themes and approaches. What will you, the reader, do differently now? If you are on this journey, we want to hear from you about your ideas and experiences.

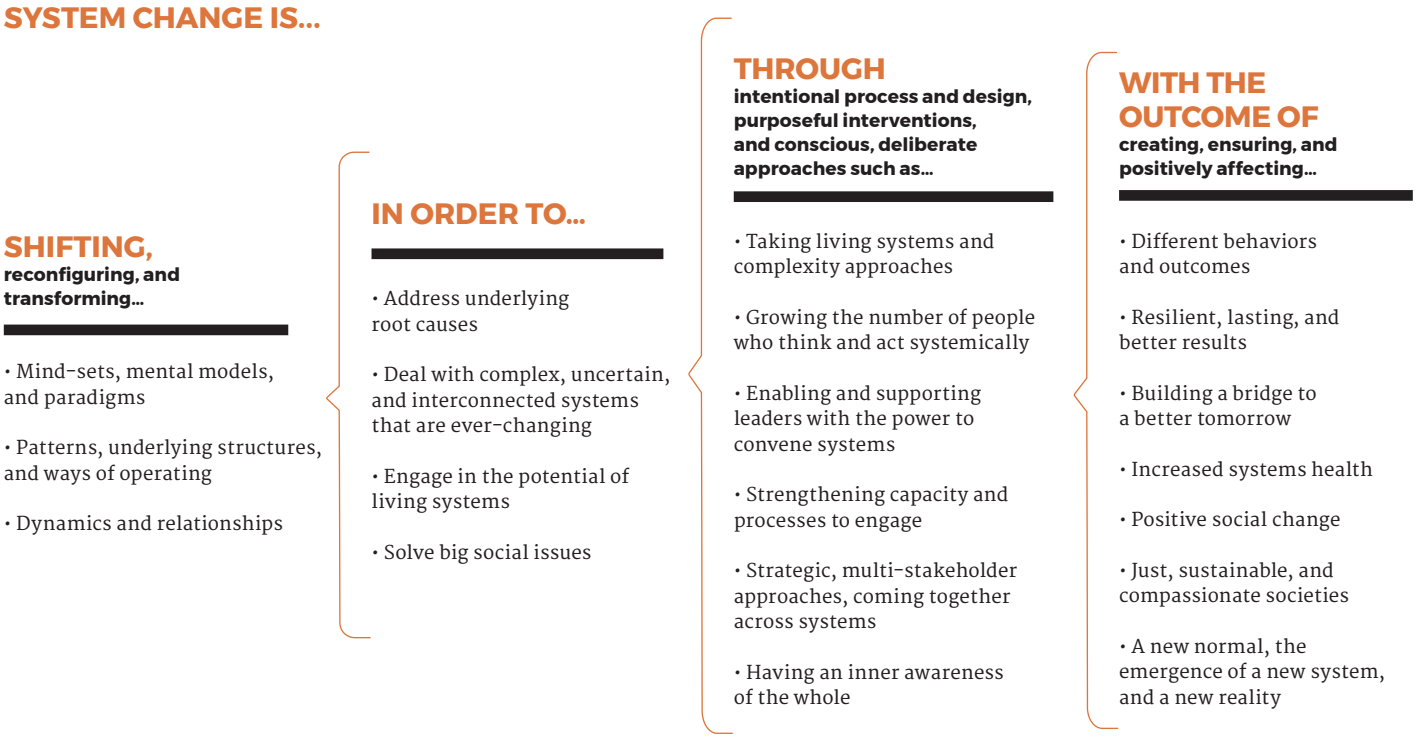
Introduction

There is an urgency and moral imperative today that our funder community often seems inured to, but that we must recognize and respond to—daunting, complex, seemingly intractable problems that threaten humanity's well-being and our planet's future. Systems experts define social problems as pathologies of systems. To solve social problems, they note, we need to understand underlying systems.[2]

Transformational change often sought by those in the philanthropy sector requires not just scaled and sustained change, but also underlying, more structural shifts. These are described in the box on the next page, adopted from a convening in 2018 at Wasan Island, Canada.[3]

And while ambition is high, philanthropic actors understand that certain challenges can limit their ability to achieve transformational change. Resources—financial, human, and time—are finite; knowledge is often siloed in certain domains and geographies; and institutional practices are often geared toward carrying out a specific

2 Christian Seelos, Stanford University Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, in "Mastering System Change," Stanford Social Innovation Review Fall 2018.
3 *Systems Change: A Field Building Convening.* A. Birney, D. Riddell, L. Winn, September 2018.



founding charter in ways prescribed in times past. Some in the philanthropic sector have an aversion to the risk inherent in innovation. Accountability for greater organizational effectiveness is weak in a sector without customers in the traditional sense. Studies have shown that peer-to-peer influencing is the most likely means to foster better policies and practices—yet what exists today isn't bold enough to address the scale of change needed.

Against the backdrop of these challenges is a sector filled with smart, dedicated, and conscientious funders, alongside a vast expanse of organizations, social enterprises, and government partners who do remarkable work. Most of the grantees we have studied have not only scaled solutions through direct impact, but also contributed to long-term change through some combination of what have been called "systems transformation levers": influencing public policy and practice, changing norms and behaviors, shifting market and investment practices, and introducing new technologies to solve problems.[4]

With this report, we share examples of how the philanthropy sector can more effectively support the potential of grantees. We highlight progress emanating from a range of countries and from newer philanthropies to provide a range of perspectives and, perhaps, leapfrog some of the obstacles common in more established philanthropic institutions.

The philanthropy sector itself can be seen as a system. Donella Meadows, an early systems thinker, would challenge our sector to identify the leverage points to intervene in this particular system.[5] High on Meadows' list are changing paradigms, mindsets, and power. Many examples of these leverage points in use are described on the following pages.

4 See SDGPhilanthropy.org and https://changelabs.stanford.edu
5 http://donellameadows.org/archives/leverage-points-places-to-intervene-in-a-system

Funders and Grantees: Standouts from the Field

An important step in creating transformational change through philanthropy is looking at the relationships between funders and those they support. Where are the examples of better funding practices, and why? Where are our SCALE recommendations in action? What spurred their adoption? And how do we bring more funders along this path?

A number of organizations have spent significant effort researching these questions. For example, the Real Cost Project, created by funders for funders, recommends new grantmaking practices based on what it actually costs nonprofit organizations to deliver outcomes.[6]

They found practices undermining nonprofits' ability to achieve their mission are a *cultural* issue, based on beliefs not grounded in any formal policies, tax laws, or governance requirements—practices that have nonetheless become ingrained in the sector. The Center for Effective Philanthropy produces a steady stream of thoughtful reports, articles, and blog posts on how funders can better support grantees, and many funders take advantage of its tools and conferences. Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Bridgespan, FSG, and Social Impact Exchange among others provide guidance to improve practices.

How is the sector reacting to these insights? Our research indicates that while funders may agree with the recommendations, agreement doesn't necessarily translate into implementation. We found that, generally, funders think they are doing a better job than grantees perceive them to be doing. And, since most funders do not collect anonymous feedback from those they fund, let alone the people and communities they seek to help, they continue to operate unaware of their deficiencies.[7]

We also heard that the push for streamlining and collaboration comes most strongly from staff (program officers) closest to the problem solvers and systems changers (the grantees), while the *power* to change both norms and practices sits with foundation management and leadership such as the CEO, CFO, legal counsel, founders and boards. As described by the *Unicorns Unite* effort, a movement to reduce power dynamics and create "epic" partnerships between funders and grantees, grantees are afraid of funders, and funders are afraid of their boards.[8] This dynamic can be challenging to negotiate.

Conversely, when philanthropic institutions (foundations or other funding vehicles) have leadership who make and fulfill a commitment to doing things differently, collaboration expands and potential for impact is unleashed. This requires greater trust of grantees and some relinquishing of control throughout the organizations that fund them.

Within foundations there are nodes of innovation around these processes. One example is the Ford Foundation's BUILD program, a pilot effort launched in 2015 to provide $1 billion over five years to selected grantees for multiyear general support, dedicated funding for institutional strengthening, and non-grant support for training, convening, and cohort-building. Distinct from the typical grantmaking of Ford and most other funders, it "requires putting our grantee partners in the driver's seat, ensuring that they are in charge of their direction and ultimate destination," according to Director Kathy Reich.[9]

More generally, our research this year has found many examples of funders using, and often combining, the approaches covered in our 2017 SCALE recommendations. These approaches give grantees more time to get on with the real work to scale their solutions and impact rather than wasting time jumping through hoops for funders. Examples of those walking the talk are shown on the next page.

6 For more information https://ncg.org/resources/real-cost-project-increasing-impact-philanthropy-california and the related Full Cost Project of Philanthropy California.
7 The Center for Effective Philanthropy Grantee Perception report is the gold standard in the sector in the U.S., but even there only utilized by a minority of foundations, generally the larger ones.
8 *Unicorns Unite* event in San Francisco in August 2018. https://www.epicpartnerships.org
9 https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/five-things-to-know-about-our-evaluation-of-build

BARRIERS

TOO MANY FUNDERS TEMPLATES

TOO LITTLE TRUST

OVERLY PRESCRIPTIVE BUDGETING PARAMETERS

SHORT-TERMS GRANTS

LIMITED LISTENING + LEARNING BY FUNDERS

OPPORTUNITIES AND EXEMPLARS

Ford Foundation's BUILD program provides 5-year core grants to trusted organizations, and so far has supported more than 200 organizations with more than $630 million this way.

