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Allison Dymnicki
American Institutes for Research

Alex Hooker
S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

Rebecca Goldberg
S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

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How to Encourage Sustainable Change: A Reflection on How Philanthropy Can Partner With Grantees to Build Organizational Capacity

Allison Dymnicki, Ph.D., American Institutes for Research; and Alex Hooker, B.A., and Rebecca Goldberg, B.A., S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

Keywords: *Learning community, funder-grantee relationships, organizational capacity building, collaboration, innovation*

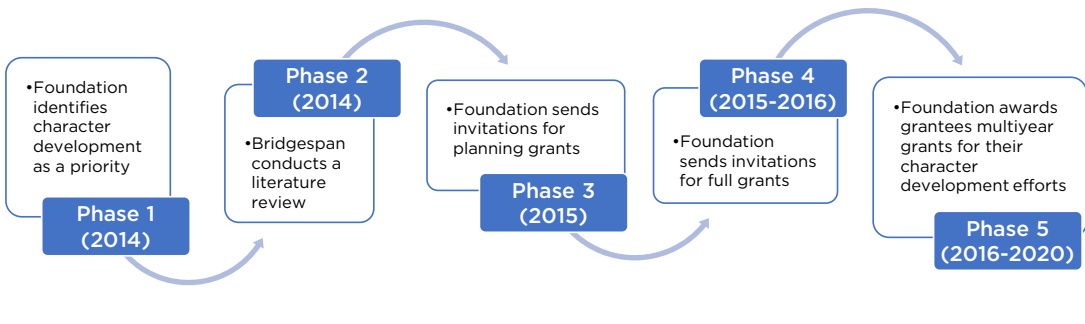
Introduction

Over the past few decades there has been an explosion of knowledge about how children grow, develop, and become learners, and about the factors that nourish or hinder their growth into adulthood. A convergence of research across scientific disciplines — neuroscience, early childhood, the social sciences, psychology, the science of adversity, strength-based approaches to human thriving, and the learning sciences — paints a dynamic and optimistic picture of human development (Cantor, Osher, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2019; Osher, Cantor, Berg, Steyer, & Rose, 2020). For example, when children’s interests, needs, and abilities are matched with opportunity and support, they develop neural pathways throughout childhood and into adolescence that help them master key knowledge and skills. The brain continues to develop from birth to adolescence, and is remarkably resilient in both learning new ideas and overcoming challenges during this time. This highlights the importance of the learning and development that occurs in multiple contexts, including after-school programs and other out-of-school-time settings (American Institutes for Research, 2019).

Research on promoting youth development and character consistently cites adult training, skills, and relationships with youth as vital to positive outcomes (Hamilton et al., 2016; Moroney & Devaney, 2017; Van Dam et al., 2018). Caring adults, whether they are schoolteachers, YMCA

Key Points

- In 2014, the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation embarked on the National Character Initiative to support organizations seeking to advance character development among youth. The initiative sought to promote lasting change by focusing on building grantee capacity that was based largely on grantee priorities.
- This article highlights key findings from an evaluation of the foundation’s approach to the initiative by elevating the perspectives of grantees, foundation staff, and field experts who served as consultants. It discusses supports the foundation provided to grantees and three key transformational elements in capacity building: proactive and responsive technical assistance, a culture of learning, and opportunities for partnerships.
- The evaluation surfaced key lessons for grantmakers looking to embrace a capacity-building orientation and shift the traditional funder-grantee dynamic. Funders should consider the strategies discussed in this article to support long-term growth and sustained practices beyond the life of a grant that, ultimately, lead to improved outcomes for organizations and the people they serve.

FIGURE 1 Phases of the National Character Initiative

staff, or Scout leaders, help youth achieve their fullest potential (Paisley & Ferrari, 2005). Because of this body of evidence, and inspired by Stephen Davison Bechtel, Jr.'s own childhood experiences in the Boy Scouts of America, in 2014 the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation designed its first and only national initiative.