Co-Impact, launched in late 2017 by four individual founders and one institutional founder, is committing five-year funding to grantees through a community of donors who want to give and learn together, and to pool resources, networks, and expertise.

Jasmine Social Investments, Skoll Foundation, and Ballmer Group all offer their due diligence and points of view for other funders who are interested.

Blue Meridian Partners, incubated by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, has pooled over $1 billion to provide unrestricted philanthropic investments to social sector leaders. Funders and NGOs work together to develop scaling plans and define outcomes.

Social Impact Exchange analyzed how philanthropic capital was distributed in order to have larger impact. By agreeing in advance to the due diligence framework, funders could share these investment opportunities with larger networks to help aggregate funds for grantees.

Following an in-depth evaluation, ClimateWorks Foundation, a 10-funder collaborative, shifted its practice to create consistency in expectations between funders, grantees, and intermediaries. It is now perceived as more inclusive of partners, funders, and staff, and performs regular evaluation of its institutional values, goals, and roles.

Core funders of Educate Girls included Dasra at the start-up stage, Mulago Foundation and Jasmine Social Investments at an early stage, and Skoll Foundation and others as it matured, provided flexible support that enabled it to accept more targeted funding such as development impact bonds to further scale its reach and impact.

In the Garfield Foundation's RE-AMP network, nonprofits and funders agree on collective priorities within the context of a "holistic system," then align their action and funding accordingly, creating an opportunity for funders and nonprofits to engage as equals in setting shared strategies.

Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation, combining the support of about 50 donors, provides $300,000 of unrestricted capital over three years in addition to rigorous, ongoing support to help build capacity in funded organizations and scale their impact.

The Fund for Shared Insight has almost 100 funders who have provided over $21 million to 230 nonprofits. It promotes the practice of collecting beneficiary feedback as a complement to monitoring and evaluation to help nonprofits and foundations be more responsive to the communities they serve.

New Profit provides "grantee-partners" with unrestricted growth capital and strategic advice, and encourages donors to reflect and work on their own behaviors that may be getting in the way of real partnerships for problem-solving.

The Skoll Foundation's Awards for Social Entrepreneurship provide unrestricted funding of $1.25 million over three years, and the foundation encourages reporting against adaptive milestones rather than fixed outputs and detailed line items.

The With and For Girls Collective, with nine strategic donors, annually provides 20 core funding awards (rather than grants) to organizations who have done good work, trusting that the recipients know best how to use the funds going forward.

MUSO

In an ideal world, when nonprofits encounter financial strain, funders would help them with immediate capital needs and with mechanisms to avoid similar situations in the future. An example of positive dynamics when this happens is Muso and Big Bang Philanthropy.

Muso was born out of partnership between Malians and Americans to address unequal access to healthcare in Mali. Founded in 2005, Muso's mission is to eliminate preventable deaths rooted in poverty, with a vision of universal healthcare coverage. Muso works with government and academic partners to redesign community health worker systems to reach each patient the moment they fall ill.

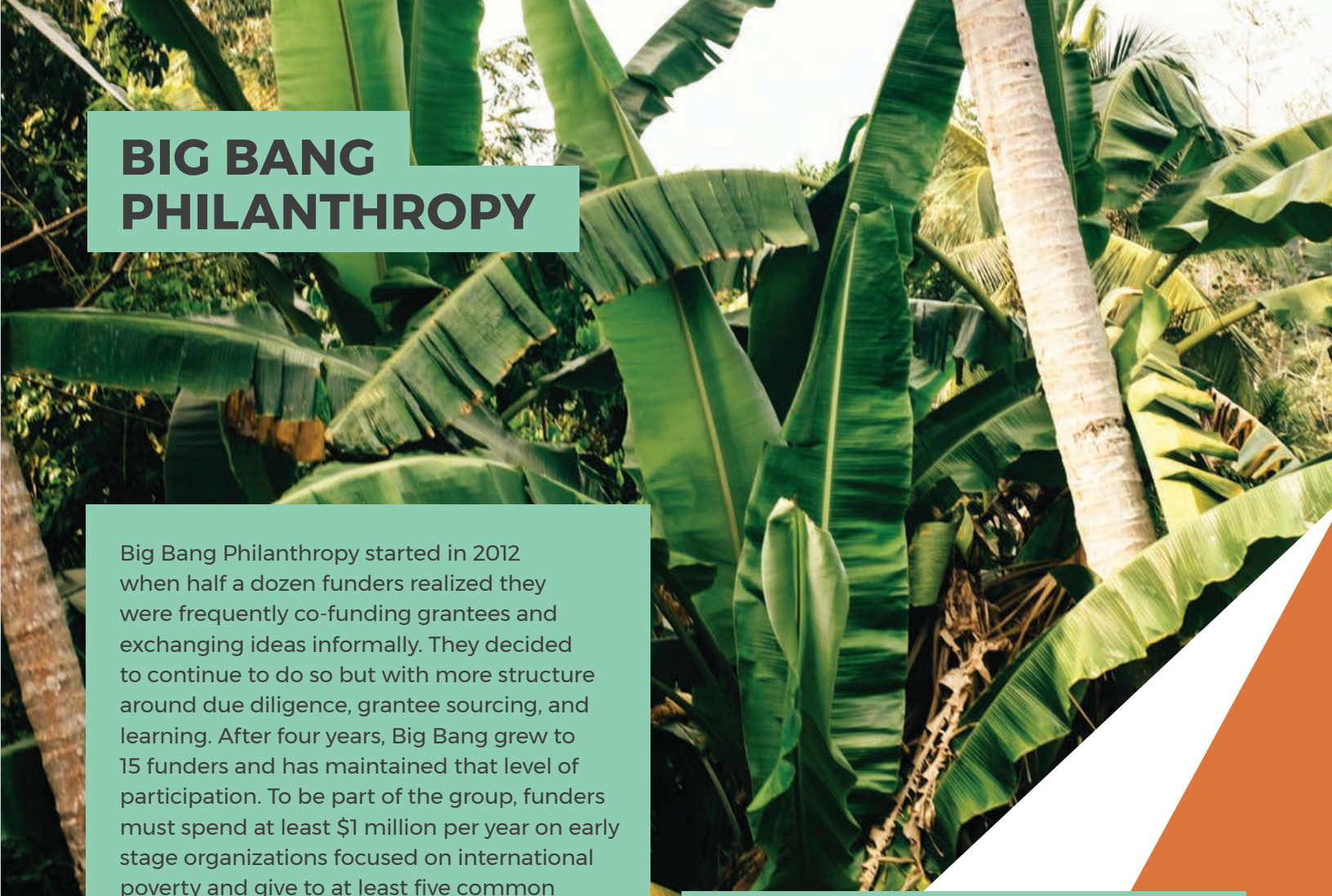
Muso's initial work focused on urban communities. The outcomes were so successful that in 2016 the Malian government asked Muso to scale its proactive healthcare model across remote areas. Muso wasn't certain whether the model would translate well, but was excited by the prospect of serving 100,000 more people.

The response was fast. In weeks, Muso reached the number of patients it had expected to serve in a few years— a ten-fold increase in using its services. It was a sea change in access to care in these communities, which matched Muso's mission. However, while Muso's leadership thought it had budgeted conservatively for the expansion project, the incredible success put the organization in an immediate cash crunch.

Muso turned to its partners at Big Bang Philanthropy. It was already a grantee of 11 Big Bang members. These funders recognized a pivotal moment in Muso's trajectory, and believed that with the right support this could be a huge opportunity to scale the impact of the organization and its model. They understood that without additional support, Muso would not be able to capitalize on the significant interest in rural communities. They rallied around Muso providing critical supports:

- Shifting the timing of commitments: current funders moved up the dispersals.
- Increasing commitment: one funder increased the amount granted.
- Attracting additional funding: Funders, especially the Peery Foundation and Planet Wheeler Foundation, encouraged support from other Big Bang members and outside funders, helping Muso secure $400,000 in weeks.

They planned for the future too. Big Bang funders advised on smoothing cash flow without diluting impact, and provided guidance as Muso re-booted and added capacity to its finance team. Big Bang member Jasmine Social Investments helped Muso recruit a part-time CFO. Others recommended nonprofits with strong financial performance and systems to benchmark against and emulate. In this way, its funders supported Muso to become a more nimble and resilient organization.



BIG BANG PHILANTHROPY

Big Bang Philanthropy started in 2012 when half a dozen funders realized they were frequently co-funding grantees and exchanging ideas informally. They decided to continue to do so but with more structure around due diligence, grantee sourcing, and learning. After four years, Big Bang grew to 15 funders and has maintained that level of participation. To be part of the group, funders must spend at least $1 million per year on early stage organizations focused on international poverty and give to at least five common grantees. In 2017, collectively, its members gave $35 million to 23 organizations.

Big Bang founder Kevin Starr notes that shared decision-making is kept to a minimum including "where to hold the annual meeting, who will create the agenda, and where to have dinner." It is focused instead on sharing ideas about how to get the maximum amount of money to the best poverty-fighting organizations, which are working toward lasting change at scale. Starr has a compelling recipe for scale comprised of three questions: 1) Is your idea big enough—are there enough populations where your idea would work? 2) Can your doer do it at that larger scale? 3) Can your payer pay for it? Big Bang works with organizations on "the big shift" to take them dramatically upwards. Funders join to leverage their funding, gain access to an efficient due diligence and pipeline process, and be part of a community with similar funding goals.

Among the funders Starr sees "a general desire to find organizations that are more local in origin, but the greater commitment is to organizations that have a capacity to scale and a commitment to deliver on that. We have a session called 'You Gotta Fund This' during which you have permission to pitch others, and they can say no if they want. There is a general sense of wanting to minimize hassle for the doers—the grantees."