The National Character Initiative (NCI) sought to bolster youth-serving organizations in supporting character development and to advance the practices of adults who work with young people. It invested in organizational capacity building, with a focus on program quality and infrastructure. The foundation provided a total of \$130 million in funding to these organizations, and provided peer learning that was grounded in evidence-based practices to adults who worked at these organizations (S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, 2019). Throughout the initiative, the foundation pivoted from a prescriptive grantmaking approach, focused on common outcomes and goals across the grantee portfolio, to a focus on building deep relationships with grantees to understand how best to support each organization and build its capacity according to its readiness and ability to engage in the work.

Starting in 2019, the foundation partnered with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a retrospective evaluation of the initiative's grantmaking approach from the perspectives of grantees, foundation staff, and field experts who served as consultants. With this aim, AIR reviewed documents (including

grantees' proposals and information about the NCI from the foundation), observed meetings of five grantee communities of practice (CoPs) during an in-person convening, surveyed all grantees and partners (54 of 97 invited people completed this survey), conducted in-depth telephone interviews with 29 grantees and two partners, and interviewed seven foundation staff.

In this article, we explore findings from AIR's retrospective inquiry into the initiative. We describe the NCI's grantmaking strategy, the supports provided, key transformational elements that helped promote capacity building in grantees, and steps other grantmakers can take to promote capacity building and sustainability of innovative practices and infrastructures.

The Foundation's Strategy and Approach

The foundation determined that it would focus on promoting character development, and subsequently went through a multistep planning process. (See Figure 1.) First, the board identified a set of character strengths that it wanted to develop in young people, including courage, empathy, fairness, integrity, respect, responsibility, teamwork, and work ethic (Goldberg, Rummel Sharvit, & Singh, 2018). This helped to ground the work and clarify what is and is not character development. One foundation staff member provided the definition that emerged: "Character is about perseverance and working hard ..., being a team player ..., and having a positive influence on others. These values allow you to be constructive in what you do

FIGURE 2 Initiative Grantees (by Cohort)

and improve your effect on the community.” The foundation, however, did not require each grantee to define character this way, or even to use the language of character development. Instead, as a way to promote sustained practices after the funding period ended, it allowed each organization to use the terminology that worked for them.

The foundation then engaged the Bridgespan Group, a nonprofit management consultant to other nonprofits, to review the landscape of character development nationally. Bridgespan recommended areas where the foundation could have the greatest impact and identified individuals and organizations that were national leaders in character development. The foundation then turned to La Piana Consulting for a comprehensive scan of the identified organizations and assessment of their internal capacity and stability. The scan, which focused on the organizations’ financial history, current financial state, and ability to partner with the foundation at scale, included conversations with the organizations’ leaders, a reputation analysis, and a review of each organization’s structure (e.g., reach/scale, level of influence the national office had on affiliates/locals). From this scan, the foundation identified a group of candidates and invited them to submit grant proposals.

Third, using criteria similar to those for the multiyear grants, the foundation made short-term (nine to 12 months) planning grants to 13 national organizations. These grants were smaller, but still significant in size (ranging

from \$240,000 to \$600,000, but most around \$250,000), and focused on projects that were ready for implementation. The introductory grants gave the foundation an opportunity to assess the organizations’ goals and their capacity as potential long-term partners by having them manage or complete a finite project, such as improving a survey instrument. Foundation staff described these planning grants as critical to understanding where the organizations were starting from and what was realistic in terms of goals and outcomes.

The foundation then invited a set of organizations to submit multiyear, comprehensive proposals, which were evaluated using four criteria:

1. *Reach and population served* — out-of-school-time providers that served large numbers of youth ages 5 to 18;
2. *Alignment of mission* — organizations whose mission focused on promoting the set of character strengths established by the foundation board and were in one of the five target cohorts (See Figure 2.);
3. *Commitment of leaders* — receptivity and commitment to the initiative as well as willingness to learn from others; and
4. *Organizational capacity and stability* — organizations that were in good financial health and would be able to both effectively use

The foundation paired each grantee with a program officer and associate, who served several roles. Some were traditional program officer roles, but others were more unique to the foundation.

funding toward the intended goal and sustain funding after the grant period ended.¹

Ultimately, the foundation invested in 24 grantees; all 13 of the grantees who received planning grants then received multiyear grants. These were categorized into five cohorts: seven large national youth development organizations, three national sports and play organizations, three national nature-based organizations, five policy organizations, and six California-based organizations. (See Figure 2.)