There is a broad culture of unrestricted funding, and not nearly the reliance on proposals that many other funders have. Starr is also the CEO of the Mulago Foundation, whose funding process relies almost entirely on documents and materials potential grantees should already have. The sharing of funder practices that empower grantees with time and options—such as Mulago's—can influence other members' receptivity to such practices as well.

B LAB

B Lab was profiled in our first SCALE report, and is determined to keep pushing funders to provide the kind of resources needed to reach its mission of redefining success in business: becoming Certified B Corporations, adopting legal structures like the benefit corporation statute, and using the B Impact Assessment (BIA) to assess, compare, and improve their impact. Some funders understand the value in B Lab's systemic approach, as evidenced by new funding for B Lab to help businesses deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), building on the nonprofit's existing impact management platform. In aligning the BIA and the SDGs, B Lab can create convergence and increase coordination of efforts and reporting, eventually across tens of thousands of businesses of all sizes across the world, including influencer companies that are in the process of getting certified.

Co-Founder Andrew Kassoy notes, "We have grown in the last 18 months with new foundation donors, and have a list of 720 potential funder relationships, but only a small subset are active supporters. Each of these funders has different reporting requirements." B Lab has found that funders generally prefer narrow requests rather than broader, system-wide approaches that the B Lab team believes is the only route to truly transforming capitalism to serve society, not just shareholders. "If we can't determine how to address this systems approach, as opposed to project funding, with funders, we will have problems with scaling in the way that a systems approach requires." B Lab hopes its own funders who see the importance of this, including the Skoll Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Propel Capital, can get other funders to understand the value.

Kassoy notes the importance of funding talent, but he shares, "It's been almost impossible to get people to understand the need for talent development, professional development, or back-office systems for M&E. This has been a huge constraint – the ability to create a sustainable organization so that our talent stays." General operating support from a few foundations is enabling B Lab to grow, but it doesn't yet have an M&E team, and it can't support it if funders don't fund M&E or provide more core support. Better collaboration—between organizations, funders, and the whole community—is essential in Kassoy's view, and something funders can and should get behind.

RESOURCE GENERATION

Resource Generation (RG) has a unique niche in the funder collaborative landscape in the U.S. It is for, and run by, 18 to 35 year-olds in the top 10 percent of the economy who use their resources and class privilege for racial and economic justice. As a multiracial organization with local chapters nationwide, RG's mission is to organize young people with wealth and class privilege in the U.S. to become transformational leaders working toward equitable distribution of wealth, land, and power. RG supports and activates them to be open about their class background, use their wealth as a tool supporting social movements, and be activists working with poor and working-class partners on long-term solutions.

RG was established in 1998. The founders wanted to involve all aspects of their identity—class, activism, race, sexual identity—in social justice efforts. In a first phase, RG held national gatherings, led donor education, and organized joint funding efforts. In 2012 it initiated a strategic planning process to become a membership organization rather than a loosely organized donor network. Now almost 600 members in 16 chapters share beliefs in radical systems change, overcoming wealth inequality, ending racialized capitalism, and achieving racial justice. Poor and working-class leaders on RG's staff and board play a critical role in setting strategic direction.

Members connect to RG through local chapters and national events, including six-month training workshops. They emerge with a personalized giving plan, inspired to take action. Many members are leaders in family foundations, often considering how to integrate social justice values into the family foundation framework. Volunteer-led local chapters focus on recruitment and personal transformation. Some raise funds for local social justice causes. RG encourages member involvement in established social justice donor circles and projects. And, although it doesn't facilitate a pooled fund or engage in regranting, RG has influenced its members' propensity for philanthropy. An external researcher, engaged to study RG's impact, found that members give 16 times as much after joining. Armed with a better understanding of their own potential and how to engage in systems transformation, members are poised to make meaningful impact with their resources.

Systems Change: Learning Through, and From, Funder Collaboratives

The following section of the report describes more about funder collaboratives aimed at systems change. Where are the models to learn from, and what are the collaboratives learning themselves? How are they adapting to the complexities of planning and measuring progress on systems change, rather than the more straightforward task of measuring the results of a project or grant?

Participating in a funder collaborative is a meaningful opportunity to magnify resources and impact, and provides the ecosystem for individual organizations to scale their solutions.

There are many funder collaboratives, but knowledge of them—their presence, value, and how they work—is sparse. This is likely because so many of them focus more on creating change than on promoting themselves. Those interviewed span geographies, size, age, duration, and rules and procedures. They take different forms. There are fully pooled funds, entirely separate grants from each funder, and hybrids of these. Some are housed within one of the funders; many hire an executive director who creates a small secretariat, often working with a very small team, or no team at all. We found no standard word used for the central connection point—names included secretariat,

executive director, and systems entrepreneur—so in this report we simply call it a hub.

Crucially, these funder collaboratives also span *purpose and approach*. In aiming for systems change, the founders and members of these funder collaboratives orient around a particular impetus. These starting points can unite what are usually independent-minded individuals and institutions, as well as offer direction for how the collaborative will support systems change. The collaboratives include, and sometimes combine, these starting points: 1) long-term goals, 2) geographies, 3) population groups, 4) social movements, 5) high-impact organizations, or 6) the dedicated pursuit of a learning journey around how to create transformational change. Starting points are not mutually exclusive, but they inform the way the collaboratives function and how success is measured.

Under unique circumstances, organizations can pursue systems-changing work with only one funder. And not all funder collaboratives necessarily aim at systems change. But generally, truly collaborative approaches and the power of a collective set of stakeholders can be a strong contributor to greater impact at a systems level. And while this report focuses on philanthropic actors, an effective funder collaborative is not itself the end point, but an effective way to *catalyze* transformational change.

What defines success? Opinions vary, but generally funder collaboratives tackling complex challenges and addressing root causes are viewed as successful when the organizations they support:

- Manage to shift the underlying structures and mechanisms that produce the symptoms plaguing society—particularly when new policies, norms, and behaviors emerge

- Yield outsize impact relative to the funding committed to the collaboration in terms of sustaining actual outcomes and attracting additional financial resources or more public attention

- Can operate in new ways that allow them to meet their potential for scaling impact beyond what they could do individually

The seven findings described in the next section of this report generally held true in the 25 examples studied and interviewed.

Key Findings at the Nexus of Scaling, Collaboration, and Systems Change

FINDING 1: THE APPEAL OF COLLABORATIVES

For funders seeking systems change, collaboratives can be more effective and rewarding than going it alone.

Funders interested in systems change tend to expand their participation in collaboratives once they have tried it because they find them effective, conceptually stimulating, and sometimes more efficient.

Funders expressed a variety of benefits to being in collaboratives, including:

- Making collective bets and spreading the risk among funders
- Making connections to important players for one another, especially more experienced or established funders supporting those new to an issue area, geography, or approach
- Having a space to experiment and take risks with others in ways traditional philanthropic vehicles generally do not allow
- Empowering grantees and beneficiaries, and learning to be more culturally sensitive and aware
- Having more impact on public agendas like the SDGs and the global climate agreements

- Accepting and addressing historical and current injustices more easily together than alone, such as the impacts of colonialism, racism, and inequality
- Gaining critical mass in terms of geography
- Reaching more influential system actors
- Understanding the landscape of funding and where the gaps lie

Funders also appreciate the assets their peers bring, including:

- Collective knowledge about a place, its people and environment, and its challenges and opportunities
- Knowledge and data on past grantmaking and upcoming dockets
- Strong analysis of how the work of grantees in respective portfolios has contributed to systems change in the past
- Connections to important stakeholders and networks
- Greater ability to attract more funders who are working on different and complementary aspects of the same challenge

While recognized as being more effective, there may or may not be efficiencies in terms of making less work for grantees or funders. Sometimes there is streamlining in the overall process, but in other cases effort is merely shifted onto the central hub—which works well if it is resourced adequately, but can cause strain if not.

FREEDOM FUND

The Freedom Fund collaborative was launched in 2013 by three independent philanthropies: the Walk Free Foundation, Legatum, and Humanity United. The collaborative's objective was to address the significant gap in philanthropic resources supporting anti-slavery efforts. Historically, human rights funders haven't paid enough attention to or committed enough resources to the issue of modern slavery. And funders generally have not self-identified as working on the issue, but have instead given it different labels such as child labor or child exploitation—not recognizing the underlying root cause as the practice of modern slavery, and the fact that it is tolerated as an input to production and agriculture.

With each of the three founding funders having an existing commitment to end modern slavery, they came together to seek a collaborative solution. They committed $10 million each to seed the effort; $70 million would need to come from other funders.

There are hotspots around the world where the prevalence of modern slavery is at its highest. The Fund's work was designed to concentrate resources to these areas of greatest need. The Fund's work spans several countries, and as the movement against this scourge gained strength, more funders joined. To date the Fund has raised over $83 million from dozens of donors. These funders can choose their priorities from a range of relevant geographical and thematic choices, which together make up a systems approach to ending the practice permanently.

Humanity United's Vice President Ed Marcum notes that, not surprisingly, the different funders have an interest in measuring very different outcomes, despite being aligned on the overall purpose. Some measure reach—the number of people freed from slavery. Others focus on supply chain issues—and how well new technologies and tools are forcing companies to enforce their commitments against slavery in their products. Still others are most interested in policy and legal changes, and better enforcement of existing policies and laws. Marcum notes, "We are on a learning journey in experimenting with how best to combine shorter-term direct service models with tackling generational exploitation and structural vulnerabilities which underlie slavery in many societies today."

The Fund's portfolio so far has been able to incorporate and balance these different outcomes as well as support important work to build frontline NGO capacity and more effectively monitor and measure the efficacy of programmatic interventions. In a very short period of time the Fund has become a center of gravity for recognizing and tackling the issue.

PLASTICS SOLUTIONS FUND

The Plastic Solutions Fund is an international funder collaborative working to stem the tide of plastic pollution into the environment. It supports projects to reduce production of single-use plastic and packaging, focusing on key drivers of systems change in the plastic supply chain.

Launched in January 2017, it grew out of funding from the Oak and Marisla Foundations to a core group of NGOs building a shared strategy and collaborating more effectively on the global challenge of plastics. Nicky Davies, now the Fund's Program Director, worked with over 50 NGOs and funders from around the world to create a global plastic pollution strategy. When funders committed to securing more funds to form a longer-term entity, the Plastic Solutions Fund was born.

The Fund aims to shift systems by supporting the power of activists, and uses a multilayered NGO strategy to change three main areas: 1) the behavior of companies that are major plastics users, 2) how cities deal with waste, and 3) how people interact with plastics. It emphasizes normative shifts, learning from the anti-tobacco movement.

The Fund now has ten partners and members, and aims to grow further. Partners contribute at least $500,000 per year for at least three years; members can join with a lower contribution. New contributors join with the agreement of the current board. Voting on grants is generally consensus based, although differences of opinion are resolved via a majority vote of partners. Funders gain a range of benefits through membership, and each may have a different reason for being part of this particular funder collaborative.

The collaborative nature of the funders has been crucial. "I don't think fundamentally the money would have flowed without this. Our funders reflect the different layers of interest in the plastics lifecycle. You couldn't address the strategic systems change layers without this," says Davies. The broader pollution field has few entities pursuing a systems change strategy. This design enables smaller organizations to play an effective role in the larger strategy.

CHINA DONORS ROUNDTABLE

China Donors Roundtable (CDR) is a technical support organization established in 2015 by Narada Foundation, the Dunhe Foundation, China Merchants Charity Foundation, Macao Tong Chai Charity Association, and Kaifeng Foundation, with the goal of improving Chinese philanthropy and helping Chinese grantmakers develop the organizational capacity necessary to tackle key social issues within China. CDR provides members with training in grantmaking strategy, issue research and analysis, and organizational capacity building.

Within three years, CDR has grown to 31 members and has maintained regular donor support from 20 additional foundations operating within China. Because many foundations in China are inexperienced, dependent on public funding, and lack the core funding required for research and development to scale impact, members see significant value in the training, networking, and collaboration possibilities offered by CDR. CDR is not a grantmaking institution, but provides members with the tools, training, and networking necessary to develop their individual grantmaking strategies necessary to influence social change within China. With this training, CDR members can advise grantees on more effective program strategy and influence the grantmaking approaches of other foundations. By equipping foundations with smart grantmaking and effective philanthropic strategies, CDR aims to change the behaviors and organizational capacity of Chinese philanthropy.

CDR promotes multiyear commitments from members and has nine members who have stayed with the organization for three years. However, changing organizational-level behaviors takes time, and “one time consultation cannot achieve deep change in organizations”, notes CDR representative Li Zhiyan. CDR actively promotes a culture of self-reflection and improvement. Because of CDR’s innovative model and the high-profile nature of its founders, the organization has been successful in creating a close-knit community of grantmaking foundations in China.

FINDING 2: TRUST ENHANCES TRAJECTORY

Organic growth of a collaborative based on pre-existing relationships provides certain benefits and a stronger growth trajectory.

Most systems change collaboratives start with a small number of funders with existing relationships, and grow from there, and organic growth keeps the emphasis on creating learning and impact, and streamlined governance, rather than negotiating about detailed process points.

Funders need to understand and accept the ground rules of the collaborative before they join, and know that the rules set at the beginning tend to be enforced with only minor modifications. In most cases, decisions are made by consensus, or in rarer cases and only if necessary, by majority vote. Most of those studied leaned toward being democratic about decision-making and gave equal or similar levels of decision-making power to funders giving different amounts. As the collaboratives grew, membership was maintained in most cases, and those supporting the collaborative continued to gain benefits from participation. Nevertheless, stewarding a collaborative over a long-term process, and keeping often impatient funders focused on long-term change, requires quite a balancing act by the leader.

PARTNERS FOR A NEW ECONOMY

Partners for a New Economy (Partners), an international donor collaborative launched in 2015, strives to help the economy work for people and the planet. Its four founding members—the MAVA, Oak, Marisla, and KR Foundations—created the collaborative to support innovative, high-risk interventions that transform the world's economic system to value ecological integrity and human well-being. Partners' theory of change revolves around changing the economy's purpose, distribution of power, and narratives to become more sustainable and fair. It addresses three primary issues: 1) making monetary policy more environmentally sustainable, 2) reforming the structure and governance of enterprises so companies operate within planetary boundaries and focus on human well-being, and 3) generating a more realistic intellectual and moral framework for the economy that will shift economics curricula and cultural mindsets. The collaborative is developing an M&E system within each of the three change areas, and exploring how to build a network so members have a better view of cause and effect relationships.

Partners' strategy is to support leadership and innovation in these three areas and construct connective tissue among networks. The goal is to find plausible solutions and build a sustained reform movement. Although it doesn't have enough money or influence to create significant change single-handedly, Partners aims to trigger critical economic shifts by working collaboratively across sectors.

Director Leslie Harroun was hired to turn this nascent partnership into a real collaborative. It began with a three-year timeframe and funder commitments—recently renewed for three more years, with new funders welcome. Mutualizing risk allows bolder action while enabling grantees to take risks themselves. Foundation teams often work on shared aims, with shared grantees, and formal collaboration via Partners leverages learning and speeds greater impact. It also seeds new ideas and projects the foundations can support as they grow and become more mainstream. Although Partners has a modest grant-making budget—around $3 million per annum—it can create a portfolio of funded partners with outsize collective impact. Partners' reporting format asks questions on outcomes toward systems change, not just activities and outputs—which is unfamiliar to some of its grantees.

Harroun believes it is too early to tell if this collaborative will enable its funders to create more systemic change. A major challenge is operating effectively in a large system that's impossible to see as a single organization. Nevertheless, Harroun recommends the funder collaborative approach. "It isn't possible to do systems change on your own; collaboration is key."

LAST MILE HEALTH & LIVING GOODS' AUDACIOUS PROJECT

Our previous Scaling Solutions report profiled the achievements of Last Mile Health (LMH) in Liberia. Since then, LMH has announced an exciting partnership with Living Goods (LG), funded by a four-year, $50 million matching grant from the Audacious Project (for a total of $100 million once matched) to expand the reach and capacity of community health care workers. Overall, the partnership aims to deploy over 50,000 community health workers to reach 34 million people across six countries by 2021. LMH and LG, long admirers of one another's complementary work, will leverage one another's strengths to meet these goals.

LG and LMH both aim to greatly expand access to healthcare through models that rely on community health workers. Their work aims to change healthcare systems in entire countries and thus requires interfacing with bilaterals and partnering with governments. LMH, which works in Liberia with the Liberian government, focuses on government-led implementation and uses the following levers: policy change, operations standardization, and identifying financing that ensures sustainable programming.

LG primarily works in two countries, Uganda and Kenya and, where each government contracts with LG, and LG, for the most part, runs its entire program end-to-end. LG trains and manages health workers including teaching them to use technology to deliver and track services. Every health worker tracks patients, locations, and treatments. Technology also enables real-time treatment advice, optimizing their chances to save lives. A third party audits the data and the services in real time. Funders have access to the data collected, which can enable results-based funding, paying for traceable, actual outcomes.

Many of the funders involved in the Audacious Project were already funders of LG, LMH, or both. They believed in the organizations and knew that together they could do much more to support them. The trusting relationships the funders had with one another gave them the confidence to take the initiative to join together and provide much more significant funding over a longer time period. They were looking for opportunities to support systemic change and believed a combined grant to LG and LMH offered that possibility. Given that LG works in East Africa and LMH in West Africa, partnering would increase their footprint, offering a bigger chance at systemic change and affecting the health outcomes of millions of people.

LG and LMH were excited to have the opportunity to collaborate. As part of the partnership, LG intends to share its use of data, research, and supervision for LMH to integrate, as appropriate, into its operations. LMH expects to share more of its learnings on collaborating successfully with government partners. They anticipate that over the four years there will be many chances for thought partnership and sharing advice and experiences. With multiyear funding from the Audacious Project, they have the opportunity to support one another to expand services in ever smarter, sustainable ways.

FINDING 3: STRONG LEADERSHIP NAVIGATES COMPLEXITY

Identifying and supporting strong leadership is an important foundation for collaborating on long-term systems change.

Collaboratives need good leaders who are accountable to the collaborative's purpose and can balance a range of competing institutional and sometimes individual interests. There should also be more effort to identify and support individuals taking on these roles.

The role of collaborative leader demands much from the individual holding it: deference but not obeisance to those with funding; insights as to what constitutes systems change, and the confidence and room to push back on funders, if needed; sufficient organizational skills to manage a complex strategy; and working collaboratively, adaptively, and in a trusting way with the organizations receiving funding. Some refer to this as a systems entrepreneur, others as a facilitative leader.

Jeff Walker, Chair of New Profit, believes individuals in this role must have a "managed ego—it's not about me or the size or supremacy of my organization, it's about the bigger idea." New Profit's definition of a systems entrepreneur is someone who "innovates to overcome key conditions that hold a social or environmental problem in place," in concert with other systems players.