Supports That Contributed to Increased Capacity Building

In interviews and surveys, grantees, foundation staff, and partners elevated four supports provided by the foundation that were central to the NCI's success: convenings, CoPs, access to field experts, and deep relationships with foundation program staff.²

Convenings

The foundation hosted convenings of grantees and partners (field experts, other foundations, policymakers, and influencers) initially once

a year starting in 2016, and then twice a year beginning in 2019.³ The two- or three-day in-person convenings included sessions about current research and policy related to character development, and also provided significant time for CoPs to meet.

These convenings were an opportunity for representatives of grantees with diverse roles in the character development field to come together and build knowledge that they then brought back to their organizations. For example, grantees in the evaluation CoP learned from one another's work developing measures and instruments to be used for program evaluation, and grantees in the program CoP worked together to develop tools to aid their programs' transitions to virtual formats in response to COVID-19.

Communities of Practice

The foundation organized CoPs that met during the in-person convenings and, in some cases, virtually. There were five CoPs, organized based on staff role: programming and practice (18 members), research and evaluation (15 members), policy (21 members), strategy (14 members), and organizational leadership (13 members). Through these groups, grantees had opportunities to share knowledge with each other, collaboratively problem-solve challenges, celebrate successes, partner on new projects or initiatives, and think strategically about how to bolster the work of each organization to have a larger influence on the field.

Foundation staff recognized that the convenings and CoPs were an opportunity for grantees to discuss the commonalities in their work and partner on specific projects or initiatives. The foundation increased the frequency of

¹ Two organizations initially were not as financially stable as the others, but because they had strong leadership and some positive momentum, the foundation decided to help them build stability by supporting them in developing their fundraising capacity and infrastructure. This reflected the foundation's intention not to privilege organizations that already had a degree of capacity and stability.

² In support of the NCI, the foundation dedicated two full-time program officers and two full-time program associates to work directly with grantees; part of the associate director's time was focused on policy grantmaking, and part of the education director's time was focused on oversight. A small portion of the evaluation learning officer's time was devoted to helping with evaluating the convenings, and a portion of the education team administrator's time supported foundation staff and convening planning.

³ The second convening in 2020 was canceled due to COVID-19.

convenings and CoP meetings after hearing about the value of these activities from grantees, and provided grantees with access to several field experts who delivered specific content at the convenings or through webinars:

- La Piana Consulting helped grantees establish their goals and develop grant plans early on, and also facilitated the organizational leadership CoP.
- Randel Consulting, a management consulting firm, oversaw planning of the convenings and CoPs.
- Collaborative Communications, a strategic communications firm, helped grantees with communication plans and storytelling to maximize dissemination efforts.
- Members of Fowler Hoffman LLC, a policy strategist, contributed to the policy CoP and advised the foundation on its California grantmaking.
- Equity Meets Design, a racial equity advising firm, conducted workshops and provided other support during two convenings to create space for equity conversations among grantees and expand their thinking around it.

Deep Relationships With Program Staff

The foundation paired each grantee with a program officer and associate, who served several roles. Some were traditional program officer roles, but others were more unique to the foundation. For example, in a traditional role, program officers regularly met with grantees via one-on-one monthly calls, attended local and national events, met with grantee board members, and used these opportunities to gain insight into organizations and their relationships with local branches. But unique to the NCI was the program officers' level of engagement with the grantees and the depth of those relationships.

Deep relationships, trust, and multiyear commitments enabled foundation staff to become thought partners and allies to the grantee

In AIR's interviews and surveys, the grantees, foundation staff, and field experts described three transformational elements that were pivotal in promoting capacity building and led to grantees' objectives largely being achieved: proactive and responsive technical assistance, a culture of learning, and opportunities for partnerships.

leaders, rather than just compliance officers stewarding foundation funds. This level of engagement was possible, to some extent, because the program officers had a manageable number of grants (under 25). Finally, program officers served as advocates and sought to highlight their grantees' work in the field and with other funders. One foundation staff member observed:

As we start to exit the field, our work is to advocate and highlight the work of our grantees but also to continue to push the learning agenda, helping grantees think about what's next, help them feel a sense of readiness for continuing their work, and really uncovering all the good things they do but also the things they still need to improve on.

Key Elements in Promoting Grantee Capacity Building

In AIR's interviews and surveys, the grantees, foundation staff, and field experts described three transformational elements that were pivotal in promoting capacity building and led to grantees' objectives largely being achieved: proactive and responsive technical assistance (TA), a culture of learning, and opportunities for partnerships.

“Through this whole process it was up to the grantee to determine what they needed. ... We would ask questions [and use the answers to] identify what type of technical assistance and access to field experts would be helpful.”

Proactive and Responsive Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is designed to increase capacity building in organizations and communities through providing an individualized and hands-on approach, often after training is conducted (Katz & Wandersman, 2016). More research is needed to identify the functional components of TA (Fixsen et al., 2005), but the limited research suggests that successful TA includes both proactive and strategic as well as responsive and customized support (Katz & Wandersman, 2016). This approach can also promote capacity building within grantees because responsive TA addresses grantees' requested needs and proactive TA pushes grantees to develop in ways that allow them to continue the work after the grant support ends. One grantee said that the foundation's program officers

created space for exploration of better ways to not only use the funding, but leverage it with other partners. They worked with us when the context or environment changed and the work needed to shift. They were responsive while holding the integrity and spirit of the work.

In terms of proactive TA, the foundation requested that field experts from La Piana Consulting solicit feedback early on from grantees regarding their organizational needs and goals for the grant. The foundation also helped to convene a workshop on character development, held by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in 2016,

to support each organization's understanding of the field's literature. Program officers worked with grantees during the grant period to help them track their progress toward achieving their organizational goals and to help them modify those goals as appropriate. Furthermore, they helped grantees conceptualize and write proposals for future funding to communicate their work successfully to the foundation, providing edits on draft proposals. In one case, the foundation's organizational effectiveness team had weekly calls with a grantee iterating on survey design to coach and support their work. Additionally, one program officer had regular coaching calls with grantees to help them think through program design.

In terms of responsive TA, one foundation staff member described how the program officers tried to identify strategies and offer supports that would help grantees achieve their own goals and shorter term milestones along the way: “Through this whole process it was up to the grantee to determine what they needed. ... We would ask questions [and use the answers to] identify what type of technical assistance and access to field experts would be helpful.”

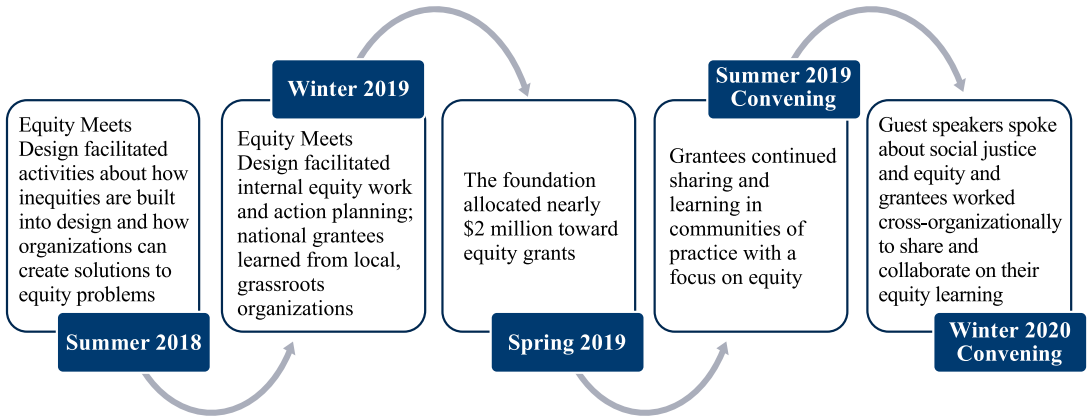
The responsiveness of the foundation to grantee needs was also reflected in the way that convenings were planned. Randel Consulting, in partnership with members of the strategy CoP, developed the agenda for each convening and for some CoP meetings to ensure that the agenda met a broad range of interests and needs across grantee staff serving different roles (e.g., CEOs, program managers). Staff from Randel Consulting solicited input from grantee staff using such methods as informal conversations and online surveys before and after a convening, and incorporated this feedback into convening plans. “Constant feedback [was] being provided on what was most useful and how to make the experience better” in future convenings, one grantee said.