CIVIL MARRIAGE COLLABORATIVE

In 2004, 11 funders came together in support of the agenda of *freedom to marry* to win state-by-state marriage equality across the U.S. The Civil Marriage Collaborative (CMC) was housed at Proteus Fund and led by Paul Di Donato from 2007 until its closure. It pooled over $20 million to target strategically in support of marriage equality, while creating a learning community of funders who applied the collaborative's experiences and strategies to their own grantmaking. Funds were designated for 501(c)3 organizations, meaning grantees primarily engaged in "hearts and minds" public education work with very limited legislative advocacy.

Donor partners grew to 14 institutions that collectively invested more than $153 million. Most of the funders had preexisting relationships with one another, which facilitated dialogue, planning, and decision making. As CMC evolved, it refined its strategy, focusing on fewer grantees, shorter terms, and higher amounts. As demographics and public support shifted, CMC began to focus where funds were most needed. Tim Sweeney, who co-founded and then advised the collaborative for many years, and still shares its lessons with others, notes, "The regular site visits with grantees by CMC funders and staff helped funders recognize the unique challenges and successes of each individual initiative, enabling the success of the whole."

CMC was created with the understanding that it would come to an end following a Supreme Court ruling in favor of marriage equality, realized in June 2015. Proteus performed monitoring and evaluation, and regularly met with CMC's executive committee and all the donor partners to provide updates, hone strategies, and promote confidence in CMC efforts as well as the larger movement. CMC's targeted theory of change evolved over time according to the needs of the movement. From the crucial focus on shifts in mindset to convince people that marriage equality had to be seen as a basic civil right, it shifted to a completely different public education approach—the notion that expressing love through joining in marriage was the fair and moral thing to do ('the golden rule approach") without negative impacts on individuals, communities, or the nation. Over time CMC also funded additional tactics, including critical litigation efforts.

CMC's organized philanthropy was essential to winning marriage equality in the U.S. As Overbrook Foundation's Steven Foster noted, "Bringing people together to fund in a collaborative way, behind a collaborative vision, leverages dollars exponentially...and creates relationships of trust among funders." CMC faced countless challenges throughout its duration, but used defeats as learning opportunities, and rallied philanthropic support through renewed funder commitments to revised strategies and tactics. CMC provided a strategic focus to the LGBT movement, and provided landmark financial resources showing the world that freedom to marry was a cause worthy of support.

CLIMATE AND LAND USE ALLIANCE

The Climate and Land Use Alliance (CLUA) is a donor collaborative of six foundations who believe that forest and sustainable land use are essential to combating climate change. Hosted at ClimateWorks Foundation, CLUA was established in 2006 by the ClimateWorks, Ford, David and Lucile Packard, and Gordon and Betty Moore Foundations, and later was joined by two additional foundations. The funder collaborative aims to combine resources and diverse expertise to "promote viable solutions and mobilize greater funding to conserve forests and more sustainably use land—for the benefit of people and the planet." CLUA works in Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, and Central America, and pursues a global agenda of promoting policies, programs, and finance in favor of sustainable land use.

CLUA's board is responsible for financial decision-making and strategy. Funders contribute to strategic initiatives by pooling funding into ClimateWorks, though the majority of funding is allocated individually by member foundations to grantees. All grant proposals and documents are shared between funders. While CLUA's grant portfolio is mixed, 20 percent of funding supports indigenous forest movements and there is a strategic focus on NGOs involved in high-impact campaigns. CLUA's new grantmaking strategy focuses on private sector agribusiness, international climate policy and finance, forest and land rights for rural economies and indigenous peoples, conflict-free commodities, strategic communications, and infrastructure and extractive industries that impact tropical forests and communities.

CLUA's initiative coordinators provide facilitated access to grantees and partners and perform monitoring on each initiative every six months. Two independent evaluations of CLUA and its strategy have been performed. Funders meet twice yearly to discuss challenges, grantees, impact, and learning opportunities. Grants are mapped against yearly milestones to see how they are contributing to CLUA's strategy.

CLUA has unified and focused the sustainable land use agenda based on the input of global experts and NGOs working in the field. CLUA may have more transaction costs because of its collaborative nature, according to Penny Davies of Ford Foundation, but the benefits outweigh these costs. In the collective's early years, foundations had different perspectives and members were often pushed outside their comfort zones during discussions. The evaluations have encouraged members to challenge one another's approaches and work towards strengthening CLUA's strategy. Since its establishment, CLUA members have refined their grantmaking strategies, allowing the collaborative to create more change than would otherwise be possible. As Davies asserts, "You don't want people to get comfortable or else you don't get robust strategies".

Systems change funder collaboratives like CLUA also catalyze action by larger groups of funders. CLUA funders were an important part of the new 18-foundation multiyear commitment to land-based solutions to climate change at the Global Climate Action Summit in September 2018.

SHIFTING THE U.S. HEALTH SYSTEM

In our previous Scaling Solutions report we profiled Health Leads, which, in founder Rebecca Onie's words, "strives to inculcate a deeper understanding of the unmet social needs of patients into the healthcare system to shift ecosystems toward creating health." Rebecca is now partnering with Rocco Perla, former Health Leads' President and a leader at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Innovation Center, to explore the radical notion that, while the U.S. is divided on healthcare, its citizens are – or could be – united on health. Public opinion research they did found that, despite divergent views on healthcare, people and institutions hold substantially aligned views on the drivers of health, such as good diet, safe housing, and well-paying jobs. This transcends race, age, gender, geography, and politics.

These findings culminated in a nascent change strategy. Perla summarizes, "If we invest only in disparate organizations and institutions, but don't pull a complete set of levers to achieve impact – spanning policy, practice, and politics – we're unlikely to see the shift in investment in healthcare to investment in health."

Onie and Perla studied successful movements, such as marriage equality, and how donors enabled such fundamental change. Fortunately, the small cohort of donors who provided the initial investment in their vision share some of those critical characteristics. According to Perla, "Our first-stage investors understand that funding the next organization or policy initiative is necessary but not sufficient, and joined us in asking how we can start charting a course to achieve sustained impact, recognizing that the timeline may be 20+ years."

For example, the Physicians Foundation, whose board includes 19 state medical societies in red, blue, and purple states—contracted them to be strategic partners in elevating physician voices on the impact of poverty on health outcomes and cost, as well as the physician and patient experience.

But not all funders are willing to do what it takes. "While a growing number of funders may say they're committed to systems change," explains Onie, "in reality their work is functionally about scaling *organizations*. To the extent that funders today are talking about systems change, they expect total, rapid transformation with very little money and zero risk to their investment. This is simply impossible."

Drawing on philanthropy's pivotal role in marriage equality, Onie and Perla believe in a unified investor framework that tracks wins and losses and frames strategic investments choices. "None of our individual donors have asked for a report in the first nine months. Instead, they want us doing the learning required to create sustained impact." Onie hopes traditional funders will take the requisite risks to shift the U.S. health system. "What we are trying to do is incredibly ambitious, and it's probably impossible, but 15 years ago everyone thought marriage equality was too."

FINDING 4: PROXIMITY FACILITATES RESPONSIVENESS

Collaboratives united by geography or supporting specific population groups are characterized by thoughtful, responsive practices that can serve as models to be adopted more widely.

Funders in these collaboratives stressed the importance of living one's values by ensuring the participation of communities in decisions that impact their lives, and feel this often works better when funders adopt a collective and collaborative approach. They see this as essential to lasting systems change, as distinct from grantmaking aimed at solving the symptoms of problems without taking local agency and voice into consideration. Additionally, such collaboratives have brought more attention to a specific region or population, making other funders more aware of the issues and work being done in those areas.

Attracting additional funding and awareness is key. Funders who have worked longer in regions can introduce newer funders to the leaders and stakeholders there, which is important to philanthropic funders who strive for very relationship-based giving. And for many funders who believe that change must come from those impacted by the issues in a place, because otherwise the positive change won't last, the collaborative approach is perceived as a way to avoid disrespecting the community and bringing in negative power dynamics.

ARCTIC FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE

Now just over ten years old, the Arctic Funders Collaborative (AFC) is a learning community focused primarily on knowledge exchange, learning opportunities, and raising the profile of the Arctic region. The interests of the group's current 11 public and private foundation members vary across social and environmental initiatives in the Northern hemisphere. Members include the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Oak Foundation, Tamalpais Trust, and the Windrose Fund. What unites them is a focus on the geographic region. The AFC's official mission is to promote more informed and effective grantmaking to support healthy Arctic communities and ecosystems, leveraging support for opportunities across the Arctic that advance land and water stewardship, capacity building for Indigenous peoples, and community and cultural well-being. This emphasis on learning and engaging with local communities is a hallmark of systems change philanthropy.