The evolution of the CoPs also illustrates the foundation's balance of proactive and responsive TA. After consulting with field experts, the foundation originally identified three CoPs:

FIGURE 3 Stages of DEI Work Supported by S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

Focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Starting in 2017, the foundation provided supports to grantees aimed at building the grantees' capacity to address inequities within their organizations:



programming and practice, research and evaluation, and policy. However, several individuals from different organizations felt that they did not fit into one of these three groups because they served roles within their organizations focused on program quality, staff practice, and capacity building across the system.

Organizational leaders also explained that they had limited opportunities to interact with other leaders of national character development organizations in a noncompetitive environment, and requested that someone outside foundation staff facilitate this group to allow a safe space to share ongoing successes and concerns. The foundation granted both requests by adding two additional CoPs: a strategy group and a CEO group.

Realizing the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the field, in 2018 grantees requested support in addressing inequities within their organizations. Historically, there has been limited work seeking to advance DEI in character development and out-of-school-time programs (Smith, Witherspoon, & Osgood, 2018). While DEI grantmaking was not on its radar before grantees surfaced the need, the foundation's internal equity work at that time helped foster interest in supporting grantees

to do the same. In response to this request, the foundation first prioritized a learning agenda for exploring DEI in its grantee convenings to create opportunities for everyone to learn together, and then built it into a grantmaking strategy. (See Figure 3.)

First, the foundation hired the consultant Equity Meets Design to provide TA to grantees during two convenings on how inequities are built into organizational design and how organizations can develop solutions to address structural inequities. Equity Meets Design facilitated several sessions introducing its framework and tools, conducted focus groups with grantees, and attended several CoP meetings to learn more about the grantees.

Second, the foundation allocated nearly \$2 million for equity grants to some of the grantees. All 13 national organizations received DEI grants, and one DEI grant was given to all five California partner organizations to support their collective equity work. (Other grantees, particularly those added later in the initiative, were funded by the foundation for equity-focused work and therefore did not receive an equity capacity-building grant.) The 13 national

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organizations developed their focus and plan for these grants and had discussions with foundation program staff to hone the ideas. Some ideas were funded as is, and others went through more of an iterative process with foundation staff.

Grantees used these grants for at least four purposes (but each grant did not address all four purposes). The first was to assess organizational operations related to equity. The youth development organization Camp Fire, for example, worked with a consultant to conduct an audit of cultural appropriation in their practices, especially from Native American or Indigenous cultures, that resulted in a report with actionable next steps. Second, grantees used the funding to provide training about equity and access to national staff, board members, and practitioners. For example, Girls Inc., a network of nonprofits that support and mentor girls in an affirming environment, conducted a series of workshops for all levels of staff, from board members and senior leadership to program staff who work directly with youth. Third, grantees used the funds to incorporate equity into program planning and strategy. For example, staff

from the YMCA of the USA described including an equity lens by “making it an upfront expectation.” At every YMCA convening, a YMCA staff member said, “as they crafted their content around, for example, what is a leading practice around relationship building, [the staff facilitating the convening] always included diversity or examples of diversity as indicators.” This helped YMCAs integrate an equity lens into the organization’s character development programming and measure its progress toward that goal. Several members of Boys and Girls Clubs of America’s leadership were exposed to DEI frameworks and ideas at the foundation’s convenings, which spurred internal exploration into what was needed in that organization’s own work and led to the development of an equity taskforce in the national office and the elevation of a staff member into a leadership position for DEI efforts.

A Culture of Learning

A culture of learning is “one in which employees continuously seek, share, and apply new knowledge and skills to improve individual and organizational performance” (Association for Talent Development, n.d.). A culture of learning can build capacity of grantees from leadership to front-line staff because this type of culture values a more equal footing between funders and grantees as all parties learn together. However, while a growing number of funders argue that solving our most pressing social challenges requires strategies that embrace vulnerability, transparency, and iterative problem-solving (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015; Maxwell, 2007), others describe the difficulty of creating a culture where grantees feel safe talking about their hard-earned lessons (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2018). To promote a culture of learning throughout the NCI, foundation staff were intentional in learning about character development alongside grantees (e.g., attending the 2016 National Academies workshop), doing their own learning by participating in webinars and reading research, creating peer-learning opportunities, building the capacity and skills of adults within grantee organizations, and

tracking progress by using individualized organizational outcomes.

First, because character development had not been one of the foundation's strategic priorities until 2014, existing staff lacked the relevant expertise. The foundation hired program officers and other staff from the field and provided intensive, ongoing training for existing staff. This fostered a culture in which foundation staff and grantees were learning about character development and youth development together. Further reinforcing the culture of learning, new foundation staff hired from the character development field embodied several youth development principles, including encouraging diverse perspectives (e.g., community and youth) and using a strengths-based (versus deficit-based) approach that highlights what each organization brings to the table (Durlak et al., 2007).

Second, the foundation created peer-learning opportunities (e.g., CoPs) and customized supports for grantees in different roles (e.g., separate CoPs for research and evaluation directors and CEOs), which were grounded in the idea of learning together. The staff also took a back seat (or were not involved) in most CoP meetings, as requested by the grantees, to maximize grantees' ability to learn. One foundation staff member said,

We believe in peer learning and listening to the people on the ground; they know best what they need, and we are in the position to support them in their learning and bring them together ... to share with each other what they've learned.

Third, the initiative focused on creating a culture of learning within grantees' own organizations by focusing on adults as a lever for promoting high-quality character development programs and youth outcomes. This allowed the foundation to embrace a capacity-building approach that invested in having grantees "learn, shift, and adapt based on what [they] learned," instead of focusing solely on achieving

In AIR's survey, completed by 54 grantees, over 88% reported achieving these outcomes (in descending order): building the capacity of staff in character development, strengthening professional development and training opportunities, building the capacity of staff in DEI, improving the quality of programming or services, and building capacity for research and evaluation.

youth outcomes.⁴ This same grantee described it as, "The old adage of teaching someone how to fish rather than giving them the fish ..., I felt like [that was] Bechtel. ... Truly, the money was used to teach us how to fish."

Fourth, grantees and foundation staff described how they embraced a culture of learning by measuring progress differently. One organization explained how, prior to working with Bechtel, it mostly focused on organizational outputs and outcomes — like counting the number of schools being served and increasing that number. As part of the NCI, a member said, it decided to have the measure of success "be less about [our organization] and more about ... how many schools have safe and healthy play." Another manifestation of this culture of learning is the types of outcomes that grantees reported achieving. In AIR's survey, completed by 54 grantees, over 88% reported achieving

⁴ The foundation did not consider many other approaches beyond focusing on adults, but did pursue approaches to create essential infrastructure (e.g., data systems, measures, or platforms; fundraising capacity) guided by the belief that strengthening the organizations overall would help bolster their character development work.