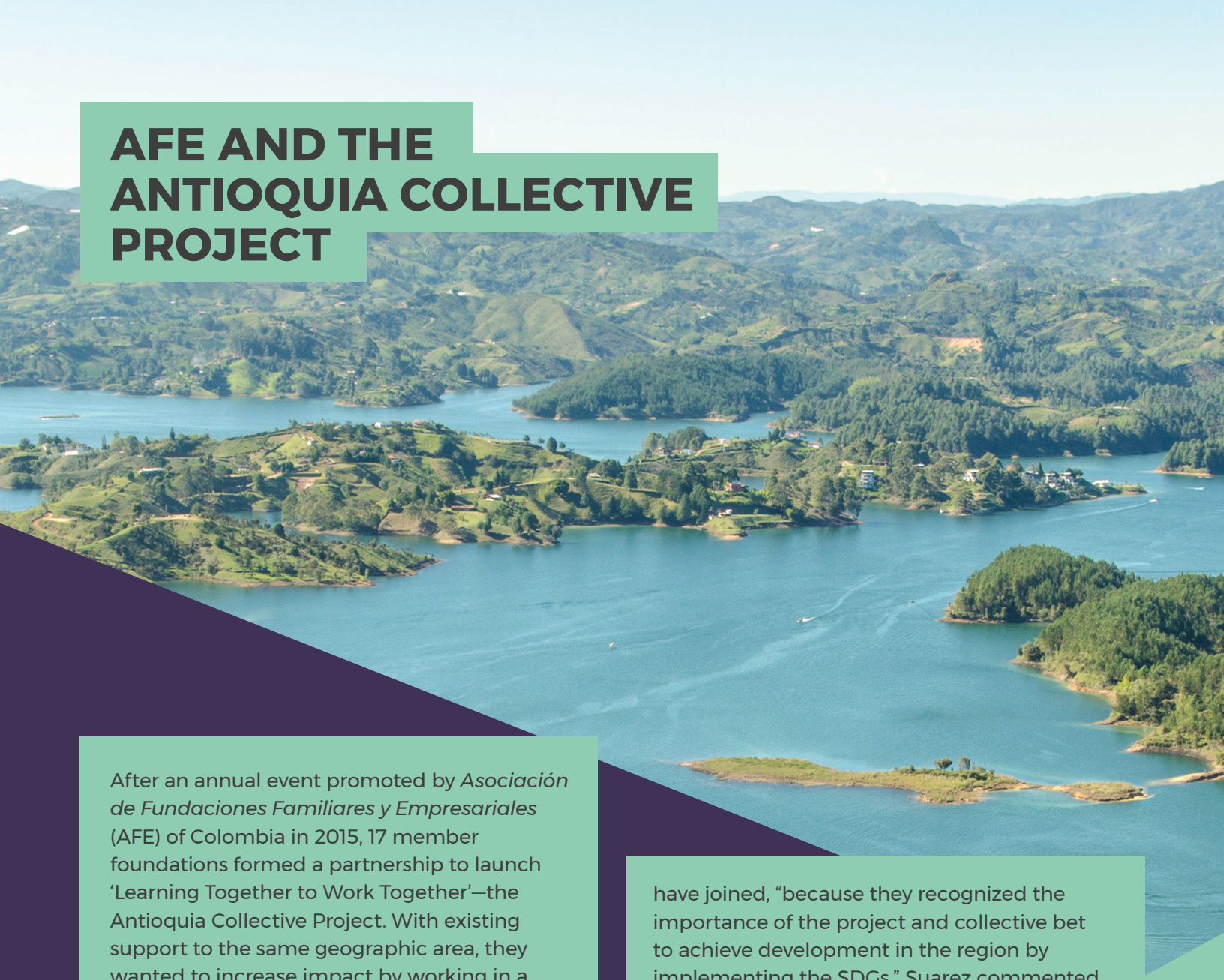
What distinguishes the AFC is its clear focus on encouraging grantmaking that involves and is respectful of those living in the Arctic region. Members ensure the participation of Arctic communities in the decisions that impact their lives and giving those communities the resources to amplify their voices on issues affecting the region. Members have learned the value of spending time in the region, building trust, and establishing relationships, and are always evolving what it means to be in tune with the local culture. They are clear that they do not represent the indigenous community, but with the support of the AFC's Executive Director, Itoah Scott-Enns, the collaborative makes space for local perspectives and voices to lead philanthropic work.

The AFC itself is not a grantmaking entity. However, members help one another with due diligence and, by getting to know one another, members often align funding and have established joint projects such as the Arctic Indigenous Fund. The members also maintain a joint database collating the grants they make in the region so they can track where investment is going, how it is being distributed, and what exciting initiatives are happening across the Arctic.

One of the AFC's most valuable offerings is learning trips. Funders meet with regional leaders and community members to learn about local cultures and understand community goals and interests. These are especially beneficial for funders new to the region. They rely on each other's networks to build new community connections and strengthen existing ones. Members also meet annually and share resources on an informal basis.

The AFC is a community of practice aiming to support locally-led growth in Northern philanthropy. As one of the collaborative members shared, "No foundation can do this work alone."

AFE AND THE ANTIOQUIA COLLECTIVE PROJECT



After an annual event promoted by *Asociación de Fundaciones Familiares y Empresariales* (AFE) of Colombia in 2015, 17 member foundations formed a partnership to launch 'Learning Together to Work Together'—the Antioquia Collective Project. With existing support to the same geographic area, they wanted to increase impact by working in a more integrated way, with results measured against the SDG framework. A landscape scan and diagnosis with community-based participatory dialogue resulted in a focus on water. Carolina Suarez, former CEO of AFE, shared, "By starting with water, we can then help achieve other SDGs such as poverty, food, and health. Water is the base to improve quality of life." They began implementation of a three-year project in January 2018, and expect the community to take ownership after that.

There is a common code of governance, minimum financial commitment, and pooled funds are held by a trust in AFE. Some members have left, and new members have joined, "because they recognized the importance of the project and collective bet to achieve development in the region by implementing the SDGs," Suarez commented. Trust-building has been a key component to the partnership and is one of its biggest challenges. At the start of each meeting, the importance of the partnership, achievements, and purpose are discussed to remind members of the partnership's values. This "ritual" helps strengthen bonds between the partners and keep them connected. Suarez believes that the collective has been able to create greater systemic change because "we can better align and complement each other's ideas. We are able to bring all the capacities and knowledge in the group to influence change in the territory. Alone, we could not achieve these goals."

KENYA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Formed in 1997 as a public philanthropic institution, the Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) was established by a group of Kenyan development workers passionate about building a resource for self-empowerment that was not entirely dependent on foreign aid. KCDF is a grantmaking organization that aims to promote the sustainable development and self-sufficiency of disadvantaged and marginalized communities within Kenya and to encourage the growth of organized giving. Since its establishment, KCDF has impacted the lives of more than 2.2 million people and forged partnerships with 2,000 organizations within Kenya. It unites donor and community agendas, promotes CBO financial sustainability, and encourages a long-term, empowered understanding of development and philanthropy within Kenya.

International and local donors join and leave the collaborative as funding interests change. Donors support KCDF through a range of unrestricted funding or through KCDF's community endowment fund, which KCDF uses to award grants to initiatives identified through a careful analysis of Kenya's development needs. KCDF helps to facilitate funder objectives by providing a contextual understanding of Kenyan development issues and access to local stakeholders. KCDF is not driven by funder interests, but rather assists in providing funder focus on critical needs. Like many community foundations, KCDF has struggled with program management, fluctuations in donor interest, and dwindling donor flexibility. KCDF's CEO Janet Mawiyoo believes that systemic and sustainable change is possible, "when communities initiate and drive their development agenda, work with governments and other actors to access basic rights and services as well as harness and grow their own resources. Impact in achieving social justice may be measured through government engagement. When a Ministry gets involved and takes responsibility over an issue, then you know you have brought in the system (and) made it work."

FINDING 5: SHARED UNDERSTANDING PROPELS ALIGNMENT

Aligning on theory of change (TOC) and embracing the complexity of systems change translate to a higher likelihood that funders can and will successfully pool funds. As we have seen, this level of collaboration can have benefits for grantee organizations in scaling their solutions.

Systems change efforts generally incorporate a TOC, which can be thought of as chains of anticipated cause and effect. Some of the collaboratives interviewed have an overall TOC, but not all. Some have agreement on the goals, which funders have prioritized to align with their foundations' program areas. Others have several TOCs that correspond to different sub-issues or geographic regions, each with distinct intermediate outcomes. In some collaboratives, all funders agree to one theory of change, which may be referred to as a strategic plan, and commit to shared funding of all activities. In others, funders support different parts of the overall whole, which can be used to strategically fill gaps.

Some collaboratives we studied came together to support social movements in particular, or social change and activism more generally, and created processes that recognize the issues and imbalances of power in society, providing important learning for other funders.[10]

Added to this, to embrace the idea that systems change is achievable requires the assumption of being able to guide or manage change on many levels, and funders with humility may feel this is presumptuous. What about all the factors that are either intangible and difficult to measure, or outside of our control? Will using shorter-term incremental steps always work in a TOC for systems change? This is an area ripe for learning, discussed in more detail in the next section.

10 The International Center on Nonviolent Conflict has resources on supporting social movements. https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/blog_post/movement-centered-support-model-considerations-funders-organizations/

INITIATIVE FOR INCLUSIVE RECYCLING

In 2011, the *Iniciativa Regional para el Reciclaje Inclusivo* (IRRI) was established between the Multilateral Investment Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank—Water and Sanitation Division (IDB), Coca-Cola Latin America, the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Recyclers, and the Avina Foundation. In 2015, PepsiCo Latin America joined as a regional partner.

These partners came together to launch a regional initiative that focused on the socio-economic conditions of waste pickers and the improvement of waste management systems. "In Latin America we spend around 40-50 percent of municipal budgets on waste management but only 2 percent of the cities in the region have formal recycling systems," Gonzalo Roqué, IRRI Director noted. According to him, the initiative is seeking policy changes that promote recycling and recognition of waste pickers as part of the waste management value chain.

IRRI has two sources of funding. Regional partners pool money into the general fund and are part of the board. Organizations can also fund specific projects at a national level. Using these funds, IRRI supports strategic projects, provides technical assistance, and does exchanges and capacity building for waste pickers, local governments, and the private sector. They develop tools to strengthen processes, increase knowledge management through studies, and advance strategic communications to gain visibility for inclusive recycling. Roqué noted, "We have a confluence of interest. The IDB has particular interest in waste management, with a portfolio of loans for over $600 million in the region; companies have an interest in recycling to help mitigate the impact of their waste and bottles and to address circular economy. At the same time, they want to have a social impact on the waste pickers."

Thanks to this collaboration, IRRI has achieved a greater impact at both the grassroots and regional levels. They have worked with governments and waste management systems in over 15 countries. From June 2016 through March 2018, IRRI documented increases in the number of waste pickers being recognized in municipal waste management (+6,018), municipalities formalizing waste pickers in their policies (+41), and businesses incorporating the purchase of recycled materials (+12). The ultimate achievement, according to IRRI, is waste pickers being paid for their services. Not only is IRRI advancing systemic changes in the waste management sector by collaborating with governments, companies, and waste pickers cooperatives, but it will also help the region create a circular economy, approaching innovation on the demand side of the recycling value chain.

ART FOR JUSTICE FUND

The Art for Justice Fund (the Fund) is a five-year capital aggregation initiative of funders who seek to reduce mass incarceration in the U.S. Inspired by the civil rights advocacy of filmmaker Ava DuVernay and author Michelle Alexander, the Fund's founding donor Agnes Gund donated proceeds from the sale of a painting to seed the Fund with a contribution of $100 million in 2017. Inspired in turn by Gund's initiative, more than 20 additional funders have since contributed to the Fund. The Ford Foundation and Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors manage the project's grantmaking. By influencing criminal justice policy reform while promoting the arts as a means of changing the narrative surrounding incarceration, the Fund aims to transform the criminal justice system and reduce mass incarceration by 20 percent in target states over the five-year life of the Fund.

Since the Fund began awarding grants in October 2017, it has deployed more than 74 grants totaling $32 million. The Ford Foundation project team identifies potential grantees whose work aligns with one of the Fund's core grantmaking areas: keeping people out of jail and prison, shortening sentences, promoting reentry, and changing the narrative through art.

While the Fund is still in the process of developing its monitoring and evaluation model, impact will be measured based on outcomes. The Fund is well poised for scaling impact because of its unique expertise; The Ford Foundation team specializes in criminal justice reform and Gund has a firsthand understanding of art's capacity to influence attitudes. Where individual patrons may lack the influence and expertise of institutional foundations, the Fund's leadership puts it in the prime position to accelerate change and provide the necessary funding to support the existing activist movement.

"To reside at the intersection of policy and art," in the words of the Fund Program Director Amy Holmes, makes their approach innovative. Grantee Liza Jessie Peterson remarks that there is a "need to cross-pollinate and forge alliances with the work we are doing." Grantees work in communities most affected by mass incarceration. However, working with a key donor who is new to collaboratives and the field of criminal justice reform is a challenge for the Fund. Its donors in the art community often expect a level of influence over financial decisions—a common characteristic of the capital aggregation model. The unpredictability of the U.S political climate at both the state and federal level, as well as the highly-contentious nature of criminal justice reform, pose additional challenges for the Fund to address.

SOLIDAIRE

Moved by the power of collective action demonstrated in the Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring, and anti-austerity campaigns, a group of eight friends (philanthropists, academics, and activists) came together to talk about how best to fund movement organizing, eventually forming the donor network Solidaire. It launched in 2013 to meet urgent funding needs, support innovative movement-building methods, and construct the long-term philanthropic infrastructure necessary to address deep U.S. structural inequalities. Today Solidaire is a community of 160+ members interested in giving in a more just, strategic, coordinated, and transformative way. Two-thirds of member contributions are pooled into a fund of about $1 million per year for movement research-and-development strategies granted through solicited proposals. A rapid response fund lets members sponsor a request and rally support from other members without proposals, with funds moving as fast as a few hours and generally within a week or two.

An "aligned giving" campaign moves longer-term financial resources to support the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) ecosystem. Solidaire incorporates M4BL's fund strategy into its grant decisions—M4BL suggests to Solidaire which anchor organizations need funding, and Solidaire connects funders with grantees. Within 30 minutes of launching the M4BL aligned giving campaign, Solidaire had raised over $1 million. Within three years, that had become $7.5 million via five-year commitments. Solidaire helps donors do something different from traditional philanthropy. Instead of offering a purely financial transaction, donors can partner with organizations on the front line of social equality movements.

Solidaire's Program Director Janis Rosheuvel notes that Solidaire is pushing away from traditional evaluation methods, asking grantees to define what effective means and help ensure that Solidaire is on the right path: "Impact means creating deep, structural change." Solidaire—recognizing that social change depends on cultural transformation, economic structures, and political systems—seeks *creative disruption, organized communities,* and *political power* to help build this ecosystem. Solidaire openly reflects on its challenges: as a mainly white organization, Solidaire is working on how to carry the voice of its grantees through day-to-day work. Jason Franklin, co-founder and chair, notes that "Traditional philanthropy often operates at odds with the needs of social change movements working for systemic change, playing out patterns of power and privilege rooted in our current inequitable economic system." This network is taking on the challenges of traditional power dynamics and working to transform philanthropy to act in solidarity with social movements as a true ally.

FINDING 6: ASSESSMENT IS A LEARNING PRIORITY

Funder collaboratives want to delve more into monitoring and evaluation processes for assessing systems-level progress and results.

Only one of our interviewees expressed the feeling that they already excelled at this. Responses ranged from, "It's the area we are finally focusing on," and "It's the one thing we haven't started to think about," to "We're not using it for creating impact as much as we could." These funders generally have years, or even decades, of experience monitoring grants and projects, but they appreciate the very different approach needed for assessing systems change. Some funders are using the SDG framework that is oriented toward long-term structural change. Others are trying many approaches to see what works as strategy and implementation evolve. After all, this is at the heart of successful innovation: test, experiment, learn, iterate. It would indeed be impossible to craft a full-blown, permanent measurement framework at the outset of a funder collaborative.

Unfortunately, once funder collaboratives come to an end, the lessons of success and failure are easily forgotten, like those of the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa or the Detroit Grand Bargain. And some startling successes that took two decades or more for significant change to happen, such as the marriage equality movement, may be perceived wrongly as high-impact quick wins. Funder collaboratives that faced many challenges—such as the first phase of ClimateWorks, a new economy funders' network in the northeastern U.S., and an initiative of San Francisco Bay Area foundations for poor communities of Silicon Valley—are often overlooked. There is a need to be more honest about, and study, the failures.

In addition, there appears to be limited interaction between the evaluation community, systems experts, and funders themselves. With so much emphasis in the last decade on measurement of tangible, short-term indicators, there is a lot of rebalancing to do. Much of that measurement approach derives from the business sector, which is oriented toward challenges that are bounded very differently: expanding customers or users, doing well in quarterly earnings, gaining economies of scale, and so on. Social change is very different, and influencing larger system actors is very different from influencing customers. An additional challenge stems from funders who want confidence of success and predictability. Are philanthropic funders interested in systems change capable of recognizing strategy that does not draw on systems thinking or expertise? Perhaps not.

The philanthropy sector should consider expanding support for processes and platforms that bring together systems experts with organizations and funders interested in systems change. Investing in a well-resourced, long-term, and objective learning platform that is interdisciplinary and reflective of perspectives from a variety of vantage points would enhance the robustness of systems change efforts. Hundreds of systems experts in academia appear to have little interaction with funders and grantees. Field-building in and for the philanthropy sector and its partners is an important step toward the transformational change that individual funders are seeking. A question is whether funders will view this as an acceptable additional cost to what they are funding a central team to do—but new research indicates that it would be very complementary.

THE END FUND

Through collaboration between philanthropy, business, and stakeholders in government, medicine, education, and local communities, the END Fund has proven that controlling and eliminating neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) is possible with a systems-oriented approach.

In 2006, Alan McCormick, Partner at private investment firm Legatum, was reading an article that framed funding to NTDs as an investment opportunity with potential to catalyze major change. This article, coupled with a visit to Alan Fenwick, Professor of Tropical Parasitology at Imperial College of London, laid the foundation for what would be successful national integrated NTD control programs in Burundi and Rwanda, spearheaded by philanthropists, government donors, and pharmaceutical companies.

The END Fund (END) was created in 2012 by principals at Legatum and their philanthropic advisors, Geneva Global. The organization provides high-impact opportunities for public-private partnership. Inspired by its innovative approach, Bill Campbell of the Campbell Family Foundation signed on as the organization's board chair and Ellen Agler of Operation Smile joined as the inaugural CEO. In four years, END helped to catalyze $75 million in funding, delivering over 331 million treatments to 140 million people in 27 countries. Sometimes work was unusually agile—Legatum underwrote an urgent END initiative in Mali following the 2012 military coup which effectively mobilized MDA [mass drug administration] to nearly 10 million people in the country."

The END team routinely completes evaluations to assess impact and inform decision-making. Improvements in disease mapping, wider engagement with stakeholders, and the successes of the END's integrated approach to combating NTDs is built on a strong portfolio of partners. Aligning with SDG 3 on health, END's grants of $20 million this year to local partners across 27 countries toward controlling and eliminating NTDs have become a part of their national SDG planning as well.

A 2018 review of END notes that a systems thinking approach is required to understand issues around solving NTDs, identify levers for change, and make recommendations for an individual funder collaborative or the broader NTD community. The review's author Jeff Glenn notes, "Systems change in complex social systems can only be achieved through collaboration that generates learning. The END Fund has both the status and flexibility required to push the rest of the community to deal with the challenging issues surfaced here in order to generate learning around more sustainable solutions for NTDs." The funders' commitment has been essential to END success in uniting stakeholders, and END's team has illustrated how collaboration can sustain impact.

EUROPEAN PROGRAMME FOR INTEGRATION AND MIGRATION

The European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM), a collaborative fund begun in 2005 and hosted by the Network of European Foundations, links the resources and expertise of foundations to strengthen the role of civil society in building inclusive communities and developing humane, sustainable responses to migration, based on Europe's commitment to universal human rights and social justice. Its origins lie in early meetings with a number of prominent foundations, including King Baudouin Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Compagnia di San Paolo, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Bernard van Leer Foundation, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, and Atlantic Philanthropies. They saw the need for a network where private funders could coordinate their activities on migration. They wanted to address inefficiencies in how organizations were approaching funders and in how similar work was coordinated at different levels. Also, competences for policy-making on migration were increasingly shifted to the EU level where new engagement was needed accordingly.

EPIM believes that a civil society voice is crucial to support policy-making relevant to its ultimate beneficiary group: migrants and the societies they live in. Besides making grants, it uses a "funding plus" strategy, providing capacity development, knowledge support, and connecting actors. EPIM makes it possible to seize opportunities during a project's implementation. Moreover, creating a link between the local, national, and EU-wide levels supports better and stronger policy-making at all of these levels, in EPIM's view.

The work on migration has become more challenging in Europe in the last few years, so more funders are joining this collaborative effort, and also internal EPIM changes have made it easier to join.

EPIM provides €2.5 to €3 million annually and has evolved into giving across six thematic funds, and added onto the pooled funds the ability for funders to align funds, partly because some funders' programs are nationally focused and pooling isn't the best approach. Funders choose which topic to be involved

in and contribute to strategy design. Some volunteer to be part of a selection committee for grantees.

Over its first five years, EPIM stayed at about ten funders but grew steadily from 2015 onward, partly because funders, some of which are non-European, saw the field of migration as increasingly complex but also increasingly urgent to address. Funders give between €50,000 and €1,100,000 for three-year phases. EPIM issues open calls for proposals in various strategy areas and receives about 150 per year. It provides grants, averaging €50,000 per annum, to about 50 organizations. Senior Programme Manager Sarah Sommer notes, "It's easy to lose the perspective that grantees can contribute to the strategy, so it is important for us to address that—even when we are setting goals, we reach out to existing grantees and peer funders to see the latest challenges, trends, and opportunities. We co-create with others rather than impose our own views."

An evaluation by RAND Europe of EPIM III (the 2012–2015 phase) found that the overall achievements of EPIM III are substantial. EPIM carefully measures progress toward its goals and encourages grantees to do so as well.

By early 2019, it will do an in-depth impact study on how it has influenced and enhanced the capacity of civil society organizations and how it is doing as a collaborative, as part of its continuous learning process.

Sommer is not sure the EPIM funders can achieve more systemic change just by being in a collaborative, but a recent survey of the funders revealed that they believe that EPIM has enabled them to achieve more impact than they could have had individually. Being part of the Network of European Foundations reduces bureaucracy and enables fast disbursement of grants—funds can go to grantees before EPIM actually has money from the funders, because of the pooled funding.

EPIM has the familiar challenge of working against a short- to medium-term commitment from funders, despite having a very ambitious long-term mission, but Sommer concludes, "When we went through a three-year cycle, halfway through we would have to start thinking about renewal already. Thanks to recent changes we have made, we can do it more in line with how internal foundation programs run and focus on the outcomes of our work."

FINDING 7: ADDRESSING OBSTACLES ENHANCES SUCCESS

Systems change collaboratives frequently share the same set of obstacles, and resolving them creates a stronger basis for success.

The challenges of collaboration are amplified when funders come together for the long haul. Common areas of misalignment involve length of funding commitments, different levels of risk appetite among members, diverse institutional approaches to what should be measured, and heavy reporting and relationship-building responsibilities that may be put on a small number of staff at the central hub. Of those, research revealed timelines and measurement as the most significant.

TIMELINE FOR CHANGE

Patience is key when seeking to create the kinds of systems change described in this report. Foundations often have an impatience to show results. And the focus on short-term results by senior leadership of foundations, generally more distant from grantees and communities than program officers are, is a particularly significant obstacle that runs counter to the patience needed.

As Christian Seelos says, "We dump solutions on seemingly similar problems. We need to move away from problems, which are symptoms, to the context. But for this, patience is needed."[11] Problem-solving can be the starting point, but those seeking to scale solutions must recognize that problem-solving is only the first step in a much longer process to which funders must commit. Systems approaches take time to bear fruit. In fact, if *one* is the median number of years many foundations award for projects, then *three* seems to be the median number for systems-oriented collaboratives—but that is still not enough.

To address root causes and impact underlying structures, funders need to change how they partner with grantees and other stakeholders. They will need to reconsider their tolerance for risk-taking, and give room to grantees to weather ups and downs in their progress. The examples above show how a level of comfort in doing this can develop out of proximity to grantees, without which there can be uncertainty, reluctance, and hesitation. Moreover, getting senior decision-makers within funders engaged in the collaborative early can help—founders and those in the roles of board member, CEO, general counsel, or other C-suite positions.

It's axiomatic that long-term change generally requires long-term funding. Leadership as much as program officers will need to trust in what can be time-consuming experimentation, and allow grantees to fail, learn, and share such learnings—without pulling funding.

RESULTS AND MEASUREMENT

We found that within a given collaborative there can be funders who expect very different strategies and intermediate outcomes. Some funders focus on "reach," a common indicator in health and sanitation programs, such as measuring reductions in disease or adoption of new infrastructure. Other funders prioritize changes in laws and policies. Still others emphasize changes in beliefs and attitudes. These are all crucial elements of systems change, and some funder collaboratives strive to

measure all of them, building in reflection and learning. Incorporating different dimensions of measurement is enabled by flexibility in funding, novel approaches to reporting, and an appetite for adaptive strategy. Moreover, the differences are bridged when members set aside the time to learn and reflect together across organizations.

There are two gaps that could usefully be addressed. First, to help with planning and assessing progress over time, funders and grantees could expand efforts to identify the boundaries of the system they are trying to change in line with systems thinking and practice. Individually and even collectively, funders will not have the resources, bandwidth, or expertise to invest in *every* level or part of the system. So they need to be cognizant of what they are aiming to change and the landscape of other funders sharing the same starting point. In this way they can compare leverage points for collective progress and impact. This helps in planning, measuring progress, and being both effective and efficient.

The second gap is in language. Systems thinking and systems change remain esoteric terms, and funders do not necessarily use these terms or concepts, even if their grantees do. Nevertheless, being part of a funder collaborative can help funders contextually define, delve into, and understand these concepts better, and therefore have more impact with their resources. As mentioned above, expanding the limited exchange between the community of systems experts and institutions on the one hand, and the funding community on the other, would be fruitful.[12]

11 Ibid.
12 Foundations and networks with resources on systems practice include the Garfield Foundation, Adessium Foundation, McConnell Foundation, Langkelly Chase, EDGE Funders, The Omidyar Group, New Philanthropy Capital, and Grantmakers for Effective Organizations.

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, the philanthropy sector itself is a system. The Scaling Solutions initiative seeks leverage points in that system to ensure funders place long-term, adaptive resources with those they invest in to scale solutions toward shifting systems. In a similar vein, the initiative has explored how enduring change happens within and across philanthropic funders. Over and over, peer-to-peer influencing was elevated as the most effective approach to change funder behavior. Funder collaboratives were also highlighted as a key structure for channeling such influence. As we investigated funder collaboratives, we found them to be especially useful for funders interested in systems change, when even more patience, flexibility, partnerships, and understanding must be taken into account across time, place, and changing circumstances. As illustrated by the case studies featured in this report, effective funder collaboratives can make systems change less daunting, and can help funders more easily understand the systems they are part of and influencing. They can encourage funders to adopt practices that are more supportive of grantees leading systems change work. Given the potential that can be unlocked by networked approaches such as learning circles, convenings, collaboratives, and other communities of practice, Kathy Reich of the Ford Foundation

noted that, "Time spent on this will need to be recognized as a real and valuable part of the role of a funder."

Our research and case studies suggest sector-wide practices that could be adopted to further improve funder collaboration to support systems change. Of course, funders could do more to either establish and lead collaboratives based on their strengths, or join collaboratives that fill their own capacity gaps. They could also prioritize the development of the talents and skills needed to collaborate and to embrace systems approaches at all levels of their institutions, including at the top. Lastly, we believe that funders need to invest more as a systems change *funder community*, as well as within each collaborative, in an evolving and adaptive M&E system, sharing findings earlier, more intentionally, and more publicly. These actions will undoubtedly stimulate a much-needed community of practice in the philanthropy sector around systems-level monitoring and evaluation.

We hope that the findings in this report point to useful 'best bet' methods to building systems funding practices as well as stimulate further improvements in the sector. What will you, the reader, do differently now? How will you change your practices to better support systems entrepreneurs and organizations changing systems? Which funder collaboratives might you join or lead? We invite comments, continuing dialogue, and connections with others to help the philanthropy sector meet its potential in addressing the world's urgent challenges.

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WEBSITES

SCALING SOLUTIONS STREERING GROUP ORGANIZATIONS

Draper Richards Kaplan Foundation
https://www.drkfoundation.org

Ford Foundation
https://www.fordfoundation.org

Porticus
https://www.porticus.com/en/home

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors
http://www.rockpa.org

Skoll Foundation
http://skoll.org

ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS RESEARCHED

AFE Antioquia Collaborative
https://www.sdgphilanthropy.org/group/29/about

Arctic Funders Collaborative
http://arcticfunders.com

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https://artforjusticefund.org

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