When managed effectively, partnerships between youth-serving organizations can build organizational capacity and contribute to increased social capital, public exposure, and the development of a learning organization.

these outcomes (in descending order): building the capacity of staff in character development, strengthening professional development and training opportunities, building the capacity of staff in DEI, improving the quality of programming or services, and building capacity for research and evaluation. These outcomes reflect a culture where grantees were able to grow and develop with support from the foundation, rather than one where the foundation held the knowledge and authority.

Members of all five CoPs reported fostering a culture of learning; AIR's staff confirmed this in its observations of three CoPs. One grantee said that "having the convenings and communities of practice meetings definitely signaled that Bechtel was interested in us learning, and shifting, and adapting based on what we learned." The members of the research and evaluation CoP were particularly emphatic in describing it as a unique and powerful learning opportunity. They explained that, prior to this grant, they never had an opportunity to develop relationships with other research and evaluation-focused staff who worked in similar organizations. They valued these opportunities and connections so strongly that they elected to have monthly calls (the only CoP to do so in addition to meeting during convenings) where one member would share something they had been working on or "that they thought would be interesting or [of] value to other members." These members called the connections and relationships formed here as "invaluable" because of the welcoming spirit,

"the wealth of information" available from the group, and the "affirming" nature of hearing from others struggling with similar issues. One member mentioned reaching out to just "about every member of the community of practice for something that they were either impressed by or wanted more information about." Another member said that a key factor contributing to the group's success was that "there was a lot of room [for us] to make it what we wanted it to be, not what [the foundation] had intended for it to be."

Opportunities for Partnerships

When managed effectively, partnerships between youth-serving organizations can build organizational capacity and contribute to increased social capital, public exposure, and the development of a learning organization (Jones, Edwards, Bocarro, Bunds, & Smith, 2017). Grantees and foundation staff reported that the initiative provided many opportunities for such partnerships, which led to promoting capacity building because grantees started relying on one another instead of the foundation for support. Specifically, in AIR's survey (completed by 54 individuals from 22 organizations), 100% of grantees agreed or strongly agreed that the NCI helped to establish a national collective of organizations that work in the field of character development, and 79% agreed or strongly agreed that the foundation provided guidance on how an organization could collaborate with others in the field. Several grantees said that this was the first time a group of organizations that focused on character development collaborated with each other and, perhaps more importantly, that these partnerships would continue years after the grant period ended. One grantee remarked:

I think one of the things that we all came to pretty quickly is the recognition that we could be called on to work together instead of in competition with each other, that there was a lot of opportunity to work either across common measures or sharing of tools or methodologies or processes, or even just the way that we structure our departments or manage our staff. So that we could get ... stronger.

Several grantees described how throughout the initiative they advanced their own work

and that of the field by partnering with other organizations. One example is The California Partnership, a collaborative of youth-serving organizations that came together through the initiative to develop a joint approach to bring social and emotional learning and character development content to the youth-services system in California. It decided on skills and the language it would use, which each grantee then incorporated into their agency's grant deliverable. Through this effort, the California School-Age Consortium, which promotes access to high-quality, affordable out-of-school-time programs for children, worked with some of the collaborative's agencies to design a social-emotional learning and character development curriculum for use in after-school programs.

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America and Playworks, whose work improves the quality of play in school settings, secured joint funding from the Allstate Foundation to pursue a collaboration where the local Boys and Girls Clubs staff used Playworks strategies and resources, including its YD Toolbox open-source app, in their school programming and after-school clubs. This partnership allowed Playworks to reach a larger group of youth, and gave the Boys and Girls Clubs access to materials, training, and supports that could improve program quality. This approach is now being piloted in six Boys and Girls Club sites, with the intention to scale up. Commenting on this partnership, one staff member said its full impact "is not known yet":

What we're doing right now together is great, I think we don't actually know what the best story is going to be. ... The authenticity of this partnership means that we're going to respond to the needs that arise; we're going to co-create together.

Promoting Capacity Building Among Grantees: The Challenges

This article describes several benefits of promoting capacity building of grantees: fostering the sustainability of practices, developing the skill and competence of staff, and setting organizations up to secure future funding. But this approach, like any, also has a set of challenges.

This article describes several benefits of promoting capacity building of grantees: fostering the sustainability of practices, developing the skill and competence of staff, and setting organizations up to secure future funding. But this approach, like any, also has a set of challenges.

First, it requires foundations to allow grantees to set their own course and be accountable for meeting individualized goals and objectives, instead of establishing a shared set of outcomes and indicators for all grantees. The typically measured youth outcomes, such as increases in the number of youth served and gains in graduation rates, are much easier to track and compare across grantees. A related challenge relates to grantees using measures that focus on organizational capacity and staff competencies, which might not be as convincing to the field as the more common youth and adult outcomes. This can present challenges when a foundation is trying to demonstrate impacts of its work to others in the field of philanthropy.

Second, all foundation staff must embrace a capacity-building approach and be committed to changing internal practices to align with it. For example, Bechtel foundation staff noted that changing reporting requirements requires buy-in from leadership and that shifting processes can sometimes be slow and cumbersome. There were some internal struggles with adopting this type of approach, particularly given turnover in the role created to lead the initiative.

Third, relationship building and establishing trust between the foundation and grantees was not a given at the beginning of the initiative. In

As philanthropy seeks to facilitate lasting changes and launches collaboratives that promote sustainable improvements in organizational practices, funders should consider providing both proactive and responsive technical assistance, promoting a culture of learning, and creating opportunities for partnerships in order to reach these goals.

fact, it took significant time for that trust to be built, especially with leadership. Through the ongoing engagement with grantees and the program staffs' trust-based philanthropy approach, deep relationships were built and program staff were able to more effectively communicate grantee successes and challenges to foundation leadership. Additionally, as leadership became more directly engaged with grantees by attending convenings and CoPs, bilateral trust was ultimately established, but this process took time and was not without hiccups along the way.

Supporting Capacity Building Among Grantees: Steps for Foundations

We close with suggestions that foundations can consider when attempting to promote capacity building within grantees in their own initiatives.

- Gather extensive intel about the field the foundation plans to work within to identify its needs and strengths as well as the key and emerging players that can be supported.
- Use planning grants to allow the foundation to develop trusting relationships with organizations and determine their capacity to engage in the type of work that is the focus of the main grant.
- Make a multiyear commitment to grantees to allow them to learn, grow, and course-correct before having to apply for a new grant.
- Shift the goals of the foundation to focus on helping organizations think differently about themselves, be open to questioning themselves, and engage in new learning opportunities.
- Create opportunities for grantees to develop lasting partnerships: have staff make intentional connections between grantees where there is learning to be shared; show how the work is bigger than any one organization; demonstrate the value of organizations working together for a broader cause, such as getting legislation passed through advocacy efforts; and make time and space during convenings for grantees to learn from each other and identify ways to partner together.
- Establish indicators and outcomes that are individualized to the grantee, and focus on how to tell the stories of project impacts in ways that are compelling to the funder and broader community.
- Expect that implementing some of these approaches to build capacity among grantees will create some discomfort, particularly if it is being done for the first time. Provide opportunities for staff members to discuss challenges as they arise.

Conclusion

The evaluation of the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation's National Character Initiative has surfaced key lessons for grantmakers looking to embrace an organizational capacity-building orientation and shift the traditional funder-grantee dynamic. As philanthropy seeks to facilitate lasting changes and launches collaboratives that promote sustainable improvements in organizational practices, funders should consider providing both

proactive and responsive technical assistance, promoting a culture of learning, and creating opportunities for partnerships in order to reach these goals. These strategies can support long-term growth and sustained practices among organizations after grants end, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for organizations and the people they serve.

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Allison Dymnicki, Ph.D., is principal researcher at the American Institutes for Research. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Allison Dymnicki, American Institutes for Research, 1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor, Arlington, VA, 22202 (email: adymnicki@air.org).

Alex Hooker, B.A., is a senior program officer at the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation.

Rebecca Goldberg, B.A., is a senior program officer at the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation.