THE COMMUNITY SYSTEM SOLUTIONS FRAMEWORK
By Rong Wang, Katherine R. Cooper & Michelle Shumate

EYES UPON THE STREET
By Julie Sandorf

CHANGING SYSTEMS? WELCOME TO THE SLOW MOVEMENT
By Christian Seelos

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION Review
WINTER 2020
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Aspirational Communication

The marriage equality and youth antismoking campaigns transformed public attitudes by connecting their causes to the personal aspirations of their audiences.

By Doug Hattaway

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Illustration by Adam McCauley

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Beyond Collective Impact

Stanford Social Innovation Review was launched in 2003. Since then, we have published thousands of articles, many of which have had a significant impact on the field of social innovation. Our most popular article of all time, though, is one we published nine years ago that has been viewed or downloaded by nearly one million people: "Collective Impact," by John Kania and Mark Kramer.

That seminal article introduced a collaborative approach to tackling social problems that has been adopted, in whole or in part, by thousands of organizations around the world. The term *collective impact* has become so popular that in many instances it has been used to describe almost any type of work that organizations pursue together.

That isn't, however, what the authors intended. "Collaboration is nothing new," wrote Kania and Kramer in 2011. "The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks, and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different.

"Unlike most collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants." In short, collective impact is a particular way of collaborating that demands a great deal out of the participating organizations.

While many collaborations adhere to the tenets of the collective impact model, many don't. Yet these collaboratives continue to call their work "collective impact." One of the reasons collaboratives do this is because of the dearth of alternative approaches.

In this issue of *SSIR*, we publish an article that introduces a new way to describe and structure collaborative work: "The Community System Solutions Framework," by Rong Wang, Katherine R. Cooper, and Michelle Shumate.

Rather than putting forward a model with a fixed approach, as collective impact is, the authors have created a flexible framework that collaboratives can adapt to different types of situations. "Our purpose is not to suggest one singular model, but rather to demonstrate that communities may find that different approaches are better suited to their current environment, the population served, the problem each community is facing, and existing partnerships within a community."

The community system solutions framework is structured around two factors: the style of governance the collaboratives use and the amount of cross-sector participation they achieve. From this the authors devised a two-by-two matrix that collaboratives can locate their work within, depending on the amount of cross-sector engagement and how centralized the governance structure of the collaborative is.

Many collaboratives will find this new framework helpful. But the field of social innovation needs to be judicious about how and when it is used. What we don't need is for community system solution to replace collective impact as a universal description of all collaborative activity. Rather, it should be seen as one approach among many that can be adopted when appropriate. —**ERIC NEE**

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Couldn't make it to this year's NMI conference? Read a summary of the sessions along with select tweets from *SSIR* and its readers. See the recap at ssir.org/nmi_recap_2019 or search for the hashtag #SSIRInstitute on Twitter.

READER COMMENTS

The Free Market's Environmental and Social Impact

In their Fall 2019 viewpoint article, "A New Accounting System Is Possible," **Sara Olsen, Clara Miller,** and other authors working on impact measurement suggest that companies, investors, and consumers need an expanded set of metrics to help assess and manage the value of social and environmental effects from private-sector activity.

READERS RESPONDED:

"Encouraging. I can see the day when instead of stock market tickers running across the bottom of a news screen we'll be watching quality of life and community thrivability metrics."
—Elsie Maio

"For decades, traditional and specialized consulting firms have been collecting governance and, increasingly, environmental and social factors. We know that executive compensation is skyrocketing, whereas the salary of a rank-and-file employee is decreasing. We know that women are paid

less than men. We know that the water in Flint, Michigan, was polluted. What is missing is the financial and political will to act upon the data."
—Geoffrey Mazullo

Read more: ssir.org/market_impacts

Dispelling False Certainties for Better Philanthropy

In their Fall 2019 cover story, "Eight Myths of US Philanthropy," faculty of the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy examine common misconceptions about charitable giving—including who gives, how, and with what impact. By unpacking these fallacies, the authors shed light on the breadth, diversity, and changing nature of American philanthropy.

READERS RESPONDED:

"Large-scale philanthropy is a significant source of support for existing power relations, which creates growing inequities because much of philanthropy is the direct financial beneficiary of these power relations and inequities. Philanthropy and volunteerism also can be viewed as diversions from the necessity of maintaining and revitalizing our democratic intuitions and a public sector able to address racial and gender equity and social and economic justice with legislation, public policy, and public funding at the scale required."
—Arthur T. Himmelman

"The article focuses on monetary philanthropy and, to a lesser extent, volunteer philanthropy. I suggest there is another type not explored. Increasingly I observe that young people (including those who have trouble finding employment in the for-profit sector) are turning to nonprofits and charitable organizations as a career path and in the process generally 'giving' by accepting less-than-market-rate remuneration for their work. This may look more like desperation than charity, but I contend that the differential is, or should be, accounted for, if not in the GNP, then in the GWP (gross well-being product)."
—Betsy Cornwell

CO-AUTHOR RESPONDED:

"This is an intriguing idea: that working for less pay is a form of giving, which is more common among younger generations. While I have not studied this topic directly in my own research, I think it is a valuable topic that deserves further attention. ... We simply need more data, and especially longitudinal data that can better tease apart life-stage and age from generational cohort."
—Patricia Snell Herzog

Read more: ssir.org/8myths

Kiva's New Chapter

In his Fall 2019 case study, "Kiva Reinvents Itself," **Jasjit Singh** examines the transformation of the crowdfunding platform into a hub for impact investing and financial inclusion. Can Kiva find success with its new strategy and still retain its original spirit?

READERS RESPONDED:

"As to solving poverty, I feel like the criticism is incredibly condescending to Kiva's users. No one thinks they're solving poverty. I think I'm lending money to a person (or paying Kiva back for their loan to a person) who needs money for a specific reason. Money they wouldn't otherwise be able to get. To buy books, buy cows, go to school, buy clothes. Money is needed. I've got a bit. I'm happy to loan it with the hope that it will make someone's life a little better. This is a short-term *now* solution. This has an immediate impact. While the world discusses endlessly and in circles how to solve poverty, without doing much, here is a small thing I can do personally to aid a few individuals who otherwise might not receive help."
—Katie Salley

Read more: ssir.org/kiva_changes

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WHAT'S NEXT

NEW APPROACHES TO SOCIAL CHANGE

ENVIRONMENT

A Farmer's Market

BY SARAH MURRAY

As a conservation leader, Bill Buckner worries about agriculture's environmental impact. But as a farmer, he also knows how tough it is to make a living from the land. In 2015, during discussions with environmental groups, farmers, government agencies, and other parties about how to cut farming's ecological footprint, he says one thing was clear: "If it's not good for a farmer and is seen as an attack on the industry, it's never going to fly."

At the time, Buckner was president and CEO of the Noble Research Institute, a nonprofit that conducts research to help farmers and ranchers improve land stewardship and productivity. In that role, he led efforts to explore a new approach to transforming the management of America's farmland: a marketplace creating economic incentives for farmers to protect their land and natural resources.

In February 2019 this marketplace took shape when 11 organizations—from Cargill and McDonald's USA to the National Union of Farmers and The Nature Conservancy (TNC)—launched the Ecosystem Services Market Consortium (ESMC). The ESMC is working on the development of a trading system, which will be an online hub.

With a national launch planned for 2022, this new marketplace, the Ecosystem Services Market (ESM), will enable farmers to use improvements in soil health—the key to water conservation and soil carbon sequestration—to generate ecosystem-service credits that they will be able to sell.

"We're incentivizing an outcome that promotes soil health," says Sean Penrith, CEO of Gordian Knot Strategies, which is advising the consortium. "But here are the real benefits you get: lower input costs, improved yields, and increased farm resilience."

Techniques that can be used include low or no tillage and the use of cover crops to increase the soil's biological activity and water-holding capacity, which reduce runoff of fertilizers and pesticides. "That's where you see impact on water quantity, water quality, and water use," says the consortium's executive director Debbie Reed.

On the other side of the equation are the buyers of the credits: food and beverage companies working to meet their own environmental goals. "We can't tackle these commitments and goals without working with our supply chain—that is, working with our farmers," says Chris Adamo, vice president of federal and industry affairs at Danone North America, a consortium member.

The ESM will enable companies to implement sustainability efforts more effectively than by working with individual farms. "A market mechanism can do part of the heavy lifting for us," says Jerry Lynch, recently retired chief sustainability officer at General Mills who led the company's involvement with the ESMC from its inception.

Noble Research Institute workshop attendees learn about sustainable land management at the Dixon Water Fountain in Decatur, Texas.

PHOTO BY ROB MATTSON/NOBLE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The ability to link farmers' sustainability goals with those of corporate buyers sparked TNC's interest in ESMC. "We see real opportunity for a market like this to make a connection between farmers and ranchers and the companies and consumers that want to see better outcomes from food-production systems," says Kris Johnson, associate director for science and planning at TNC's North America Agricultural Program.

The consortium is developing and piloting protocols for quantifying, monitoring, reporting, verifying, and registering for the credits.

Measurement tools are critical, since quantifying performance against a baseline is how credits will be allocated to newly enrolled farms. The tools will not only measure actual soil-quality changes but also make it possible to model these changes on farms that already use stewardship techniques but lack a baseline from which to measure improvements. This is equally important, since the ESM is also designed to reward its early adopters.

Smart sensors, which send real-time information on soil content to a smartphone or laptop, generate the data needed to allocate credits. The ability to track how soil reacts to planting programs or different nutrients helps farmers make better decisions.

"That's where they can double and triple the value of the credits," says Tim Palmer, a farmer and president of

SARAH MURRAY is a freelance journalist who writes regularly for the *Financial Times* and the Economist Group. She has also written for many other publications, including *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, the *South China Morning Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

RACHELE HENDRICKS-STURRUP (@AcesoIngenuity) is a journalist and an online instructor in behavioral economics in the Department of Medical Ethics & Health Policy at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine.

the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Importantly, farmers will be paid for the credits, rather than having to trade them, leaving the ESM to sell them. And while the market will help farms using it to become more sustainable, it could have a broader effect.

"If we can bring proof points together in the next couple of years … then perhaps government can create some better policies from that," Adamo says. "That's something to be optimistic about." ■

FOOD

Vegan Vending

BY RACHELE HENDRICKS-STURRUP

Vending machines are more often than not disappointing lifesavers. They stave off hunger, but most offer products that are high in saturated fat, have poor nutritional value, or include ingredients that fail to cater to individuals with dietary restrictions, particularly those whose diets are vegan or vegetarian.

One family in Fort Wayne, Indiana, sought to address this shortcoming by creating CPNJ Vending, which offers "Vegan Refreshments."

Founders Reesha and Ronald Howard launched CPNJ Vending after discovering that their infant son's severe skin reactions to breastfeeding were linked to Reesha's consumption of dairy products. Once Reesha abstained from dairy, their son's skin cleared immediately. The family then adopted a vegan diet.

After this experience, they understood the importance of giving other children and families options to conveniently purchase vegan products in public spaces for health reasons. "Our goal is to create better convenient food options for those with dietary restrictions," Reesha Howard says.

CPNJ Vending is currently determining exactly where and how many machines to place in hospitals and other public spaces, such as high school cafeterias, across the United States. Their first machine appeared at Dupont Hospital in Fort Wayne earlier in 2019. Since hospitals are intended as places of personal health restoration and recuperation, they are poised to promote a culture of health by offering healthier food selections in their vending machines.

Dupont Hospital's CEO Lorenzo Suter explained that CPNJ Vending's vegan business concept aligns with the hospital's goal: "It is an honor to work with CPNJ Vending," Suter says, "as our goal in a hospital setting is to reconnect preventative health care with food. Their mission to increase accessibility to healthy living is also our goal and we are proud that they have accomplished this in part for our guests."

CPNJ Vending aims to improve the quality of life for Fort Wayne-area residents and visitors. "I appreciate the efforts of the Howards, as they are developing innovative solutions to help improve the quality of life in our community," says Fort Wayne Mayor Tom Henry. "Having access to healthy food choices and making a commitment to leading healthier lifestyles can help individuals and families."

Jen Helt, a specialist in the emergency department at Dupont Hospital in Fort Wayne, Indiana, scopes out the selection of vegan products available for purchase.

Heather Dahman, vegan lifestyle coach and founder of Fort Wayne Vegans & Vegetarians, explains that although an "increasing number of doctors are prescribing a plant-based/vegan diet to patients with diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and certain cancers," many of her clients struggle to eat healthfully. Making vegan options more accessible to the public is a win for the health and well-being of every individual.

CPNJ Vending is expanding to other local hospitals near Fort Wayne, with their second machine set to be placed in late 2019. While the company's waiting list for machines grows, they are currently crafting a franchising model.

CPNJ Vending controls the supply chain, from food selections to distribution. Reesha Howard explains that while CPNJ Vending does not maintain strict selection standards, they do have a wide vegan variety with nutritional information for each product that is readily available and displayed on our vending machines' screens.

Their machines offer a variety of vegan options, such as freeze-dried fruits and veggies, kombucha, alkaline water, organic teas, trail mixes, crunchy bean snacks, granola bites, organic chewing gum, and some gluten-free options. Each machine contains approximately 20 products and has a clear display and tablet that allows consumers to scroll through the nutritional information. This information helps consumers determine which snacks and beverages suit their dietary needs.

While some of CPNJ's Vending's vegan products do contain added sugar for flavoring (e.g., fig bars), the Howards are interested in working with behavioral economists to explore how strategic product placement in their machines might influence consumer decisions to purchase vegan products that are either low in sugar or have no added sugar.

CPNJ Vending's products are not meant to replace actual produce. Rather, their goal is to provide alternative and more healthful vending machine options for those who

PHOTO COURTESY OF CPNJ VENDING

LINUS UNAH is a journalist based in Lagos, Nigeria. His work on global health, conflict, development, and the environment has been published in *Al Jazeera*, *The Guardian*, *Mongabay*, and *Devex*.

A staff member from a recycling firm weighs a bag full of plastic at Isrina Schools in Ajegunle, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Lagos, Nigeria.

want or need it. "I prefer veggie chips for my kids, rather than Goldfish crackers, because my kids can't have dairy," Reesha Howard observes. "But there will be some parents who stick to celery and carrot sticks—and that is okay."

EDUCATION

Paying With Plastic

BY LINUS UNAH

Nigeria's public primary and junior secondary schools are free. But years of neglect and underfunding have forced schools to charge for some school-related expenses, such as registration and examination fees, uniforms, parent-teacher association dues, textbooks, school bags, and footwear. Some public schools even ask for liquid soap, garden hoes, desks, tissue paper, and disinfectants. These fees amount to between 6,000 to 20,000 naira ($16 to $55) per term.

Parents who cannot afford these fees allow their children to stay at home or pull them out of school to find employment in order to support the family. As a result, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children worldwide: 10.5 million.

In December 2018, the nonprofit African Clean Up Initiative (ACI) introduced the Recycle Pay Educational Program to address this problem. The Recycle Pay program allows parents to pay a portion or all of their children's school fees by gathering plastic and discarded drinking-water bags, which are then recycled.

The idea to start the program emerged from a conversation that ACI founder Alexander Akhigbe had with an ACI volunteer who was running a low-cost private school in Ajegunle, one of Lagos' poorest neighborhoods. The volunteer complained that most parents were unable to pay fees, thus affecting the school's operations. He really needed to find urgent solutions to keep his school running.

"Plastics and discarded sachet water bags are everywhere, especially in low-income communities where you can barely find culverts," Akhigbe says. "Then I told myself: 'How about if we design a concept that would address this problem and help kids to stay in school?'"

The next day he discussed the idea with his team of volunteers. They weighed the merits, and then asked the volunteer who runs the private school to allow them to do a test run at his school.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AFRICAN CLEAN UP INITIATIVE

After two pickup rounds in a month, more parents joined the program.

"When we introduced the idea to parents, many didn't believe us," says Akhigbe, who coordinates the program. "But when they began to see and understand how it worked, results canceled out doubts."

After collecting the plastic waste, parents bring it to the school compound twice a month. ACI works with social enterprises like Wecyclers, Greenhill Recycling, Lasgidis Recyclers, and Ecoprune, which serve as a conduit through which plastic waste collected is moved to recycling plants in Lagos. These recycling firms run incentive-based models to collect recyclables from households, communities, and companies in return for points that can be redeemed for cash and other household items.

The social enterprises weigh the waste collected by each parent separately and then the amount is calculated and deducted from their children's school fees. The enterprises pay 25 naira ($0.60 USD) per kilogram of plastic waste. (A kilogram is an average of about 28 plastic bottles.) This money is paid to ACI, which then credits the schools directly to sort out how much debt has been cleared off students' fees.

The Recycle Pay program not only helps parents to pay school fees but also rids Nigeria's largest city, Lagos, of waste. The city, which has a population of about 20 million inhabitants, generates about 13,000 tons of waste daily, but only about 40 percent is collected and around 10 percent recycled.

"I like the transparency with which ACI and the school handle this program," says Patience Samuel, whose three children attend a participating school. "They tell us about how much we have raised through plastics and never hide anything from us."

Currently, the program is operating in five schools in poor neighborhoods across Lagos. Approximately 150 parents have signed up for the program, and around 1,000 schoolchildren have had their school fees paid off through the program.

ACI's goal was initially to reach at least 10,000 kids by 2030. But with interest exceeding their expectations, Akhigbe believes they will achieve that target in "less than five years." His only concern is that recycling firms aren't collecting waste at the rate that the schools need, which "slows the pace of the program."

A potential solution, he adds, would be to raise money to buy their own truck, which would help ACI collect as much waste as possible.

"We don't want school fees to disrupt any child's schooling again," says Akhigbe. ■

SARAH ROBSON is a journalist with New Zealand's public broadcaster, RNZ. She reports on social issues, including child poverty, food insecurity, and the social welfare system.

GOVERNMENT

The Wellbeing Budget

BY SARAH ROBSON

Across many measures, New Zealand appears to be doing well: Its people are relatively healthy, well educated, and socially connected; material standards of living are high; and the unemployment rate is trending downward and is just below 4 percent.

But the country still faces significant challenges: Tens of thousands of children are living in poverty; young people in particular are struggling with their mental health; the rates of family violence are among the worst of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) nations; and its Māori and Pacific populations face inequalities in health, education, and employment.

When Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern came to power two years ago, she committed to tackling these problems. In May, she and Finance Minister Grant Robertson announced their first Wellbeing Budget, as the national budget. Instead of simply pegging the country's success to traditional economic measures, like GDP, they want policymaking to be driven by what will make the biggest difference to the well-being of people, their communities, and the environment. It's been dubbed the "well-being approach."

Using the New Zealand Treasury's framework for measuring living standards, and in consultation with experts and science advisers, the government set five priority areas for the Wellbeing Budget: supporting mental well-being, reducing child poverty, lifting Māori and Pacific incomes, transitioning to a low-carbon emissions economy, and boosting productivity.

"If you're going to have a set of five priorities like we have, you can't expect any one ministry or vote to be responsible for that," Robertson says. "We did prioritize government agencies that worked together on particular areas—that didn't work everywhere the first time around [during the round of policy proposal bids], but where it did it was successful and we tried to reward that."

One example is the NZ$320 million ($202 million) package to address family and sexual violence. Every year, about one million New Zealanders are affected by the problem, including 300,000 children. Eight government departments were involved in putting together the budget proposal, which includes more funding for crisis support services, major advertising

campaigns to eliminate violence, and changes to court processes to reduce trauma for victims.

The departments—which include the education, health, justice, and social development ministries, as well as the police and corrections—have set up a joint venture board that is both responsible for the implementation of the package and accountable for its outcomes.

Elsewhere, the budget included NZ$2 billion ($1.26 billion) for mental health services, as well as NZ$500 million ($315 million) to begin reforming the social security system. There was NZ$230 million ($145 million) to encourage sustainable land use, and NZ$300 million ($189 million) for investing in start-ups. The state-owned rail company got NZ$1 billion ($631 million), and there was money for rebuilding run-down schools and hospitals.

While the well-being focus is a welcome shift in economic thinking, according to Child Poverty Action Group spokesperson Mike O'Brien, the spending itself marks only the very beginning of addressing entrenched problems, such as severe hardship and poverty.

"Improvements for children and families experiencing the worst of poverty are yet to be seen," he says. "Until more is done to urgently address, reverse, and prevent poverty we will still see problems arise that will require more effort in terms of public services."

Max Rashbrooke, a senior associate with the Institute for Governance and Policy Studies at Victoria University, argues that economic inequality needs to be given greater prominence within the measures of well-being.

"The reality is that inequality of income and wealth has a massive effect across all the other domains," he explains. "It's very hard to be healthy, have a decent chance of doing well at school, have positive connections with neighbors, participate in democracy, and so on, if you don't have sufficient income or wealth."

Robertson admits the government will still have to juggle other short-term cost pressures—repairing aging infrastructure, for example—and the need to make significant long-term investments to make progress on bigger challenges like child poverty or climate change.

"The truth is it will always be a balancing act, there will always need to be funding for immediate need, but what we're trying to do is re-orient the focus to investing on the big long-term challenges and opportunities," he says.

FIELD REPORT
PROFILES OF INNOVATIVE WORK

Incarcerated women participate in Pathways, an SUI voluntary recovery program, in Franklin County, Ohio.

Decriminalizing Mental Illness

The Stepping Up Initiative integrates law enforcement and community resources to reduce the number of people who have mental illness in jails and prisons.

BY VICTORIA A. BROWNWORTH

The largest psychiatric facilities in the United States are prisons. It's a sobering fact: 2.3 million adults are held in America's prisons and jails, according to 2019 data from the Prison Policy Initiative. Within this statistic, approximately 20 percent of inmates in jails and 15 percent of inmates in prisons have a serious mental illness. There are three times as many mentally ill people housed in jails and prisons as there are in hospitals.

Since 2015, the Stepping Up Initiative (SUI) has worked in communities across the country to reduce these numbers by diverting people with mental illness into mental health programs. SUI created a national coalition of mental health, law enforcement, and substance abuse professionals, and brought together community leaders and formerly incarcerated people to tackle the problem.

"SUI is an attempt to apply the successful collective impact approach to solving complex social problems to a longstanding and growing national crisis," says Allen Houston, public affairs manager of the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, one of the cofounding organizations behind SUI.

A major function of SUI is compiling data—and what the data show is alarming. People with serious mental illness are jailed in the United States at a rate of approximately two million times each year. In addition, people with mental illness spend more time in jail and are more likely to be incarcerated again than those who are not mentally ill.

Rachael Eisenberg, director of policy and planning at Philadelphia's Office of Criminal Justice, who works with the city's SUI program, explains that nearly 75 percent of these people suffer from both mental illness and drug and alcohol abuse. A 2017 Department of Justice (DOJ) report reveals that a quarter of inmates have serious psychological distress that lasts beyond a month, compared with only 5 percent of the general population. Two in five prisoners and jail inmates have a history of serious mental health problems. (Serious mental illness includes schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, long-term depression, and anxiety disorder—all at a stage where medication is required.)

Lloyd Hale, now assistant executive director of SC Share, a nonprofit recovery-oriented organization that works with SUI and the South Carolina Department of Mental Health, was once one of those people whose mental illness led them to prison instead of treatment. His mental illness went untreated in jail. "I was in the middle of a really bad episode when the guy in the cell above called down to me, threatening my life," Hale recalls. Terrified, he clawed at the cell door, beat his hands against it "until they were bloody," and screamed for the guards to let him out. The following day, he went to confront his tormentor. "I stood in the doorway and looked around at the empty room—there was no sign of anyone ever being there," he says.

Hale's experience represents a disturbing norm. SUI provides crisis intervention training to both jail and prison personnel to help people like Hale once they are incarcerated. But it focuses more on prevention, so that mentally ill people never enter the penal system in the first place.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE STEPPING UP INITIATVE

STRENGTH IN A DIVERSE NETWORK

In May 2015, the CSG Justice Center, the National Association of Counties (NACo), and the American Psychiatric Association Foundation (APAF) partnered to create SUI.

SUI's funding is broad-based, utilizing a range of public and private funders, including the DOJ's Bureau of Justice Assistance. Individual SUI programs have myriad funding sources. As Eisenberg explains, Philadelphia's SUI has city-funded positions, while individual programs within the Philadelphia SUI "have various funding streams—state, federal, municipal. But Stepping Up is the framework under which any new projects can be linked with each other."

VICTORIA A. BROWNWORTH is a Pulitzer Prize-nominated and Society of Professional Journalists Award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, among others. She has authored and edited more than 20 books.

Risë Haneberg, deputy division director for county initiatives for the CSG Justice Center, explains that since its inception, SUI has gotten nearly 500 counties in 43 states to "focus on early forms of diversion" to keep mentally ill people from getting trapped in the penal system, as happened to Hale.

"Sheriffs tell us that they didn't know they were going to be a mental health facility," Haneberg says. "We want to ensure that law enforcement has proper training so that they can make the call on where a person in a mental health crisis should go."

SUI's first cohort of counties across the nation—a total of 15 known as "innovator sites"—are compiling baseline data to apply at the national level. By managing the data for law enforcement, police can do a better job of getting people help by also knowing who is repeatedly coming through the system into shelters, emergency rooms, and other access points where they could end up in the penal system. This means that when a family calls 911 because a mentally ill family member is in crisis, the mentally ill person can get intervention that will restore them to their medication and therapy and keep them from being arrested.

SUI created a tool kit to educate communities as well as law enforcement about intervention and its cost-effectiveness. Eisenberg explains that jails spend three times as much on mentally ill inmates than on other inmates. Put bluntly, keeping mentally ill people out of the carceral system doesn't just help those individuals and save lives but also reduces costs.

New York City has been a model for how SUI can be applied nationwide. "The average number of inmates at Riker's Island has been cut by nearly two-thirds since the 1990s from the 20,000s on any given day to 7,400 as of July 2019," says Ayesha Delany-Brumsey, the Behavioral Health Division director for the CSG Justice Center. "The commitment was on what we can do to narrow the front door of the justice system so mentally ill people don't go in, but if they do go in, they come out to supportive programs."

New York City invested $130 million in the initiative and launched two crisis response centers with the NYPD. These centers provide food, showers, and medication, as well as temporary housing—all the stopgaps to keep someone out of jail.

SUI records reveal certain essential elements—such as collaborative decision making and quality data—that most county criminal justice systems lack. Helping local government and their partners build those foundational elements is one of SUI's primary goals.

And the initiative is seeing success in Philadelphia. As project manager of the SUI program at the Managing Director's Office of the City of Philadelphia, Danielle Walsh enumerates how the city's work with the SUI has succeeded dramatically, utilizing the program not only to facilitate programs that keep mentally ill people out of jails and prisons, but also to keep them from ever being arrested.

In September 2017, Walsh's SUI program "developed a police-assistance diversion plan so that mentally ill people picked up by police who had no open warrants, instead of being processed as an arrest, there was no criminal case initiated."

In another groundbreaking initiative under SUI, Walsh's office enabled arresting officers to do "a screening process with a behavioral health navigator in the detective division." They can look up an individual's mental health records and get that person a full mental health screening. The results are made available to the person's defense attorney—most often a public defender. The district attorney's office and the defense attorney can then coordinate over mentally ill individuals. "This offers more opportunities for diversion," Eisenberg says. The city has seen a significant decrease in the numbers of mentally ill people in the city's six jails since the SUI program was implemented.

DATA FOR PREVENTION

In October 2018, Pennsylvania's Department of Health and Department of Corrections, and other government officials, launched a resource center in Philadelphia focused on helping counties reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jail through research-driven approaches.

An outgrowth of SUI, the Stepping Up Technical Assistance Center (SUTAC), established by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and administered by the CSG Justice Center, is using both in-person and distance-based trainings to improve county jail officials' ability to identify mental illnesses among those admitted to their jails.

SUTAC will also strengthen data collection and establish a baseline of performance measures to track progress toward getting people the treatment they need.

York County, Pennsylvania, has also worked with the SUI to develop a secondary companion program, the Community Action for Recovery and Diversion (CARD) initiative, which is designed to tackle systemic change in York County with regard to mentally ill and substance abusing people and the justice system. "CARD is a private/public partnership aimed at diverting individuals with substance abuse issues in addition to mental health needs from the time of arrest," Dave Sunday, the county's district attorney, explains.

CARD is scaled to utilize existing resources, as well as identify additional need areas, so that eligible offenders with substance abuse and mental illness may be provided community treatment and other necessary support services—and kept out of jail.

Franklin County, Ohio, is yet another focal point for SUI. As the most populous county in Ohio, it exemplifies how a fully implemented SUI program can save funds. According to Sheriff Dallas Baldwin, $250,000 a month could be saved by the county through diverting just a quarter of the daily population of 719 mentally ill people in the county's jails.

Retired Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, who helped start the program, says it works. "It's not that you have to have new money," she says. "You just stop wasting money with horrible outcomes."

Haneberg envisions SUI continuing to grow over a multiyear span. "We hope—through our tool kit, webinars, and data collection—to help communities understand just how beneficial the Stepping Up Initiative is," she says, "how much change it can effect, and how quickly the results can be seen."

FIELD REPORT

A Meri Seif bus is filled to capacity on International Women's Day in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXANDRA CHRISTY

A Women's Movement on Wheels

The women-only transportation program in Papua New Guinea is challenging social norms about gender by improving women's economic lives and securing girls' education.

BY ALEXANDRA CHRISTY

The pink and purple buses carrying women through the streets of Papua New Guinea's two major cities are as bold in purpose as they are in color.

The buses launched in the capital city of Port Moresby in 2014 and expanded to Lae, the second-largest city in Papua New Guinea (PNG), in 2019. The women-only transportation program began exclusively as a free-to-ride service called Meri Seif ("Woman Safe") and, in 2017, added a pay-to-ride service called M-Buses.

The two bus programs have ensured that some 170,000 women and girls annually ride safely to and from work and school each day. This is a momentous step forward for a country where, in 2017, more than 90 percent of women reported being sexually harassed or robbed of their daily earnings by men on public transportation.

"It's a worldwide epidemic," says Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, a professor of urban planning at UCLA, who conducts research on college students and their sexual harassment experiences in transit environments in 18 global cities. "Physical harassment—groping and touching—happens in crowded settings because men feel more emboldened. For many women, public transportation is their first #MeToo moment."

Women-only transportation programs exist in more than a dozen countries. There are women-only subway cars in cities such as Rio de Janeiro, Cairo, and Dubai. Women-only compartments exist on trains in India, Japan, and Indonesia, among other Asian countries. Guatemala and Malaysia have also experimented with single-sex buses. More recently, women-only taxi services have emerged in New York, Paris, Grozny, and Lahore.

In PNG, which the Human Rights Watch describes as "one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman," Meri Seif shines a persistent ray of hope.

"When the buses came, it showed us that there are people who are willing to help women and girls in the city," says Joanna Oala, a member of the UN Women youth group Sanap Wantaim ("Stand Together"). "It gives us hope that change is happening."

Nigel Mado, a young volunteer also in the Sanap Wantaim program, has seen a shift in female bus riders, which he attributes in part to Sanap Wantaim's on-bus trainings about women's rights and where to get help. "What the bus really does is give women a voice, an avenue in which they can express themselves and say, 'We are not under men but equal,' and it sort of changes the ideas and concepts in some men in part of the country."

"I feel so safe when I get on the Meri Seif bus," says Valerie Ulal, a university student in Port Moresby. "I can easily pull out my phone and listen to music and actually make a phone call. On the private buses [public motor vehicles (PMVs)], the thieves just walk on, and when they see ladies holding their bags, they just grab them or threaten [the women]."

THE ROAD TO SAFETY

In 2013, pastor Mike Field, then general manager of the Ginigoada ("Stand Strong") Foundation, a job-training NGO in Port Moresby, could not bear the frustration of watching women wait patiently at rush hour to get on the public bus to work.

"Every morning I would see the young men forcing themselves into the buses. They would jump through the windows, and the young women and the older women would have little or no chance [getting a seat] at all," he explains. "I found this really disconcerting, because at the Ginigoada Foundation we're working hard to give training opportunities to

ALEXANDRA CHRISTY is a journalist and digital storyteller who won a travel award through the Solutions Journalism Network's #MeToo #SolutionsToo program and raised additional funds through the Magnum Foundation to travel to PNG to cover this story.

these young women, and we try and get them to work, and then [we] get them a job, [but] they can't get transport because these young men just force their way into the vehicles."

Field suggested to Ginigoada board member Dave Conn that the foundation pilot a free, women-only bus program. Conn agreed and encouraged Field to approach Powes Parkop, governor of Port Moresby, to ask that the National Capital District (NCD) release one of its old buses to use for the pilot.

Parkop, a former human rights lawyer, donated five retired NCD buses. From these, Ginigoada cobbled together one roadworthy vehicle. UN Women PNG, a local NGO, provided the initial funding.

"Gender-based violence is a big problem in our country; in our city, too," Parkop says. "But you can take only one step at a time. We cannot solve everything, but we absolutely have power and influence to change the dynamics on public transport instantly."

From 2014 to mid-2019, the number of buses rose from 1 to 11, the number of routes from 1 to 6, and the number of riders from 21,000 to more than 600,000. The Meri Seif free-to-ride program also expanded, with two buses in Lae. The pilot was so successful that the Ginigoada Foundation started the M-Bus, a pay-to-ride program, to move the model toward financial sustainability.

"The trialing of the free Meri Seif buses was that it was intended to be a temporary measure," Richelle Tickle, Pacific Women's PNG country manager, explains, "to prove the value of this service as a commercial arrangement … and the value of taking security seriously on all public transport."

As demand soared, the media spread word that Port Moresby needed more buses. The NCD donated two more; UN Women PNG, together with Pacific Women PNG, raised funds to purchase two additional air-conditioned buses; the Hertz car rental company in Port Moresby (whose managing director was on the Ginigoada board of trustees) donated two more; and the Ventura Bus Company in Melbourne, Australia, donated four.

"I think what made me put a lot of energy behind this program," explains Andrew Cornwall, managing director of the Ventura Bus Company, "is that I've been to Port Moresby previously and understood how the people of Papua New Guinea helped the Australians [in World War II], and I just wanted to give back. It really got to me that women in this world are scared to go to work."

This confluence of politics, programs, and people has made the women-only transportation a success. Rather than originating as the stand-alone idea of a single NGO, the bus programs complemented other efforts in the country to address women's empowerment and gender-based violence.

The continuation of the women-only buses has been integral to other efforts. The buses helped Ginigoada Foundation trainees not only attend its program but also get to and from their subsequent jobs safely. Parkop had every incentive to help the program work, since his administration set out to end gender-based violence and empower women economically to build businesses and credit. And for UN Women PNG, the bus program augmented their Safe Public Transport for Women and Children program.

"It's about collective action," says Brenda Andrias, a program specialist at UN Women PNG who focuses on safe public transport. "It's about getting all the stakeholders who have some role to play in enhancing the safety of women and girls to make a stand."

DRIVING THROUGH THE PATRIARCHY

An unexpected benefit of the program has been the hiring of 10 women drivers. With funds from the Canadian government, which Ginigoada approached with a $15,000 proposal to train women drivers, the foundation has trained close to 50 PNG women.

"I became a bus driver because in the city in Port Moresby, women are not safe to get around, so I decided that I would make a little bit of a difference in my community," says Gola Momo, one of the new drivers.

The job, however, is far from perfect. "The biggest challenge," says Momo, who does six runs a day, "is the male bus drivers [of the PMVs]. When we pull into the bus stops, they are very mean to us and don't give us space to get in, and sometimes they scream abuse at us when we pick up the women."

In response, UN Women trained more than 100 PMV drivers, crew members, and operators in 2018 about the importance of safe transport for women. The overall message to the drivers was clear: If you had kept women safe on your buses in the first place, the city would not need women-only transportation.

The future of PNG's women-only transportation depends on many factors, from finances to social acceptance. While some signs point to continued growth—the NCD is donating four more buses, and a potential new donor is willing to add up to 25 buses for the Lae pilot—the program faces continued hostility from men, who have catapulted marbles through bus windows, threatened women drivers at knifepoint, and tried to force themselves aboard the buses. While no serious injuries have occurred—each bus has two male security guards—safe travel around Port Moresby remains elusive.

Sustainability is another long-term challenge. The Ginigoada Foundation, now overseeing the bus program, will phase out the original Meri Seif free-to-ride buses at the end of 2019 in both Port Moresby and Lae, and the pay-to-ride M-Buses will take over all routes. A shortfall of $50,000 per year exists between the cost of running the program (approximately $205,000 for drivers, maintenance, petrol, security, and marketing) and the income from fares (approximately $157,000). Pacific Women PNG currently covers this shortfall, but their funding will end in 2021.

Finally, an issue never far from the minds of those responsible for the program is the wish that the buses did not need to exist at all.

"There's a certain irony, I know," says Philip Priestley, the manager of the entire Ginigoada M-Bus fleet, "that at the same time we wish the buses didn't exist, here we are, scrambling to get as many online as we can. But the truth is, we have a long way to go in PNG to combat gender-based violence, and until that is under control, maybe 30 years from now, we'll keep doing what we need to do to keep women safe."

FIELD REPORT

Student interns from the Center for Civic Innovation and BCe2 survey an area of Bowman Creek.

The Creek Will Rise

Interns in South Bend, Indiana, first collaborated to help restore a polluted neighborhood waterway. Then the project grew into something bigger.

BY KYLE COWARD

Ask people what first comes to mind when they think of South Bend, Indiana, and they may mention the University of Notre Dame and its legendary football team. But the city is also famous for being an early-20th century industrial power that housed the Studebaker automotive company and other manufacturers, and where the St. Joseph's River played an important role facilitating commerce for the city throughout the Midwest.

The gradual decline of the nation's manufacturing sector that began in the late 20th century and hit the Rust Belt hard also impacted South Bend. The city's economy eroded, and its natural environment followed. These problems were especially difficult for residents of the city's Southeast neighborhood, where a loss of jobs and rise in pollution combined with an increase in housing vacancy and criminal activity.

"The Southeast was an abandoned side of town with a lot of drug houses, prostitution, and gangs," says Rickardo Taylor Sr., senior pastor of Mount Carmel Missionary Baptist Church and who has called South Bend home for more than two decades.

For residents like Taylor, Bowman Creek, a two-mile-long tributary of the St. Joseph's River that runs through the neighborhood, symbolized those woes.

"The only time the creek ran is when it would rain," says Taylor, who notes that the sole part of Bowman Creek that previously looked presentable was a short section running past the nearby Studebaker Park public golf course. "It was a neighborhood that was forgotten about, and that creek was forgotten about 100 percent."

Four miles to the north sits the campus of Notre Dame. That distance might seem greater to some Southeast residents given the very different surroundings of the two places. But as the 2010s approached, some faculty members of the university's engineering department were very much aware of the environmental problems plaguing the creek and were exploring novel approaches to help start a restoration.

Prior to the beginning of the decade, engineering faculty and students had collaborated with community organizations on various individual projects, including those related to public works. But, a few years later, a new idea was conceived: getting high school and college students involved not just in learning science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills, but also in applying those skills to lead projects of their own.

Launched in 2015, the Bowman Creek Educational Ecosystem (BCe2) brings together local high schools and higher education institutions, community organizations, and private and municipal entities for the goal of developing sustainable solutions to social, economic, and environmental problems in South Bend.

RESTORING THE CREEK

The roots of BCe2 actually go back to 2010. Gary Gilot, who then was the city's public works director, and Jay Brockman, an associate director at Notre Dame's College of Engineering, started a collaboration among Notre Dame, the city, and James Whitcomb Riley High School for the purpose of addressing solutions to environmental problems at the creek, which is located near the high school. Among those initially recruited to help were Arezoo Ardekani, an engineering professor at Notre Dame, whose research interests in water physics and general interest in community outreach dovetailed with Gilot and Brockman's ambitions for a revitalized Bowman Creek.

"I wanted to start an outreach project that not only focuses on the education of high school students and attracts them to STEM fields, but also has a positive impact on the society," Ardekani says. "When I heard about

PHOTO COURTESY OF BARBARA JOHNSTON/UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

FIELD REPORT

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the challenges that Bowman Creek faced, I immediately decided to work on it."

In 2012, Ardekani and some of her students partnered with city engineers to teach students at Riley—a public high school—how to test the water quality of a nearby section of the creek. The curiosity of Riley's students, who hail from diverse backgrounds and who received no funding for this initial endeavor, was piqued. They provided such a suitable pool of researchers for the project that its leaders saw an opportunity for BCe2 to expand its offerings.

Brockman quickly recognized the potential for building upon the initial experiment, which coincided with a 2013 study cosponsored by the city that detailed solutions for restoring the creek, which contained elevated levels of E. coli, ammonia, and phosphorous. The experiment would now be dependent on all entities involved working together on an effort that was becoming considerably greater than just a one-off endeavor.

BCe2 would also have to balance community improvement goals with the realization that it was still very much a project with pragmatic objectives.

"We were working in a neighborhood that's had a long period of decline," Gilot says. "And before you change momentum, you have to focus on little wins. We're not swinging for the fences."

BUILDING ON COMMUNITY ROOTS

With grants of $15,000 from the National Science Foundation and almost $20,000 from local nonprofit organization enFocus, BCe2 officially launched as a summer internship program in 2015. It had nine participants. Interns, consisting of a mix of local high school and college students, worked on STEM projects such as producing 3-D physical and digital design models and learned about drone technology for the purpose of assessing the creek's environmental quality.

Increased funding, primarily through local and federal grants, has enabled the internship program to expand. When the program returned the following summer, more projects were added, which allowed student participation to rise to 21. In 2019, 39 students participated in the eight-week program.

Students outside of South Bend are welcome to apply; majoring in engineering or another STEM field is not mandatory for admission. The program neither requires candidates to have an excellent academic record nor prior experience working in STEM fields or initiating STEM academic projects. Those selected are provided with an overview of each project for the upcoming summer and are assigned to a specific group of three to four people based on how they rate their interests in the projects and where their skills fit best.

"We're looking for people that have a sense of commitment to a community, and who know themselves well enough to want to be a part of something like this," Brockman says. "We know what our projects are going into the summer, and we know the different skills, talents, and backgrounds we want in the mix."

For the 2019 program, two projects in particular focused on the continued restoration of Bowman Creek and the surrounding area. In one project, a group worked with EmNet, a local water utility management company, and Notre Dame to develop a weather station atop the clubhouse of Studebaker Park golf course. Data from the station feeds into an online dashboard that allows the public to view conditions of the creek in the stretch by the course. Additionally, interns launched a beautification project at the site to remove weeds, branches, and graffiti to facilitate the planting of 250 native floral plugs.

In the second project, another group addressed concerns about heavy rainfalls potentially creating bottlenecks in the city's sewer system and possibly spilling over into both the creek and the St. Joseph's River. The group also partnered with the city and EmNet to create cost-effective sensors placed at different points in the creek. They used lasers to survey and collect data for a cross section of the creek where the sensors were located.

Interns further used statistics on the creek obtained from the US Ecological Survey's database and developed a model for a website they created to provide the public with a gauge of water conditions. Additionally, the site allows local high school students taking STEM classes to learn about conditions and trends in the creek for their own studies.

"There hasn't ever been a comprehensive effort to make a network that's focused specifically on Bowman Creek, and which gives a holistic picture of where the water is on the creek," says Finnian Cavanaugh, a senior civil engineering major at Notre Dame who worked on the latter project. "The key of this is to open the data to the public, because this is something that hasn't really been done before."

"The Bowman Creek project is what education should be," says Seth Ponder, a teacher at Riley High School and one of BCe2's 40 mentors, who has been involved with the program since 2016.

"It's community engaged, it's networking with professionals, and it's making a change by the end of the summer," he adds. "You have a project that you can show off that betters the community, and maybe even betters your own family."

BEYOND THE CREEK

The growth of BCe2 has allowed for the creation of other summer projects in addition to those concentrating on the creek's restoration. This year's program included eight additional projects that branched out beyond the creek to the larger Southeast neighborhood and the city.

In the Southeast, one project saw interns working on a marketing plan to promote home ownership for a neighborhood community-development corporation. Housing was also a focus for a separate team project that conducted a study aimed at reducing lead exposure in homes throughout town.

Another effort included interns working on a cost-effective model for local businesses to comply with an Environmental Protection Agency mandate next year to retain storm water on their properties and disable their downspouts. A further project had a team working on research to develop an app for formerly incarcerated individuals seeking social services.

South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg greets BCe2 interns at the annual kick-off picnic.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CENTER FOR CIVIC INNOVATION

BCe2's increasing focus outside the Southeast neighborhood resulted in the creation last year of a pilot program called the Western Educational Ecosystem (We2), where teams initiate projects in the western section of the city. For 2019, We2 projects included interns working on a computer chip to create a digitized neighborhood oral history archive, acquiring vacant lots for the purpose of transforming them into sustainable nurseries, and lending assistance to ongoing community development efforts in two neighborhoods.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Many area residents who have interacted with BCe2 are deeply impressed by its mission and work. Among those admirers is one nationally prominent South Bend native: the city's mayor, 2020 US presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg.

"One of the most compelling things is that it breaks the mold of a traditional college-related service project," Buttigieg says. "While there have been plenty of programs over the years that took students from Notre Dame and brought them into downtown or other parts of the city to do something, this is the first one I've seen that brought together every layer of the community."

Like other colleges, Notre Dame has long faced criticism by local residents of not caring about the larger town it calls home. The mayor, however, feels that BCe2 has made strides bridging philosophical divides between the city and the school.

"I think the most important thing it did was that it helped people on the university side look at the community as more than a service project," Buttigieg says. "The people they got to know and work with in the community really challenged them."

BCe2 also has dealt with questions from residents who are skeptical of their intentions. Taylor said that he initially heard from many of his neighbors who believed BCe2 was nothing more than a means to gentrify the largely African American Southeast neighborhood, and price homeowners out of the area.

"These kids walked into the inner city and met challenges," says Taylor of local residents' initial resistance. He has since become a BCe2 mentor as well as helping to establish 466 Works, a neighborhood community development corporation that has worked with BCe2 interns.

It didn't take long for Taylor to be impressed by BCe2's interns. Eventually, other residents felt the same. "Those kids never backed down to do the work they were called to do," Taylor says. "And when the people that doubted them got around them, they discovered the students were not there to look down on the neighborhood but were there to make a difference."

Taylor and others acknowledge more work remains in bridging the town-and-gown divide, an effort BCe2 cannot fix on its own. They also realize the importance of consistent funding to continue to work toward the program's objectives.

"We've been successful with grants," says Gilot, who is now the assistant director of community engagement for the Center of Civic Innovation, an initiative at Notre Dame's College of Engineering that launched this year to build upon the work of BCe2. "But people will give you money to prove a concept, but then not give you money every year to keep it going."

Another challenge is that most of BCe2's activity occurs during the time period of the internship, before students resume their regular academic obligations in the fall. Some community partners and interns who are still in town will continue to work on a number of uncompleted projects through the new academic year, though not to the same capacity as during the summer.

BCe2, which launched a pilot program this summer in nearby Elkhart, Indiana, plans to replicate its work in other towns. It also would like to maintain the momentum of its summer projects year-round.

"In the same way we're building vibrancy in the neighborhoods, you need that vibrancy in the summer to continue in the academic year for a variety of reasons," says Danielle Wood, an associate director of research at the Center for Civic Innovation.

For now, Bowman Creek's small wins include stabilizing a section of the creek with native plants to help prevent soil erosion and the placement of concrete crosses to keep banks intact during floods. Their efforts are also allowing the creek's crawfish population to thrive, making the area a hospitable recreational spot after years of neglect.

And throughout the Southeast, BCe2 has inspired the efforts of neighborhood organizations like 466 Works, which is currently working with city officials to promote financial investment in the area.

"I'm always attracted to projects like this where working on science and engineering has a direct impact on the society," says Ardekani, who in 2014 left Notre Dame for Purdue University, where she is currently an associate professor of mechanical engineering. "I learned that it was also important for my students."

And if you ask the interns about the work they have done with BCe2, more likely than not they will say that the results are and will be bigger than them.

"I would hesitate to say that there's something special about us," says Cavanaugh. "I think there's something special about South Bend."

CASE STUDY
AN INSIDE LOOK AT ONE ORGANIZATION

Can Harambe Transform Africa?

The **Harambe Entrepreneur Alliance** believes that business, rather than aid, is the key to eradicating poverty on the continent. But are good intentions based on a shared identity enough to unlock Africa's potential?

BY ABIGAIL HIGGINS

Kwami Williams intended to become a rocket scientist, not a social entrepreneur in West Africa.

But one school trip to Ghana in 2011 upended this plan. The aerospace engineering major at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), who even landed a coveted internship with NASA, was inspired to move to his parents' homeland to help poor farmers in the country's North.

His mother, who at the time was working two jobs to put herself through nursing school, sobbed uncontrollably when he told her.

"You've made it, this is everything we've sacrificed for, and you want to let it all go to move back to Ghana and work with farmers!" he remembers her saying through tears. "You don't even know anything about farming!"

"Rural poverty was a bigger monster than I had ever realized," Williams says. "Development statistics can be ignored when they are numbers. But when they become the people you spend time with, and eat with, and share life with, they become harder to ignore."

During his trip, he saw poverty everywhere—in orphanages, in hospitals, and in his own meetings with local polytechnic college students, most of whom subsisted on a single meal per day. But the farmers stayed on his mind the most. Despite being responsible for more than half of Ghana's GDP, most of them, who live and work in what's known as the breadbasket of the country, could barely feed their families.

In addition to maize and potatoes, many of the farmers were cultivating a plant Williams had never heard of: the feather-leafed Moringa tree. He learned that aid organizations had told the farmers to plant them because they had staggering nutritional properties—more vitamin C than oranges, more vitamin A than carrots, more calcium than milk, more iron than spinach, and more protein than yogurt. But the funding dried up and the aid organizations abandoned the project, leaving the farmers unable to process the leaves or find buyers.

This story gave Williams the seed of an idea—but pursuing it would mean giving up a lot. "If aerospace engineers can help put a man on the moon, then there has to be something more I can do to put food on the table for the families that I got to meet and fall in love with," he recalls thinking at the time.

The seed began to bloom when, in 2013, Williams cofounded MoringaConnect with Harvard Univesity-trained economist Emily Cunningham, whom he met through MIT's D-Lab, a design-thinking center for global poverty research. MoringaConnect is a company that connects Moringa farmers—many from the region he first visited—to a global market for their Moringa-based products. The company has two branches: Minga Foods, which turns the leaves into nutritionally dense powder for tea and energy bars, and True Moringa, which uses cold-pressed Moringa oil from the seeds to create high-end, all-natural beauty products. It also sells Moringa oil and powder in bulk for companies to make their own products.

Lower left: MoringaConnect farmer Akosua Krah stands underneath her Moringa tree. Below: MoringaConnect cofounder Kwami Williams.

In 2014, Williams committed fully to his new life and Ghanaian roots by joining the Harambe Entrepreneur Alliance, a network of 304 entrepreneurs from 34 African countries (with significant representation from Nigeria, South Africa, and Kenya) who are determined to lift Africa out of poverty through business for good.

MORE THAN A NETWORK

The gambit has paid off for Williams. Natural-health-and-beauty wholesaler Pharmaca stocks True Moringa, and Whole Foods stores in New England carry its products. MoringaConnect's next step is to expand sales across Africa. Investors have taken notice, and the company has raised more than $4 million. But profit, he believes, is only half the battle.

"When we started out, I actually didn't know the phrase 'social enterprise' or 'social venture.' We just did what felt right—making sure farmers had a part in designing the solution that would impact their lives and their families," Williams says of his company's dual agenda. "I think doing good while doing business have been pretty aligned for us from the beginning."

Williams changed the trajectory of his life because he wanted to help farmers. He chose to make it a business because it seemed like a more effective way to help Ghanaians than the aid industry. MoringaConnect works with more than 5,000 farmers across northern Ghana, guaranteeing them a market and a fair price for their product and also providing services like financial literacy to help them save and invest the money they make from Moringa.

Williams didn't know it when he launched MoringaConnect, but he was part of a trend sweeping the continent, one that continues today. Thousands of young African entrepreneurs are making a different choice than their parents did: Instead of fleeing the continent's problems for greener, Western pastures, they are returning (or never leaving) to try to solve these problems—and many of them are hoping to make a buck in the process.

The Harambe Entrepreneur Alliance is trying to amplify this trend by boosting the ideas and ventures of some of the continent's most talented young people, some of them born and raised in Africa and others who are repatriates, like Williams. Each Harambean, as they are called, is committed to eschewing the opportunities of the West in exchange for a shot at making a difference on the continent, using business as their vehicle.

The vision for Harambe began in 2007 with Okendo Lewis-Gayle, an Italian-Costa Rican student at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), who created the alliance as an informal network of entrepreneurs who shared a common set of values: servant leadership, deliberate audacity, and enduring optimism. These values mean each individual is committed to work that helps people, is unafraid to pursue goals others deem unrealistic, and remains optimistic in the face of the daunting challenges of doing business in African countries.

Harambe has grown in prestige and formality. Every two years, the alliance hosts the Harambe Vatican Forum in Rome, where members receive trainings on fundraising, networking, and team building from business leaders and social entrepreneurs—some of whom are Harambeans themselves. The organization also helps connect entrepreneurs to venture capitalists and angel investors who can help them to scale their business. The organization now receives thousands of applications per year from entrepreneurs eager to join the network.

But, as any Harambean will tell you, having access to a robust network is only one aspect of the alliance. Above all, Harambe, and being a Harambean, is an ethos, crystalized in the Harambe Declaration: "We publish and declare our intention to work together as one to unleash the potential of our people and fulfill the dream of our generation." Written by Lewis-Gayle, it continues, "We will check our road and the nature of our battle, yet in the end, the Africa our generation desires can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it is ours."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MORINGACONNECT AND HARAMBE

ABIGAIL HIGGINS is a journalist in Washington, DC, who reports on global health, international development, and human rights in the United States and sub-Saharan Africa.

The declaration is signed by every new Harambean admitted each year in a ceremony at the Bretton Woods Symposium, held at the Mount Washington Hotel in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire—the same place where, in 1944, 44 allied nations assembled at the Bretton Woods Conference and created The World Bank and The International Monetary Fund.

"Becoming a Harambean is not about you and your business, and if that is what is driving you, this is not the organization for you. It doesn't matter how successful your venture is—this isn't for you," says Michele Rivard, former director of special initiatives at the United States African Development Foundation and current fellow at Village Capital, who has mentored several Harambeans over the years. "This is about community, it's about generosity of spirit, it's about helping if someone calls you, asking for help."

The organization's name, a Swahili word often translated as "let's pull together," reflects this ethos. In Kenya, where it is the national motto, it's used as a rallying cry at community fundraisers where everyone chips in to cover otherwise insurmountable bills—whether funeral costs, medical expenses, or tuition for a kid from the village who's snagged a spot at an elite university.

The network of Harambeans paints an impressive picture of a continent on the rise. Collectively, Harambeans are responsible for creating more than 3,000 jobs, raising more than $400 million in capital, and running companies that are together valued at more than $1 billion. The alliance has received widespread media attention, from *The Economist* to *Vanity Fair* to *The New York Times*. The network has also caught the attention—and dollars—of Silicon Valley powerhouses such as Y Combinator and the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.

The 2019 class of 20 hails from nine African countries, with degrees from educational institutions around the world, from the University of Nairobi to Yale University. Their entrepreneurial ventures are vast, reaching across industries—including a company that sells locally produced toilets for low-income Ghanaians, an online platform for selling ethically sourced products by African designers, and a loan program that helps Nigerian farmers acquire agricultural assets. One company even makes high-end products for men's beard care. What unifies the ventures is their founders' core belief that if Harambeans pull together, their businesses will transform Africa.

HISTORICAL CHALLENGES, FALSE PROMISES

For Harambeans, business is not only a new path forward but a viable solution for a long-troubled continent. Poverty in Africa has stymied aid workers and development economists for decades. The diverse continent is made up of 54 countries, somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 languages, and a staggering landmass larger than China, India, the United States, and most of Europe combined. It is bound together by the legacy of European colonization that decimated its land and people, rendering it the poorest region in the world. Most African countries, in fact, were not liberated until the 1960s. While poverty in Africa is starting to fall for the first time since 2015, some 88 percent of the world's poorest are still expected to live on the continent by 2030.

Africa faces interlocking systemic challenges. In total, the continent loses more than $50 billion in illicit financial flows annually (tax evasion and the corrupt practices of multinational corporations being the primary culprits); poor infrastructure means that sub-Saharan Africa has half as much electricity access as the rest of the world; scientists expected the continent to experience the effects of climate change first and most dramatically; and it has more than three times as many youth who enter the job market as jobs created each year.

"If, 20 or 30 years from now, the dream of our generation is not fulfilled and the Africa that we love is not realized," Lewis-Gayle says, "those who have signed this declaration will have no one but ourselves to blame. The buck stops here."

Lewis-Gayle is undaunted because he knows that, despite these challenges, business interest in the continent is growing. According to The Brookings Institution, Africa has more than 400 businesses with annual revenues exceeding $1 billion, and these organizations are

Harambe founder Okendo Lewis-Gayle speaks to the new class of Harambeans at the 2019 Bretton Woods Symposium.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HARAMBE

faster growing and more profitable than their counterparts around the world. On top of that, 6 of the 10 fastest-growing economies in the world are in Africa, and 5 of the 10 most improved countries for business regulation on The World Bank's 2019 Doing Business index report are in Africa.

Whether that business interest will create social good, however, is another question. Whether the issue is environmental degradation, unequal access to health care, or poor technological infrastructure, the private sector is responsible for many of the problems these entrepreneurs are seeking to solve. Nestlé and Hershey continue to use child labor along the Ivory Coast, Heineken supported the Burundian government, which is likely responsible for war crimes, and Shell Oil Company recently reached a $1.3 billion settlement for using bribery to illegally explore for oil in Nigeria.

MYTH-MAKING LEADERSHIP

Born in Costa Rica, Lewis-Gayle moved to Italy as a child and was raised in Rome, "in the shadow of the Colosseum," as he likes to say, which inspired his early love of the classics. In conversation, he's quick to point out that he studied Aristotle and Plato in the original Greek.

He compares the 304 Harambeans to the 300 Spartans who nearly defeated the vast Persian army at the Battle of Thermopylae.

In his youth, Lewis-Gayle's knowledge of Africa was sparse, although he was aware that his family's origins in Costa Rica were the result of transatlantic slave trade more than 400 years ago, when 25 to 30 million Africans were abducted from their homes and enslaved around the world. This knowledge fueled his conviction that it was black people's "collective opportunity and responsibility to do something" about Africa's problems.

Lewis-Gayle's ambition took him to the United States for college. At SNHU, he worked as a staff writer at the college newspaper and quickly emerged as a leader on campus. A single issue of the newspaper from February 2006 encapsulates Lewis-Gayle's ambition and frenetic drive toward social change. One article mentions a talk he gave to local high school students on poverty and social activism, as part of a day of service. Another details campus visits he helped organize as part of a Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Action, including those by Rosa Parks' cousin Deborah Redfern and Martin Luther King III. In an op-ed, Lewis-Gayle announces his intention to run for student body president—an election he went on to win, becoming the first black student president at a largely white school. Also in the Opinion section, Lewis-Gayle details the nonstop, 24-hour drive to New Orleans he made with two other students to patch roofs, staff soup kitchens, and strip homes of moldy carpeting in the months following Hurricane Katrina.

In the midst of all this, the idea of Harambe was born when Lewis-Gayle and Prince Soko, a Zimbabwean and one of the few other black students, organized a fundraiser to send computers to Soko's mother's home village to connect his community with the world.

"I really started learning about Africa and its challenges and opportunities," Lewis-Gayle recalls. "The talent is there and the opportunities are there; all they needed was the change and the right leadership."

He and Soko started Harambe as an informal network of African students in 2007. One year later, it had 60 members from the country's top universities.

At his graduation in 2007, Lewis-Gayle shared the commencement stage with then US senator Barack Obama, who had just launched his historic presidential campaign.

"Senator, I, too, was told that the campus of SNHU may just not be ready to elect a president with a funny name like Okendo and the tinge of the skin like my own. Don't let them stop you," Lewis-Gayle said to Obama onstage.

In return, Obama told the crowd that he was relieved that Lewis-Gayle wasn't running for president—yet.

SCRUTINIZING FOREIGN AID

Lewis-Gayle's pivot toward Africa occurred at the same time a sea change was happening in ideas about foreign aid to the continent. Economist William Russell Easterly's 2007 book, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*, published the same year that Harambe was created, encapsulated the critique of foreign aid most notably.

The book—named after Rudyard Kipling's poem that encouraged America's colonization of the Philippines as a civilizing mission—is a comprehensive attack on a patronizing and ineffectual aid industry. The central question is how could an aid industry responsible for $2.3 trillion in spending still have failed to save the lives of nearly one million African children who died of malaria each year? A mosquito net treated with insecticide, after all, costs less than $5, and, barring that, $2.50 worth of medicine can treat the disease.

Easterly railed against the common exhortation—epitomized by the 1985 Live Aid concert, where musicians ranging from U2 to Joan Baez performed and raised more than $125 million for famine in Ethiopia—that Western charity could eradicate poverty in Africa. Too often, however, money was pumped into ambitious, large-scale projects in Africa before their efficacy was rigorously tested. And that was Easterly's point: Africa didn't need more aid—it needed more *effective* aid.

Williams' studies of aid's failures at MIT's D-Lab changed the way he thought about doing good—namely, he realized that

German-Ghanaian Yasmin Kumi joined the Alliance in 2016.

outsider-determined, top-down solutions weren't the best way to solve Africa's problems. He cites PlayPumps International, an organization that built merry-go-rounds in rural villages that pumped clean water when children played on them, as an example. *The Guardian* and *PBS Frontline* revealed what seemed like a community-conscience intervention—netting $16.4 million from diverse foreign actors such as the US government, the Clinton Foundation, and Jay-Z, who held a benefit concert for PlayPumps—as a hasty venture compromised by oversights and setbacks. Among them were the fact that thousands of pumps lay in disrepair, and that children would have to "play" on the merry-go-rounds for a continuous 27 hours to produce enough water. (In some cases, the women in the villages were tasked with toiling on them for hours to squeeze out water for their families.) After the media's reports, the funders ended the program.

For Williams, the pitfalls of PlayPumps were similar to those of the aid organizations that encouraged farmers to plant Moringa trees and then pulled out when funding ran dry.

"People create technologies that are supposed to save the world, and then they ship those technologies to a place in need, only to find that they are not really what the people themselves want, and that the people actually know a lot more about how to solve their problems than those of us in the Western world," Williams observes.

In his first attempt to help the farmers after college, Williams used his engineering background to build a machine to extract valuable oil from Moringa seeds. When he delivered the machine to Ghanaian farmers, they stared at him blankly. Without a guaranteed buyer, they couldn't waste precious time pressing seeds, and without a connection to global markets, they couldn't incur the financial risk.

For many young people trying to fix Africa's problems they associate with aid, their solution has been a surprising pivot to the private sector. "I think that for anyone who is an idealist, and certainly I'm an idealist, the aid sector seems like the right place to be," German-Ghanaian Yasmin Kumi (Harambe '16) notes. Kumi began her career as an intern at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation but quickly found herself frustrated with the aid sector's inefficiencies. Not only was it staffed predominantly by Americans and Europeans who drew large, often untaxed salaries with generous benefits, but it also didn't place enough emphasis on transferring the staffers' skills to local Ghanaians. She then took a job with international consulting firm McKinsey & Company, but after a couple of years she grew tired of helping large, multinational companies steamroll African companies, so she created her own African consultancy for local businesses.

Young African entrepreneurs aren't the only ones who are moving away from aid and toward the private sector. The money that flows into poor countries from abroad is increasingly for business investments, rather than charity. Researchers at the Center for Global Development recently found that in low-income countries (including 19 in Africa), aid as a share of GDP has declined significantly, while the share of private capital flows has increased. In many African countries, the two now provide about equal amounts of finance.

INVESTING IN AFRICANS

Harambe is now starting to realize its ambitions, thanks to an increasing number of partnerships with American foundations.

Its early years were ad hoc. Harambeans had to pay their own way to the annual conference (something Lewis-Gayle says he still does to reward self-starters), and Lewis-Gayle persuaded the Mount Washington Hotel to cut them a deal and string together grants of a couple thousand dollars from various MBA programs for conference costs.

His relentless networking landed initial opportunities, including summer 2012 grants that GlaxoSmithKline and Pfizer gave to Harambeans studying health care, and grants for Harambeans to do a fully funded master of international business or master of arts in law and diplomacy at Tuft University's Fletcher School and a master of business administration at Yale University. So far, two Harambeans have received Yale scholarships and three have received Tufts scholarships.

Opportunities like these made the alliance increasingly attractive to entrepreneurs, and, paired with Lewis-Gayle's popularity, made Harambe an advantageous organization for foundations and corporations by association.

"He is so compelling and charismatic," says Charu Adesnik, the deputy director of the CISCO Foundation, the technology company's corporate social responsibility arm, which became Harambe's first formal partner in 2017 with a $5 million grant. "He has a great idea, but he's also a great storyteller—and he has a great story to tell, and a lot of the success to date is attributable to him."

It's a common sentiment.

"I vividly remember the first time I met Okendo, because everyone remembers the first time they meet Okendo—he's just a force of nature," says Jeremy Johnson, the CEO of Andela, a company that identifies and trains software developers in Africa and matches them with global companies. "I couldn't tell at first whether he was

Iyinoluwa Aboyeji, admitted to the Harambe Entrepreneur Alliance in 2010, attends a recent Bretton Woods Symposium.

an entrepreneur or a preacher, and I soon came to learn that the answer does not have to be either/or," Johnson adds.

Lewis-Gayle's knack for identifying talent before other people, however, was what cemented one of the organization's most important partnerships.

Iyinoluwa Aboyeji applied to Harambe in 2010 with a venture he called Bookneto.com, an online educational platform that Lewis-Gayle describes as "a rickety idea that didn't work." Lewis-Gayle, however, believes in investing in people—not their business ideas. Business on the continent is difficult, and he wants to make sure that at the "first hurdle, [entrepreneurs] won't crumble." He believes that people's ability to execute their idea matters more than the idea itself, especially when they are in the early stages of a business, as most Harambeans are. After becoming a Harambean, Aboyeji founded Flutterwave, which helps African companies make and receive international payments, before he cofounded Andela with Johnson.

Andela's vice president of global operations is another Nigerian entrepreneur, Seni Sulyman, who became a Harambean in 2015. The company's recent $100 million Series D funding round constitutes a significant portion of the total capital Harambean-founded companies have raised.

Adesnik says Cisco is helping Harambe transform from a "scrappy startup nonprofit to a grown-up and professionalized organization." This development includes financially supporting the growth of a management team, a board, and fundraising structures.

Beyond Lewis-Gayle's charisma, social entrepreneurship is a desirable investment for Cisco, which wants to make sure its dollars positively impact as many people's lives as possible. Investing in entrepreneurs, who theoretically require only startup capital, is a more attractive prospect than constantly shelling out cash to charity.

"What was really appealing to us was this ecosystem that has a multiplying and transformative effect, not just for each Harambean but for their businesses, for the people they employ, for their communities, and for their countries," Adesnik explains.

Cisco's grant to Harambe is part of the company's goal to improve the lives of one billion people by 2025, so it will measure the success of its financial support primarily by whether Harambean businesses improve social indicators—like health, gender equity, and hunger.

A major part of the $2 million Cisco grant will be allocated for the Harambe Prosperity Fund, which launched in 2019. Lewis-Gayle intends to disburse $100,000 investments to 20 Harambeans who have already raised at least $1 million.

The first entrepreneur, Nigerian Ikenna Nzewi (Harambe '17), cofounded Releaf, an online marketplace that helps connect agribusinesses to customers and that has participated in Y Combinator, an American seed accelerator for early-stage startups. The other is Adetayo Bamiduro (Harambe '15), who founded MAX.ng, a Nigerian ride-hailing service known as the "Uber for motorcycles," and announced that his company raised $7 million in funding last summer.

The IDP Foundation, a private nonprofit foundation that focuses on global issues through both grants and investments, got involved soon after Cisco. Its goal is to catalyze the growth of Harambe businesses through increased partnerships, knowledge, and funding. The foundation signed a two-year agreement with Harambe in 2017 to give $100,000 each year to three Harambeans to grow their businesses, as well as to create an entrepreneurs' institute for Ghanaian junior- and high school students taught by Harambeans. It also committed $100,000 to start the Global Access Program (GAP) to support the travel of Harambeans who have already raised at least half a million dollars to attend conferences, workshops, and meetings with potential funders—a program the IDP Foundation renewed for another year. Williams, for example, says he was able to attend meetings through his GAP fellowship, and that those led to new investments in MoringaConnect.

IDP's CPO, Allison Rohner Lawshe, says that Harambe is helpful for organizations that don't have the capacity to ensure that they are making a good investment. "We have a small team, so due diligence, digging deep and understanding, or finding an entrepreneur in Ghana working in technology" are beyond IDP's current bandwidth, she explains. Harambe provides a credible, accessible network, and Lewis-Gayle's ability to attract top talent makes investors confident their money will be well spent.

Another goal of IDP is to inspire other donors to get involved with Harambe. That aim came to fruition this year when the Oppenheimer Family Foundation became Harambe's latest major donor with a multimillion-dollar commitment over the next three years. Harambe will use the money to disburse the Knowledge Transfer Initiative Fellowship, which, like the IDP fellowship, will give select Harambeans funding for travel, as well as a $5,000 stipend.

Lewis-Gayle believes this partnership will act as a pipeline for future Oppenheimer investments. While the businesses receiving the grants are still getting off the ground, if they continue to show promise, Oppenheimer might invest in them directly in the future, with the hope of a financial return.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HARAMBE

Seni Sulyman, a Nigerian entrepreneur, joined Harambe in 2015. He serves as Andela's vice president of global operations.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HARAMBE

DOING (GOOD) BUSINESS

Social entrepreneurship is a young field everywhere, but in Africa it's particularly nascent.

"Most entrepreneurship is still in its infancy across Africa," Lewis-Gayle explains. "The best practices are not yet on the books. They reside mostly in the people who are doing them, and here at the alliance, we have access to those people."

He regards the more successful and established Harambeans as resources to grow the network's reach and impact. Sulyman and Aboyeji, for example, have taught classes at the annual symposium and have mentored Harambeans.

Mentorship is fundamental to the "social" element of social entrepreneurship. "If private-sector companies are going to drive long-term economic development, they need essentially two things to do that rapidly and effectively: They need access to capital, and they need access to the skills and network to learn how to build private-sector companies," Johnson says.

These two factors mirror a tension inherent in social entrepreneurship, between ethical action for social good and turning a profit. It is a tension expressed in the varying opinions of Harambeans themselves. Sulyman and Aboyeji, for instance, hold a different perspective about whether entrepreneurs should focus on maximizing profit than Williams, who runs MoringaConnect first as a vehicle to get more meals on Ghanaian farmers' tables.

"Fairly early on, I didn't really know what entrepreneurship was, but I realized that a lot of the organizations that were fundamentally changing the world were private-sector companies," Sulyman says. "Some of the best ideas—some of the game-changing products, solutions, and services that could advance human potential or the social and economic conditions in multiple countries—were created by individuals seeking profit."

Sulyman began his career at Hewlett-Packard, then moved back to Nigeria to head a startup before joining Andela, where much of his view on entrepreneurship was born. He believes that he has a slightly different opinion on the subject than a lot of people—and perhaps other Harambeans—which is that given the levels of poverty in Africa, anyone building a business will inevitably improve poor people's lives.

"I think by default you're creating public good: You're employing people, you're creating economic mobility for those people, you're making life easier for your customers, whether they're businesses or individuals," he asserts.

In fact, Sulyman finds patronizing the relentless attention on whether or not African entrepreneurs are "doing good." "Even in business school, you don't find a lot of people who think about doing business in Africa as a purely commercial venture," he explains. "We've overindexed on that, to the point where the first question people ask you is what the social good [of a business] is, as opposed to what value you are creating for the world, or for the countries you're operating in, or for the customers you're serving."

South African Nneile Nkholise (Harambe '18) agrees: "We try to drive ourselves so far toward social good that we end up building these *kumbaya* models," she says.

Nkholise joined Harambe with the dream of building a business that helped low-income survivors of breast cancer get breast prosthetics after a mastectomy. She changed her plan, however, when she realized she was destined to forever operate at a loss because her niche market couldn't afford the prosthetics. It's a reality that can be tough to square for a lot of social entrepreneurs: Often, social good is inherently about helping people who do not have the money to pay for the product. Unless they can cut costs and scale rapidly to a mass market, running a profitable business can be elusive.

Now, Nkholise owns a business that builds products to help professional athletes predict injury risk. She plans to add crowdfunding campaigns for low-income athletes to her business but admits they aren't the focus. "The very fact that we identified a problem in society and are addressing it is in itself a social good," she says.

Even companies with a large market can struggle. In September 2019, Andela ended its developer training programs in Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda—250 developers lost their jobs immediately, and another 170 are at risk of layoffs. Andela is retaining only the Rwanda program because the government is subsidizing it. The culprit is a saturated American job market for junior engineers, causing Andela to focus on more senior engineering positions—unattainable to the thousands of young Africans entering the workforce every year.

Aboyeji is no longer at Andela. He recently stepped down from the company and is spending time with his family in California's Napa Valley and thinking about what the future of the sector should look like. As one of African entrepreneurship's brightest stars, he's thinking about how he can steer it forward.

"A lot of people pretend there's a big gap, as if making money and doing good in Africa are directly at odds with each other," he says. "I find that dichotomy false and manufactured."

Aboyeji is focused on creating an enabling environment for business on the continent, pushing for free trade in Africa and battling with the governments he sees as stifling innovation. One of his sources of inspiration for the change he envisions is David Koch, the recently deceased conservative billionaire who poured millions into right-wing causes, largely through the political advocacy group Americans for Prosperity. Like Koch, Aboyeji believes prosperity through free enterprise is the bedrock of society.

THE PROSPERITY PARADOX

The idea that creating markets that target people who will pay for a product is a better way to solve poverty than traditional aid is the "road map" for Harambe. Rather than continuing to focus on aid interventions to help the poor, the organization believes that innovation and entrepreneurship are what will create an enduring path out of poverty. This is the central argument of *The Prosperity Paradox: How Innovation Can Lift Nations Out of Poverty*, written by Efosa Ojomo (Harambe '17) and Harvard Business School professors Clayton Christensen and Karen Dillon.

"It may sound counterintuitive," the coauthors write, but "enduring prosperity for many countries will not come from fixing poverty. It will come from investing in innovations that create new markets within these countries."

It's a perspective Ojomo reached after the failure of his own aid project, which he started after hearing stories about poverty in his home country, following eight years of living in the United States.

"I did what I think most or many people do when their heartstrings get tugged by stories of poverty and dying kids: I started an NGO."

Ojomo raised $10,000 and started building wells in Nigeria—most of which soon broke. His story isn't unusual. By some estimates, one-third of rural water supply projects in Africa are not working within a few years, representing a lost investment of more than $1.2 billion.

He turned to microloans and then to funding primary-school education, but he wasn't satisfied with how much money he poured in without getting a return.

"We had to keep begging people for funds, and I was throwing all of it into a system that wasn't regenerative in any way, and that's what led me to business school."

Harvard Business School is where Ojomo met Christensen. The two began studying examples of what they call "market-based innovations" that created long-term growth. One example the book cites is Mo Ibrahim, who was the technical director for British Telecom when he decided to create a mobile telecommunications company for Africa in the late 1990s. When Ibrahim announced his plan to his colleagues, they laughed him out of the room. "Everybody said Africa is a basket case," he told the authors; they claimed "it's a dangerous place, it's full of dictators, it's full of crazy people … who are all corrupt."

But, the coauthors write, "instead of seeing just poverty, he saw opportunity." With very few employees and little financial backing, Ibrahim set about filling in infrastructure gaps himself—building his own roads, using helicopters, and sometimes providing his own power. Six years later, Celtel was operating in thirteen countries and had 5.2 million customers. The authors argue that it was the vanguard for what is now a robust mobile telecommunications industry, today estimated to be worth $214 billion.

The idea that an entrepreneur can make a lot of money by inventing a new product, or a new way of distributing a product, and thereby create jobs and infrastructure and improve people's daily lives is the thesis behind what Lewis-Gayle believes: Harambeans aren't just building companies, they're building nations.

THE HARAMBEAN HORIZON

The ability to spot talent is what Lewis-Gayle believes is Harambe's "secret sauce." He sees its future as a kind of African Y Combinator, paired with a three-month grooming process to help entrepreneurs hone their ideas. While the funding helps, it's the Y Combinator stamp of approval that really makes a difference, by signaling to other investors that an entrepreneur is worth their attention—and money. For investors eager to get involved in an unpredictable and often opaque African startup scene, the Harambe brand is their guiding light.

Signs indicate that Harambean businesses could attract the kind of investments that would make them internationally competitive and put African startups on the map. Breakthrough Energy Coalition, a $1 billion-plus clean-energy fund with private investors like Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, and Mark Zuckerberg, as well as capital from global corporations, has invested in MAX.ng and sent representatives to the most recent Vatican forum.

Next year, Harambe will host its first Global Summit in South Africa. It will be the alliance's first major event held on the continent, and it will be open to African entrepreneurs, philanthropists, and investors, in the hope that Harambe can continue to strengthen Africa's entrepreneurship ecosystem.

But for other investors to get on board and for Harambe to become the leader in African entrepreneurship, the pressure is on Harambean businesses—particularly its Prosperity Fund recipients MAX.ng and Releaf—to start turning a significant profit.

"The question is, can we take Harambe from cute to relevant?" Lewis-Gayle asks.

Like Harambe itself, many Harambean ventures are upstarts with a charming story and a charismatic founder, with varying degrees of early success under their belt. Lewis-Gayle sees this moment as a turning point for the alliance, "the official end of the beginning."

Now, these ventures will have to prove whether they're able to compete with billion-dollar companies. The Global Summit will also be a testing ground for whether socially minded startups can make serious cash while still having a positive social impact on a very poor continent. On an international business stage, where relevance is measured in valuation and social impact is considered a bonus, it's likely to be a Herculean task.

But if it is possible, then Harambeans will be the ones to do it.

The US marriage equality and youth antismoking campaigns transformed public attitudes by connecting their causes to the personal aspirations of their audiences. Other social change movements can follow their successful model by applying a six-step framework detailed here.

Aspirational Communication

BY DOUG HATTAWAY

Illustration by Adam McCauley

Two women stand in a conference room in a market research center in a suburban office park outside Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The room contains only two chairs and a small table. One woman, psychologist Mitzi Desselles, is walking the other woman through the "dangerous edge" exercise. It's 2005.

Desselles positions the woman at one side of the room on a spot representing the status quo. Communications researchers and strategists watch from behind a two-way mirror.

"This is where you feel comfortable," Desselles says. Then she points all the way across the room: "Over there is gay marriage."

Desselles gently leads the woman a few steps forward, to a spot representing laws that protect LGBTQ people from job discrimination. The woman says she is comfortable there. They walk a few more steps and stop again. "This is civil unions," Desselles says, which confer legal rights and responsibilities to couples without the social status of marriage. The woman is also comfortable there.

About three-quarters of the way across the room, they stop on the spot Desselles calls "gay marriage." The woman looks down, as if peering over a dangerous cliff. Desselles asks why she feels anxious about the idea of same-sex marriage. "I want to be fair, but this is foreign," the woman answers. "I was raised to think marriage is between a man and a woman." Her conflicted response, echoed by dozens of other men and women who participate in the exercise, provided insight into the challenges same-sex marriage advocates faced. As one well-known political pollster put it to me around that time, "You'll never see gay marriage in your lifetime."

"Merely having a majority is not enough," says Evan Wolfson, the founder of Freedom to Marry, about what is required to achieve large-scale, long-term attitudinal change on contentious issues. "You need a solid majority. You need a majority that can't be eroded or peeled away."

Wolfson's organization led the fight to secure same-sex marriage rights in the United States. To some political strategists, building that kind of majority wasn't just an uphill battle for the marriage equality movement—it seemed like an impossibility. When Gallup first polled on the issue in 1996—the year the Defense of Marriage Act, which defined the institution to be between a man and a woman, was signed into law—only 27 percent of the US public supported legal recognition of same-sex marriages. In the first decade of the 2000s, the marriage movement lost ballot referenda in 30 states.

Fast-forward to 2018. A Gallup survey on the topic reported that 67 percent of Americans supported marriage equality—which,


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thanks to the US Supreme Court's landmark 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling, is now the law of the land. Public support first reached 60 percent in Gallup's 2015 survey, and has not fallen below that level. A cause that some strategists thought was hopeless has become the new normal.

In building a winning majority, the marriage equality movement achieved what some social scientists call "durable attitude change"—a shift in attitudes that persists over time and resists counterattack.[1] This effort required millions of people to change their minds on a deeply personal issue, despite a long history of invisibility and vilification of LGBTQ people. It also required beating back a relentless campaign to maintain the status quo by powerful politicians, including former president George W. Bush, and deep-pocketed groups such as the National Organization for Marriage.

In this article, I assess that extraordinary feat through the lens of Aspirational Communication, an approach that seeks to motivate and mobilize people to support a cause by connecting it to the audience's aspirations for their own lives. I specifically suggest a six-step framework based on the approach that can help social movements to drive durable attitude change. To broaden the discussion, I demonstrate how the framework also applies to another campaign, one that changed attitudes and behaviors on a very different but equally difficult issue: youth smoking.

CULTIVATING NEW IDENTITIES

In 2000, 23 percent of American teenagers reported smoking cigarettes. A highly successful and much-celebrated campaign by the Truth Initiative, a nonprofit public health organization, led the way in cutting teen cigarette smoking to 5 percent in 2019. Before it launched nationally in 2000, the initiative's pilot campaigns in Florida and Massachusetts achieved a dramatic decline in cigarette use among young people.[2]

Truth's communications strategy aimed to change young adults' attitudes toward cigarette smoking by promoting an "aspirational identity" to at-risk adolescents. We're highly motivated to take actions that help us live up to our image of the kind of people we truly want to be—our aspirational identity.[3] Truth harnessed this tendency by branding a tobacco-free lifestyle through words, images, and stories that made it seem cool to be a nonsmoker. Brands can help people express their aspirational identities by serving as symbols of the kind of person they are or aspire to be.[4]

The Truth team faced a difficult task. The teens in their at-risk audience were subject to powerful countervailing influences, such as peer pressure, glamorized images of smoking on TV and in movies, and billions of marketing dollars spent by tobacco companies. To lower smoking rates, Truth's aspirational brand strategy had to drive attitude change durable enough to resist tobacco industry marketing.

But by 2005, the Truth campaign had succeeded, according to a study published that year in the *Journal for Health Communication*. It found that the target audience's new attitudes toward cigarette smoking persisted over time. "Truth brand equity, once established, is not affected by exposure to industry countermarketing campaigns," the study's authors wrote. "The brand has staying power and remains effective in spite of potentially countervailing messages."[5]

The Truth campaign, like Freedom to Marry, drove a mass shift in attitudes by appealing to its target audience's aspirational identities.

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We can understand the effectiveness of the campaign in terms of the six-step framework of Aspirational Communication that I offer here.

STEP 1: FOCUS ON PEOPLE WHO ARE AMBIVALENT

When you survey the vast middle ground of public opinion on a contentious topic, you're likely to find a lot of people who are ambivalent. We often observe this state of mind among people who say they are "of two minds" or have "conflicting feelings." Because these inner conflicts make us feel uneasy, we try to resolve them to achieve peace of mind. People who feel torn about a contentious social issue may ultimately change their worldview to achieve inner peace—by making peace with the changing world around them.[6]

Building a solid, durable majority for marriage equality required persuading not only people who were undecided, but also people who said they *opposed* it. Among those opposed, Freedom to Marry focused on a particular category: people who favored civil unions but did not support legal recognition of same-sex marriages. Nationally, they represented about 15 percent of the population, according to Pew Research Center polling and a Freedom to Marry analysis.

These conflicted voters "wanted to be fair and supportive of LGBT people—yet they were not convinced that same-sex couples 'deserved' marriage," according to a Freedom to Marry report. Their positions suggested that these voters were perhaps ambivalent—and thus open to persuasion.

The Truth campaign also focused on ambivalent people. In the case of youth smoking, the target audience was young people "who had never smoked but who would not rule out trying a cigarette sometime in the next year or if a friend offered them one."[7] As with "conflicted" voters for the marriage equality campaign, Truth's target audience seemed to be of two minds when it came to smoking.

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND THEIR ANXIETIES

Anxiety often underlies the inner conflicts and public turmoil associated with contentious social issues. The American Psychiatric Association defines anxiety as an uncomfortable feeling in response to an anticipated threat—something that might happen in the future that makes you feel insecure.[8] In the brain, anxiety can disrupt attention, concentration, and memory, prompting people to shut down, rather than open up to new ideas.[9] When people feel anxious about a social change like marriage equality, you need to address their concerns up front.

Desselles unearthed a number of anxieties and doubts among people who felt ambivalent about marriage equality. For some, the issue caused alarm about the future of society, with same-sex marriage quickening a downward spiral into social chaos. President George W. Bush tapped into this anxiety in his 2004 announcement supporting a constitutional ban on gay marriage, calling it the only way to protect "the most fundamental institution of civilization."

Desselles' research showed that marriage equality triggered feelings of powerlessness, especially among men. Other participants

questioned whether same-sex relationships were genuine and felt as if the movement was out to subvert the institution of marriage by "redefining" it. Some feared that government would force religious institutions to perform same-sex weddings, in violation of their beliefs.

Such feelings revealed a daunting emotional terrain. To navigate it and address these anxieties, the marriage equality movement needed to find ways to help conflicted people feel comfortable with recognizing the rights and relationships of same-sex couples.

For the teen smoking campaign, Truth explored the emotional terrain of adolescence—a time of high anxiety for teens, many of whom worry about how their peers perceive them.[10] Social anxieties and peer pressure can feel more real and immediate to them than the abstract, future prospect of lung damage from smoking cigarettes.

"One consistent experience of adolescence is the constant feeling of being 'on stage' and that everyone and everything is centered on their appearance and actions," reports a guide for healthy adolescent development by the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University.[11] Teens anxious about fitting into a social group are susceptible to pressure from peers who see smoking as cool.

The Truth campaign understood teen anxiety about fitting in and being cool, and aimed to address the anxiety by making it cool *not* to smoke. The campaign team for Truth's pilot program in Florida turned to teens to figure out the best way to do that.

"We really relied on the teens involved in the campaign to help us stay in line with what was cool to them, rather than assuming what *we* thought was cool was what *they* thought was cool," says Carlea Bauman, who served as press secretary for the Florida campaign. "You could never say smoking isn't cool, and the campaign never did. That was hard for some adults who really wanted to say that smoking wasn't cool, but that wouldn't have been authentic at all."

We can relate to people who seem very different to us when we sense that they share hopes and values similar to our own.

STEP 3: CONNECT YOUR CAUSE TO THEIR AUTHENTIC ASPIRATIONS

Connecting an issue to people's aspirations—tapping into ideas and emotions that define and motivate them—opens an efficient route to addressing their anxieties. Your aspirations are your ideas about the kind of person you want to be, the life you want to live, and the world you want to live in. Aspirations are important to our personal identities and play a powerful role in driving our attitudes and behaviors.[12]

What's more, lifting up aspirations and values that people with different backgrounds and perspectives share can help them "see themselves" in a cause. We can relate to people who seem very different to us when we sense that they share hopes and values similar to our own. We recognize our common humanity.

Among all the popular fears and doubts surrounding the marriage issue, Desselles' psychological research found a shared aspiration that would ultimately serve as a fulcrum for changing hearts and minds. Some ambivalent voters nonetheless expressed respect for same-sex couples, saying they must "truly love each other" to stick together despite discrimination and social pressure. These loyal couples represented an aspiration many people held for marriage: a lifelong commitment. The ideal articulated in the traditional wedding vow, to stay together "for better or for worse," was shared both by voters the movement needed to persuade and by same-sex couples striving to marry.

This authentic, mutual aspiration around marriage would be critical to reducing anxiety and resolving inner conflicts in favor of equality. Cognitive studies show that we're most likely to like and trust people who are similar to us in some way.[13] Voters who understood that same-sex couples shared their own aspirations for marriage were less likely to feel threatened and more likely to understand that same-sex couples wanted to join the institution, rather than undermine it.

The Truth campaign tapped into the aspirations of adolescents through a brand strategy, much like a clothing company or other consumer brand might market its products. Psychological research suggests that young people will adopt aspirational identities that reflect their values and act in ways that reinforce that identity.[14] The Truth campaign worked directly with young people to design a brand focused on adolescent aspirations: to be independent from adults, express their individuality, and take more control over their lives.[15] In the words of one study of the campaign, Truth connected to this aspiration through a narrative focused on "socially irresponsible behavior of the tobacco industry and the ability of youth to rebel against the industry and take control of their lives, thereby establishing their independence."[16]

The campaign turned the notion of smoking as a symbol of youthful independence on its head. A survey of young people representing Truth's target audience found that the number who agreed that "not smoking is a way to express your independence" increased 22.2 percent over the first 10 months of the national campaign.[17] Connecting the cause to this aspiration was crucial to the campaign's success.

STEP 4: FRAME IT WITH WINNING WORDS

Once you have a clear read on the emotions and aspirations of your target audience, it is time to craft your message. The first words people hear about an issue influence every perception and judgment that follows, so framing a topic strategically at the outset is critical.[18] The words you use first (and most frequently) to talk about your topic should be what I call Winning Words—simple but meaningful words and phrases that define the issue in terms that win over the target audience.

The marriage equality movement built an initial base of support among roughly a quarter of the voting population by using

messages about civil rights and equal protection under the law. Defining the debate in those terms won over people who were already inclined to support minority groups fighting to be treated equally under the law—but their numbers were insufficient for a solid majority. Most people didn't see marriage through a legalistic lens. What's more, talking about the legal "benefits" of marriage made people think same-sex couples were marrying to get tax breaks and other perks. To build a winning majority, the movement needed Winning Words.

The insight about people's shared aspirations for marriage inspired the movement to reframe the cause as honoring "love and commitment." Evan Wolfson had used these words in his 1983 law school thesis, which outlined his vision for marriage equality. "Part of the reason I wanted to do marriage in the first place was claiming this shared, aspirational, value-laden vocabulary of love, commitment, family," he says.

Voters across the political spectrum could readily relate to "love and commitment." Love, intimacy, and belonging are universal desires. Beginning with "love," the message appeals to the heart. "Commitment" speaks to the responsibilities of marriage, and to the dedication, hard work, and loyalty involved in maintaining a long-term relationship. This simple message reflected personal values that many people recognize in themselves and aspire to live by.

"Love" and "commitment" aren't fancy words. They're familiar. The fact that people can easily understand, remember, and repeat them makes them more likely to be passed on by word of mouth—a highly persuasive form of communication. What's more, messages that are easy to recall are more likely to influence our thinking and actions.

This short-and-sweet message also delivered a powerful counterpunch to the opposition's message, which defined marriage exclusively as "a union between a man and a woman." Marriage equality supporters could now say simply, "Marriage is about love and commitment between two people." Two words helped take the moral high ground on the way to a winning majority. Who wants to stand in the way of love and commitment?

Similarly, the brand name of the teen tobacco initiative frames the cause with a simple but profound Winning Word that evokes the campaign's core narrative: Truth. This single word sets the campaign at odds with a tobacco industry that deceives young people about the harms of smoking and robs them of their independence by getting them addicted to cigarettes.[19] The campaign's name positions young people as autonomous, independent truth-tellers taking on corporate power and deceit.

The campaign's name was chosen by young people involved in the Florida pilot program. Carlea Bauman, press secretary for the Florida campaign, says the teens responsible "had a much more finely tuned radar about what would actually work." The initial idea for the brand name was Rage, but the teens rejected it. "The kids picked the name Truth because the campaign was exposing the truth of the tobacco industry," she says.

The language in the Truth campaign's call to action—"be the generation that ends smoking for good"—speaks to the aspirational identity of today's young people as changemakers. This choice of language is supported by extensive research that has found that being an agent of positive change in the world is a powerful aspirational identity for young Americans. The Millennial Impact Project, a study commissioned by the Case Foundation that surveyed more than 100,000 people born between 1980 and 2000, found that many aspire to remake society for the better. Millennials in particular see themselves and their peers as better catalysts for social change than government or other institutions. Two-thirds of the generation believed they could make a "moderate" or "big" impact on the world.[20]

"For millennials, taking consistent positive actions every day or week is a fundamental part of their identity," writes Case Foundation CEO Jean Case. "In changing how change is made, members of this generation no longer see themselves as 'activists' like their parents, but rather as 'everyday changemakers.'"[21]

STEP 5: SHARE STRATEGIC STORIES

Not only was the marriage equality movement's "love and commitment" frame a short, simple, and powerful message, but it also established the foundation for a new storytelling strategy.

Storytelling is the most powerful form of communication.[22] We learn our language, our values, and how the world works through stories. In order to comprehend a story, we must first *believe* what it tells us—a phenomenon the poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge called the "willing suspension of disbelief." Readers must put aside critical reasoning and judgments and accept the sometimes fantastical premises of fictional works in order to enjoy them. You do this when you're reading a novel, viewing a film, or listening to a skilled storyteller in person. If you're in a highly rational, critical, or judgmental frame of mind, you're less likely to enjoy the experience.

Studies suggest that the suspension of disbelief may also occur when we hear nonfiction stories about real people, which cause us to let our guard down and believe the story in order to understand it. When we hear a story about two men or two women who love each other, our brain has the experience of *believing* that to be possible. To then *disbelieve* it takes additional mental effort. We have a bias to believe stories.[23]

But there's more to the strategy. For storytelling to help you achieve your goals, the stories you tell need to communicate specific ideas and touch emotional chords that actually move people to support your position. Many organizations and movements miss the mark here. While a growing number have caught on to the emotional power of storytelling, many don't have a clear understanding or articulation of the essential ideas their stories need to convey to persuade their audiences and achieve durable attitude change.

In the case of marriage equality, the big idea of "love and commitment" pointed to a clear and simple storytelling strategy: Share stories of couples in loving, committed relationships.

In Massachusetts, the first state to marry same-sex couples, advocates began the new storytelling strategy with a simple but effective ad. (See "Simple But Effective" on page 31.) It features two women who stayed together "in sickness and in health," as the vow goes, after one of them was diagnosed with cancer. Their story demonstrated the authenticity of their commitment; the words, image, and story all worked together to deliver the shared aspiration.

"Love and commitment" wasn't just an advertising slogan—the phrase became the heart of the movement. Qualitative research with LGBTQ people in Massachusetts found that those most likely to take action for the cause were in committed relationships. This simple

Simple But Effective

Ads for the marriage equality and youth antismoking campaigns incorporated simple but effective images that communicated the love and commitment of gay couples and the rebellious independence of teenagers.

but profound storytelling approach not only persuaded conflicted voters but also mobilized a base of supporters. Couples shared their stories with neighbors and legislators, at public hearings and campaign rallies, and via news and social media. These deeply personal stories drove home the "love and commitment" idea thousands of times, reaching millions of people.

The Truth campaign also used strategic storytelling through paid advertising and social media. Truth's content illustrated the deviousness of the tobacco industry in seeding false information and creating dependency, and highlighted the power of independent young people to make change.

"The basic idea was to use challenging, thought-provoking ad contexts and images of teens in control, rebelling against forces that would prevent them from expressing their independence (i.e., the tobacco industry)," write the authors of a 2002 study of the Truth campaign.[24]

The campaign's first national ad, "Body Bags," featured young people dumping body bags outside the Philip Morris headquarters to dramatize the 1,200 deaths that tobacco use causes every day.

This type of storytelling gave young people the sense of being part of a social movement, which added to the motivating power of the antismoking message. "Much like the early protesters against the Vietnam war, Truth teens would take up the mantle against the establishment (in this case, the tobacco industry) and create an environment that fostered camaraderie and a sense of mission," write the 2002 study authors.

The Truth campaign's impact depended largely on its strategic use of images to tell its story. Teens in its target audience could easily see themselves—and, just as important, aspirational versions of themselves—in Truth's imagery. Truth's storytelling shows tobacco-free teens who look cool, independent, and rebellious.[25]

From the beginning, Truth has used young people involved in local campaigns to tell its story in ads, not actors. Young people represent the program in news and social media, too; adults don't deliver campaign messages to the target audience of independent-minded adolescents. This approach is both strategic and authentic, a necessary combination to augment the impact of storytelling.[26]

STEP 6: HELP PEOPLE THINK IT THROUGH—AND BE THEIR BEST SELVES

Strategic storytelling about love and commitment created empathy for same-sex couples by opening people's eyes to the realities of their relationships, but that didn't secure marriage equality's victory. The final step in achieving durable attitude change was to help the audience of ambivalent voters think through the issue on their own terms—and decide to live up to their own aspirations for the kind of people *they* wanted to be.

Many people perceive strategic communications about political issues the same way they see product marketing: pushing emotional buttons to prompt a purchase or other immediate action. Emotion is critical; messages must evoke emotional responses for people to notice them, remember them, and be moved to act.[27] Manipulating

people's emotions—especially anger and fear—is a tried-and-true tactic in politics.

However, truly changing attitudes about a controversial topic fraught with cultural, political, and personal significance takes more than pushing emotional buttons. It takes what Richard Petty and John Cacioppo, two social scientists who have studied persuasive communication, call "elaboration."

"Attitude change that is based on high levels of elaboration is more likely to influence thought and behavior and more likely to be persistent over time and resistant to counterattack," they write in their groundbreaking 1983 study of persuasion.[28]

Petty and Cacioppo developed the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which suggests two different paths to persuasion. What they call the "central route" is what we think of as ordinary thinking—careful consideration of information and ideas by the recipients of a persuasive message. This is what the model labels elaboration. Those who take the time to think through the topic are more likely to change their minds in a meaningful way. Once that happens, the new attitude persists and they resist changing their minds again.

The other path is the "peripheral route," which we tend to take when a topic doesn't affect us personally. In this case, we use our intuition and "go with our gut." Rather than considering the arguments for and against, we'll base our judgment on who is delivering the information. The messenger matters more than the message.

To achieve durable attitude change, both the marriage equality movement and the Truth campaign needed their target audiences to take the thoughtful route. Freedom to Marry helped people elaborate through advertisements that modeled the mental "journey" taken by those who wrestled with inner conflicts and ultimately supported marriage equality. These ad campaigns featured friends and family members of lesbian and gay couples who changed their minds on the subject. A television ad for Freedom to Marry's Why Marriage Matters campaign showed "Darrick" and "Kate," a heterosexual couple, discussing their journey:

> *Darrick:* Where I grew up, gay people were not in the forefront or in the community.
> *Kate:* Over the years, I've met some gay and lesbian couples. Their commitment to each other is just like our commitment to each other.
> *Darrick:* Built around love, like any other relationship. As a parent, as a neighbor, the Golden Rule is very important.
> *Kate:* We teach our children to treat people the way we want to be treated. I would absolutely not want anyone to tell me I could not get married.
> *Darrick:* And we certainly wouldn't want to deny that for anyone else.

The couple describes a journey that unfolded over years, but the ad captures it in about 30 seconds. It doesn't feel preachy or tell viewers what to think. It simply presents two people sharing their own thinking and reaching their own conclusions. In the end, the couple decides to live up to their own aspirations: adhering to the Golden Rule and being good parents and neighbors.

Encouraging and assisting people to think through their values and aspirations—through communications like Freedom to Marry's videos, in-person conversations, and other approaches—can motivate them to reconsider their position. In fact, Freedom to Marry's research found that the idea the Golden Rule expresses—treat others as you'd like to be treated—influenced many people who changed their minds. Communications that reminded their target audience of the kind of people they aspired to be prompted ambivalent voters to think matters through on their own terms.

Note that Derrick says he's a "neighbor" and a "parent"—two roles central to his identity. Messages using nouns of identity like these are more likely to motivate people to take action than messages that don't, because they communicate that a behavior reflects the kind of person one is. For example, in one study of this dynamic, children who were asked if they wanted to "be a helper" were much more likely to help an adult with several tasks than children asked if they wanted "to help."[29]

Seeing their own identities, aspirations, and values reflected in the movement motivated many

The Six Steps to Durable Attitude Change

The path of aspirational communication involves answering the following questions.

Step 1	**Focus on people who are ambivalent.** Are people of two minds, or do they feel mixed emotions, about your cause?
Step 2	**Understand their anxieties.** What anxieties might people feel toward the change you aim to create?
Step 3	**Connect your cause to their authentic aspirations.** What aspirations do people share in connection to your cause?
Step 4	**Frame it with Winning Words.** Are you using meaningful, memorable language?
Step 5	**Share Strategic Stories.** What stories can you tell that convey ideas shown to motivate your target audience?
Step 6	**Help people think it through—and be their best selves.** How does your organization help stakeholders be the kind of people they want to be? What ideas, information, or activities can you provide to help people think through your issue?

people to take the time and energy to think through the issue. Seeing *themselves* in the message was essential. "Thoughtful message processing occurs when we think about how the message relates to our own beliefs and goals," states *Principles of Social Psychology*, a user-friendly reference work explaining fundamental concepts in the field.[30] Connecting your cause to people's authentic aspirations is the key that can open the door to durable attitude change. It moves your audience beyond empathy to self-reflection.

"We really, in some sense, transformed the question from 'How do you feel about gays?' to 'What kind of person are you?'" Evan Wolfson says. "Are you a fair person? Are you a person who believes in freedom and love and commitment and family? Do you believe that everybody ought to be treated with respect? That you ought to treat others as you would want to be treated?"

Like the marriage equality campaign's "journey" ads, Truth equips its target audience for the kind of elaboration that leads to durable attitude change. Beyond its aspiration-oriented brand and strategic storytelling, Truth focuses on facts. The campaign shares information about the addictiveness of smoking, deaths and diseases attributed to tobacco use, marketing practices of the tobacco industry, and other areas of concern. This approach enables users to think things through, come to their own conclusions, and ultimately realize their own aspirations.[31]

"We're not here to criticize people's choices, or tell them not to smoke," says Eric Asche, chief marketing and strategy officer for the Truth Initiative. "We're here to arm everyone—smokers and nonsmokers—with the tools to make change."

Truth worked with the Mayo Clinic to design a digital quit-smoking program, BecomeAnEX, which helps users translate attitude change into behavior change by creating a "quit plan." The first step in the process encourages smokers to think of their aspirational self-image as part of developing a plan to quit: "Your vision of who you want to be will focus your quit plan on what really matters."

FROM A HOPELESS CAUSE TO THE NEW NORMAL

The famed psychologist Abraham Maslow authored an influential theory of motivation that suggests that helping people resolve their inner conflicts over the marriage issue allowed them to realize their aspirations for their own lives. His theory posited that we are motivated to take actions that make us feel safe, secure, and accepted, and to achieve esteem from others and self-respect. We also strive to fulfill ourselves through using our unique talents and abilities. In addition to these self-oriented motivations, Maslow said we also aim for "self-transcendence." We seek a sense of purpose that's defined not by satisfying ourselves, but by serving others and connecting to larger causes.[32]

Social movements that equip us to look beyond political and cultural divides and recognize our shared humanity help us achieve our full human potential. The key to truly changing hearts and minds is to enable people to see your cause as an opportunity to live up to their aspirations for themselves. Touch their hearts with well-told stories. Use words that remind them of their own hopes and values. Offer information and ideas that help them think it through on their own terms. When they reach their own conclusion, they have changed their own minds—and likely they have changed them for good. ■

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The collective impact model has so thoroughly shaped the way we think and talk about solving systemic social problems that it has obscured alternatives. We offer a new conceptual scheme to help communities find the best approach for their circumstances.

The Community System Solutions Framework

BY RONG WANG, KATHERINE R. COOPER & MICHELLE SHUMATE

Illustration by Rose Wong

Organizations that hope to make a social impact can't go it alone. They need to work with other organizations to scale their efforts if they hope to make progress on social issues. The simple truth of this principle hides great complexity. Groups of organizations can work together in a variety of ways. The choices that they make about how to organize influence the capacity of the coalition, the type of change that it will make, and whether communities that are the most affected will have any say in its decisions.

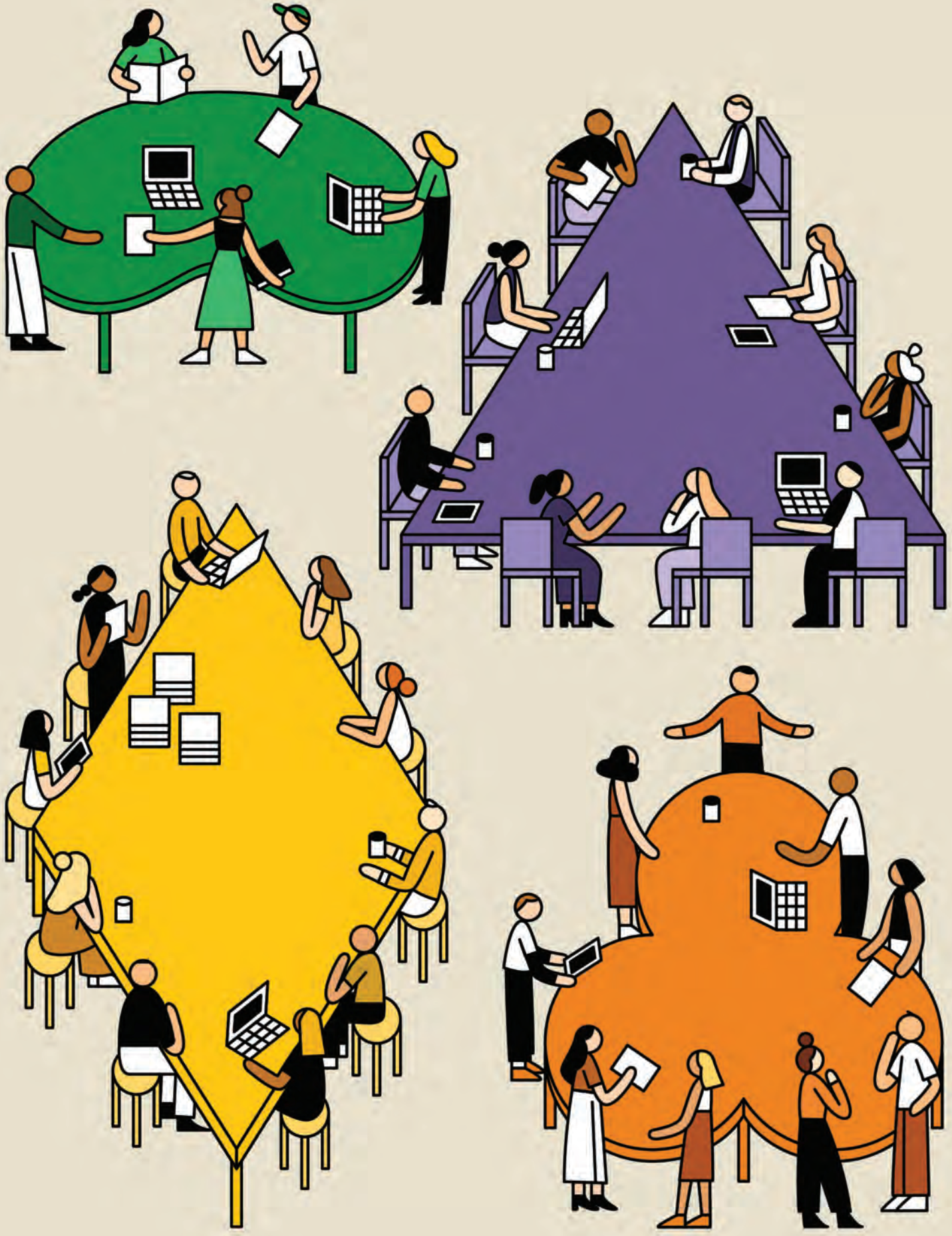
Organizations are often confused about how to describe their work with other organizations and how it compares to that of other partnerships and collaboratives. They frequently identify themselves as using the popular model of "collective impact," whether or not they adopt its tenets in practice. This tendency has created an overreliance on the model's vocabulary, because coalitions lack the terms to describe other ways of organizing.

In 2017, the Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact (NNSI) at Northwestern University launched a nationwide study that takes a comparative approach to identify the conditions that make collective impact useful for education reforms. In our experience of speaking to representatives of education-focused collaborative coalitions across the country, we found that nearly all considered themselves to be implementing collective impact, but their interpretations of the model's principles vary widely and many were not able to fully implement its practices. In the process, we realized that better ways of describing how coalitions collaborate exist and that naming these variations can help guide local leaders and the diverse communities they serve. To realize these goals, we propose the community system solutions framework.

THE NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH

Collective impact, a collaborative model that brings together relevant actors from different sectors to solve a complex social issue, has gained tremendous momentum across the United States since FSG consultants John Kania and Mark Kramer introduced it in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* in 2011. Successful collective impact efforts, according to the authors, distinguish themselves from other community collaboration models by meeting five conditions essential for achieving large-scale social change involving multiple stakeholders: common agendas, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.

How essential are these five pillars to collective impact? In a 2014 *Stanford Social Innovation Review* supplement sponsored by the Collective Impact Forum, Jeff Edmondson and Ben Hecht argue that only practices that adhere to these pillars should be called collective impact. Whatever the merits of their argument in theory, projects have been labeled this way in practice to appeal to funders and to connect to a broader community of advocates across the country. Coalitions take



the only model available to them and tweak it for their circumstances, instead of developing an approach that takes their needs into account. But what if they had other models to choose from?

We suspect that current funder and community interests in collective impact have created an overreliance not only on the language of this particular model but also on the actual approach. One reason, we propose, is that coalitions lack the language to describe other types of networks for social impact. To address this deficit, we interviewed coalition leaders across the United States, including officers at nonprofit organizations and foundations, and collected archival data from more than 55 coalitions. We then reviewed our conversations with coalition leaders and the data that they gave us.

The community system solutions framework holds that there are several pathways to solve complex social problems. Our purpose is not to suggest one singular model, but rather to demonstrate that communities may find that different approaches are better suited to their current environment, the population served, the problem each community is facing, and existing partnerships within a community. We offer this framework as a tool to help communities identify their current collaboration framework, its benefits, and its drawbacks. It also supplies a language for communities to describe various ways of networking with partners to generate social impact.

CLASSIFYING SOLUTIONS

The community system solutions framework is informed by two lines of academic research that predate the conceptualization of the collective impact model. The first line describes the different ways in which cross-sector collaborations between businesses and nonprofits and between nonprofits and governments occur. It focuses on what kinds of organizations participate in cross-sector partnerships and how they integrate their activities.[1] The second line of research describes how coalitions are most commonly governed.[2] It introduces three forms of governance: network administrative organizations, lead organizations, and self-governance. Network administrative organizations are similar to the backbone entities of the traditional collective impact framework. That is, they are independent bodies with their own dedicated staff that coordinate the activities of a network. In lead organizations, by contrast, a participating organization steps in to coordinate. In self-governed networks, the members of the coalition share governance responsibilities.

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The resulting community system solutions framework describes how coalitions differ in two dimensions: who participates and how work gets done.[3]

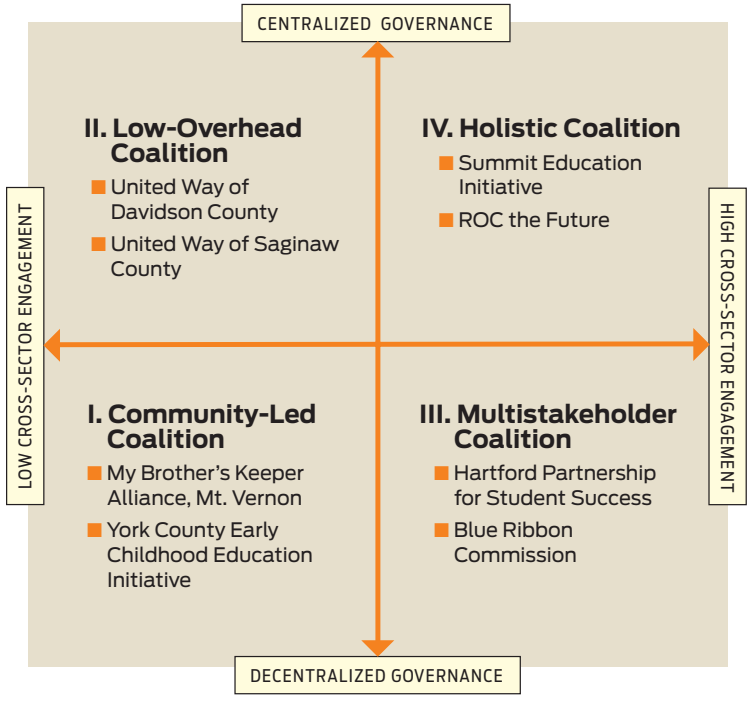
Who participates? The original publications of the collective impact model emphasize cross-sector collaboration, in part because business leaders played such a large role in the emergence of the Strive Network in Cincinnati, Ohio—an effort that became a foundational example for the model. However, in our experience, not all networks easily attract cross-sector partnerships. Nonprofits led many networks in our study. Government agencies, such as the health department or city government, led others. These entities often had difficulty recruiting businesses. In other cases, conflict between the school district and the local nonprofit community prevented collaboration. Because of these issues, community networks often differ in who participates and the degree to which particular participants engage.

How does work get done? The collective impact model highlights the presence of a backbone organization in which a staff separate from the participating organization manages network activities. However, communities described variations, including organizations splitting up the backbone functions, or networks saying that their backbone was more of a "connector" than a "manager." In some networks, partners self-organize because they cannot afford a backbone organization. In these networks, partner organizations may work together without agreeing on the problem to be solved, and they tend to work on multiple agendas under distributed leadership.

The answers to these two fundamental questions inspired us to divide the community system solutions framework into four different models and present them in a two-by-two diagram divided by two axes. One axis represents the amount of cross-sector engagement, while the other represents how centralized the coalition's governance is. For each of the four quadrants in the framework, we present two communities as examples to demonstrate how their context and peculiar characteristics influence the adoption of a particular model of collaboration. (See "Four

Four Types of Community System Solutions

We classify approaches based on the style of governance they use and the amount of cross-sector participation they achieve.



Types of Community System Solutions" on page 36.) Let us examine the four models in turn.

I. COMMUNITY-LED COALITION

The community-led coalition model (Quadrant I, in the lower left part of the diagram) has a strong focus on community engagement and involves the community served in making decisions. Its participants are typically local organizations or nonprofits that have strong local connections. Cross-sector relationships rarely take root.

The model often seeks to build a sense of community by engaging local leaders and stakeholders. It specifically takes a grassroots approach to program design and implementation. A local nonprofit frequently initiates the network to empower the community, but the collective effort usually reflects a lack of coordination. Funding sources for the coalition are scattered and program-specific. Community-led coalitions tend to focus on implementing programs across multiple agendas, and they do not strongly emphasize metrics or data collection. The downside of this model is that it does not allow for continuous or structured communication between partners, or for participation from other sectors. The upside is that the coalition wins sufficient community support.

My Brother's Keeper Alliance in Mount Vernon, New York, is a community-led coalition, founded in April 2016 as a city-level initiative. Its steering committee consists of six influential people in the community, including a religious leader. The Boys & Girls Club of Mount Vernon manages the alliance's financial affairs, such as accepting funding and handling tax issues. The steering committee considers the network itself a social movement. It currently focuses on running programs to help community members parent better and to cope with mental health issues, and on raising community awareness of the coalition. It has no backbone organization. To manage the network's efforts, core partners—mainly community organizations or local people—belong to smaller working teams that meet weekly to address different agendas concerning disadvantaged youth. These agendas include getting to school, becoming prepared to learn, reading by third grade, graduating from high school, entering the workforce, and avoiding violence. The network would like to involve more businesses, but it hasn't been able to attract them. Its leaders would also prefer that government agencies and the school district be more proactive in addressing their agenda items. Because the alliance is only three years old, it hasn't yet secured resources for sustaining cross-sector alliances, such as partnerships between government agencies and education nonprofits. The network has also not yet collected any data on education outcomes.

Primary Features of Community-Led Coalitions

- They emphasize community-organizing approaches and citizen volunteers more than the other models.
- They balance multiple agendas and respond to community changes.
- External funding is scarce or nonexistent.
- Decision making does not rely on data-driven metrics.
- They focus on coordinating events and raising awareness, and may include a few programs, but they are not project driven.
- Participants include volunteers, nonprofits, community-based organizations, and religious organizations, which do not maintain continuous communication.
- They often don't involve a backbone organization, or, if they do, it is not equipped with a robust infrastructure.

Another example of a community-led coalition is the York County Early Childhood Coalition, an education initiative in Biddeford, Maine, that United Way of York County started in 2011 and that seeks to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood education at the county level. It has no budget for running specific programs and focuses instead on coordinating events and programs for local partners such as school districts, the YMCA, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts. For example, it hosts a yearly York County Community Conversation on Early Childhood and encourages local organizations to attend. But it has not yet led partners to engage with one another outside of the meetings.

The coalition also conducts education and outreach on issues related to investing in young children. Programs include a volunteer reader program that places adult volunteers with children up to third grade who read below grade level to improve early literacy. The initiative collects evaluation data about the programming by asking participants to complete a survey, but it does not yet track any educational outcomes of the programs.

II. LOW-OVERHEAD COALITION

In contrast with the community-led coalition model, the low-overhead coalition (Quadrant II) has a more structured way of organizing and motivating partners to work collectively on a common goal. Networks in this quadrant typically have an active lead agency that serves as a backbone organization but do not necessarily enjoy participation from multiple sectors. A member of one sector—typically a nonprofit or a government agency—usually facilitates or coordinates the effort. Consequently, the implementation of programs is top-down. In addition, organizational partners do not engage in regular communication, or only a small set of core partners from the same sector communicate with one another.

Because partner organizations in low-overhead coalitions often come from the same sector and have financial constraints, a lack of partnership diversity frequently results. The low-overhead coalition model has fewer coordination costs, which makes it less expensive than the collective impact model. Most, but not all, of these coalitions self-identify as early-stage collective impact initiatives that have struggled to attract partners from different sectors. Low-overhead coalitions also have limited community engagement.

The Impact Committee for Education in Davidson County, North Carolina, is a low-overhead coalition. The United Way of Davidson County founded it in 2015 after a community-needs-assessment survey identified three focus areas: education, health, and financial stability. United Way serves as the only funder for the committee and the lead agency to coordinate meetings and manage communication among partners. Operating at the county level, it has drawn partners mainly from the nonprofit sector, such as the Salvation Army Boys & Girls Club of Davidson County, YMCA, and local charity organizations providing education and community-outreach programs. Its partners also include school districts and one local business. The committee aims to recruit additional advocates, such as the county superintendent of schools and other policymakers.

The Impact Committee for Education is relatively new. It was the first collaborative effort in the county to address educational

issues. The network decided not to pursue the collective impact model because of its limited resources. The committee currently seeks to identify which education issues in the community it should focus on.

The United Way of Saginaw in Michigan founded a low-overhead coalition in 2014, to ensure that every high school graduate in Saginaw County is prepared for a career. It consists mainly of local nonprofits. The United Way functions as the lead agency and plays a central role in overseeing partner organizations. For example, it requires all partners to submit quarterly reports with measurements and outcomes to ensure that they are on track to meet the goals set by the funding agreements.

Primary Features of Low-Overhead Coalitions

- A clearly defined agenda aligns partners' efforts.
- Sector diversity in partnerships is lacking, although the coalitions try to take advantage of and build upon existing collaborations.
- A small set of core partners maintain regular communication with one another, but the network lacks momentum because of resource constraints.
- A government organization or foundation serves as the lead organization and plays a significant role in determining the agenda and coordinating participants.
- The network chooses this model to save money or because it lacks the resources to support a backbone organization and data system.

In contrast with the Impact Committee for Education in Davidson County, North Carolina, the Saginaw coalition identifies as an early-stage collective impact initiative and is in the process of building upon existing partnerships in the community. But it has yet to attract the funding necessary to build a systematic, diverse database.

III. MULTISTAKEHOLDER COALITION

In contrast with low-overhead coalitions, multistakeholder coalitions (Quadrant III) attract a diverse set of stakeholders, but the lead agency plays a less central role in the organizing process. In this model, there is often no backbone organization, either because the lead agency decides not to serve in this capacity or because it simply hasn't taken on a formal role in managing partnerships because a lack of staff or money prevents it from doing so. The lead agency sees itself instead as a "connector" or "convener." The partners feel responsible for sustaining communication and self-organize their efforts toward achieving collective goals.

This model faces a potential downside in trying to focus on numerous agendas and struggling to align partners' efforts. Multistakeholder coalitions can be early-stage collective impact efforts that are in the process of developing a shared vision among partners. In some other cases, these coalitions strive to become collective impact initiatives but fail because of a lack of a strong backbone organization.

The Hartford Partnership for Student Success (HPSS) is a multistakeholder coalition established in 2006 through equal partnerships among four organizations: the United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, the City of Hartford, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and Hartford Public Schools in Connecticut. HPSS aims to improve the academic, social, emotional, and physical health of Hartford students by applying the Community School model, which coordinates the services that students need to be successful in school, while promoting healthy families and communities through extended days and hours. HPSS staff functions as the backbone of the coalition. United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, on the other hand, functions as the lead agency by convening regular meetings focused on technical assistance and best practices. HPSS implements multiple strategies to boost student achievement (such as school readiness, attendance, high school graduation rates, and college and career readiness) in alignment with the district and individual schools' operating plans. The partnership helps to coordinate, align, and utilize each partners' different strengths, but it does not define how the partners work together. Local schools, nonprofits, and government agencies participate in the partnership and engage in continuous communication—for example, through biannual executive committee meetings, monthly leadership team meetings, and monthly meetings among nonprofit partners. HPSS emphasizes data sharing among the core organizations.

Another multistakeholder coalition is Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) on the Prevention of Youth Violence in New Haven County, North Carolina. Established in 2007 and modeled after Harlem Children's Zone, BRC focuses on interrupting the cycle of multigenerational poverty in the community through reducing youth violence and conducting youth programs that help social development (such as renovating a multipurpose athletic field and a community garden and offering college scholarships). It primarily serves the Youth Enrichment Zone, an approximately 140-square-block area on the north side of downtown Wilmington that suffers from high crime and poverty rates. This low-income community distrusts the mayor, the district attorney, and the superintendent of schools. As a result, BRC positions itself as a middleman between the local community and government agencies. As the backbone organization, BRC sees itself as a connector among diverse partners, including school districts, local nonprofits, the county health department, higher-education institutes, and local businesses. Partners from different sectors work together through different action teams, including ones dedicated to education, community engagement, and youth violence. Each of these teams is composed of more than 20 representatives from different community partnerships.

Primary Features of Multistakeholder Coalitions

- Multiple agendas accommodate a variety of partner goals.
- They collect data to inform decision making.
- Partners include government, business, and nonprofit sectors. These partners typically form teams focusing on a single agenda.
- The lead agency or backbone organization acts as a facilitator, but not as the agenda setter, for the network. It facilitates the team's work by providing technical and communication support among the groups.

IV. HOLISTIC COALITION

Multistakeholder coalitions differ from some of the most mature collective impact initiatives we have studied, which we refer to as the holistic coalition model (Quadrant IV). Under this approach, the partners come from different sectors, share specific goals, and are committed to sustained communication and collaboration to achieve those goals. The backbone organization facilitates various partners' efforts to enact a common agenda and ensures effective decision making about partnership activities and outcomes. It can also play

an important role in identifying appropriate measurement systems and formulating detailed plans about achieving collective goals.

Under the holistic coalition model, the management of partnerships and programming is typically top-down and often has less direct community engagement. Most holistic coalitions deliberately choose this model because the community the network serves has both the need and the capacity to sustain a lead agency and support cross-sector collaboration. Holistic coalitions are often collective impact initiatives at the sustaining stage—they have adequate funds to support the backbone organization, to maintain a shared data-collection system, and to conduct advocacy.

The Summit Education Initiative (SEI), based in Akron, Ohio, is a holistic coalition. Founded in 1994, SEI was created to improve reading scores in Akron public schools. SEI followed a cradle-to-career model, which focuses on helping every child reach his or her full potential from birth to employment. In 2013, SEI joined the StriveTogether network and embraced the collective impact approach. The backbone organization, also named SEI, coordinates more than 300 partners, including school districts, local institutions of higher education, local businesses, and community-based organizations. Between 2010 and 2011, SEI experienced leadership turnover, program termination, and staff layoffs, which left a lot of empty promises in the community. When the organization was rebuilt in 2011, it needed to cultivate diverse partnerships and repair its relationships.

Guided by the principle of "acting on education data," SEI maintains a robust data-collection system and uses it to identify issues that require attention, to measure progress, and to keep itself accountable. SEI was able to become a holistic coalition because it has sufficient funding to support its programs, including an endowment and additional funds from other donors. The fact that some funders require all partners to work closely with SEI explains its preference for centralized governance.

Another holistic coalition is ROC the Future in Rochester, New York, a city-level initiative established as a StriveTogether coalition in 2011. Much like SEI, ROC the Future has sufficient financial support—in this case, from private foundations. The community ROC the Future serves has a rich history of cross-sector collaboration, which enables the initiative to use existing partnerships to identify areas to focus on. The current backbone organization, the Children's Agenda, advocates for policies and evidence-based practices to improve academic achievement. More than 60 diverse partner organizations exist, including stakeholders from community-based nonprofits, research institutes, local foundations, businesses, and government agencies. The Children's Agenda coordinates all the subcommittees and aligns their separate goals toward the overall mission of boosting the academic achievement of Rochester's children. The collaboration is organized around different task forces defined by educational outcomes, such as school readiness, attendance, and college access, and includes a special task force on data sharing. ROC the Future has not done much direct community engagement, preferring to partner with local organizations to connect with communities.

Primary Features of Holistic Coalitions

- Partners have a long history of working together toward a shared vision.
- Programmatic decision making tends to be data driven.
- Diverse partners hold each other accountable through continuous communication and combined effort.
- They are generally larger than multistakeholder coalitions.
- Of the four models, they have the most developed partner coordination.
- Holistic coalitions do less direct community engagement than other types of coalitions.

OPENING POSSIBILITIES

The communities discussed here represent only a sample of the education-reform initiatives in the United States, but together they present a diverse set of cases to capture the various needs and solutions on offer at the community level. The framework we propose captures the variations of how organizations can work together to solve community problems. With four categories based on who participates and how work gets done, the framework demonstrates how coalitions can follow multiple pathways to solve social problems and generate systemic change. We acknowledge that coalitions vary in numerous measures, including size, tenure, population served, challenges faced, goals sought, existing social capital, and potential resources available for mobilization.

We believe that the community system solutions framework can serve as a guide for coalitions to figure out the best way to align partners and implement programs specifically suited to their communities. It provides an alternative, more precise language for collaborative coalitions to describe the varieties of ways in which they can organize their partners for social impact. It also clarifies the advantages for particular coalitions of some models over others.

The framework is not static, and the divisions among the four quadrants are not walls. Some coalitions may see change over time, and those that aspire to conform to a more integrated model may begin in one quadrant and ultimately move into the others. But such a progression may not be the goal for all coalitions, especially those with limited cross-sector engagement that do not attract significant funding, or those that have found success with less centralized, more grassroots approaches to organizing.

We hope that communities will be better informed about the potential approaches available and embrace the one that best suits their context. Similarly, we hope that funders will be open to different models of community system solutions and seek to fund initiatives with the best chances of success in their respective communities. Whether collective impact is superior to the other models remains unclear, but we suggest that for communities aware of their resources and goals, it need not be the final destination. ■

Notes

1 James E. Austin and M. May Seitanidi, "Collaborative Value Creation: A Review of Partnering Between Nonprofits and Businesses: Part I. Value Creation Spectrum and Collaboration Stages," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 5, 2012.

2 Keith G. Provan and Patrick Kenis, "Modes of Network Governance: Structure, Management, and Effectiveness," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2008.

3 We used a set of qualitative methods to determine what role these or other factors played in different networks. We conducted our coding through a two-step process. In the first step, we relied upon "provisional coding" to focus on codes about factors identified from the literature review: sector engagement (Who participates?) and network governance (How does work get done?). In the second step, we used magnitude coding derived from the collective impact literature and additional network research to determine how each community is positioned along the dimensions of sector engagement and network governance, on a scale ranging from -2 to 2. For both rounds of coding, we conducted pilot tests and used multiple coders to refine our approach further. Additional information on the codebook is available upon request.

Applying a systemic lens to social problems does not generate quick and easy fixes. On the contrary, it forces us to slow down and tease out complex dynamics. I propose a framework to help guide such deeper reflection.

Changing Systems? Welcome to the Slow Movement

BY CHRISTIAN SEELOS

Illustration by Alex Kiesling

There are no Robinson Crusoes in this world. We all live connected lives. We participate in families, communities, organizations, transportation systems, education systems, political systems, health systems, and so on. Though this point may be obvious, only recently have many philanthropic organizations come to embrace explicit system perspectives in their work. But what does it mean to make such a commitment?

System work seeks to address social problems by making substantive and lasting changes to the system in which the problems are embedded. Doing such work requires thinking about causal architecture.[1] To reform a system necessitates understanding and then transforming the causal processes that constitute those systems.

This is hard work. There is no magic to changing systems, no waving of the wand. But investing in a system perspective can pay off greatly. Deeper reflection on a system's architecture reduces our tendency to prematurely specify and enact solutions that are not effective or likely make situations worse. We thus employ resources more productively. We become more realistic about how much time is necessary to address problems and more humble and willing to explore and to learn, rather than to base decisions on the assumed superiority of our existing knowledge, technologies, and strategies.

System work gives organizations the opportunity to rethink their approaches and refresh their attitudes. Leaders may have better arguments to nurture long-term commitment to places and communities, instead of the exhausting fly-in, fly-out practices of Western philanthropic and development organizations. System work is not about solutions; it's about discovering and steering local pathways for change at a pace appropriate for our ability to learn and for what local communities can enact and absorb. In what follows, I sketch some practical routes for adopting system perspectives for organizations that want to make their philanthropic work more effective.

PROLEGOMENA TO SYSTEMS THINKING

The field of philanthropy may enthuse over systems thinking, but it betrays confusion about systems, system perspectives, and their claim to objectivity. First, defining the boundaries of social systems is generally impossible. When we think of systems as relevant wholes, as is usually the case, we end up easily with the universe: Everything is somehow connected. Any problem context is influenced and relates to other problems, situations, and systems, and thus our inquiry expands the ecology of issues and problem defini-

tions, in the words of social scientist Werner Ulrich, "to the point where it might encompass God and the World."[2] Needless to say, this is not a very practical approach. The practice of systems thinking, then, requires setting boundaries determined not only by the context of the problem discussed but also by our interests and needs.

In another example of common confusion about systems, practitioners tend to model systems "objectively," with sophisticated system maps. But humans differ widely in their interpretation and experience of the same system, and so does their motivation for change or maintaining the status quo. Ultimately, we cannot map any one objective system or reality. System diagrams can greatly help groups articulate different views and capture assumptions, but they are less useful when their visual sophistication induces feelings of deep understanding and control that fuels a naive overconfidence. The complexity of such diagrams can be overwhelming for those who did not participate in the exercise. In 2009, when US General Stanley A. McChrystal saw a sophisticated system diagram of the social situation in Afghanistan, he famously remarked, "When we understand that slide, we'll have won the war."[3]

Instead, a useful system perspective is sensitive to the fact that people hold various interpretations of situations, problems, and what can and ought to be done about them. Relaxing the assumption that systems exist objectively in the real world represents a big step forward. Progress comes from thinking about social problems in a systemic manner that does not privilege our biased perspectives. "A systems approach begins when first you see the world through the eyes of another," the influential systems thinker C. West Churchman says.[4]

These confusions about system thinking are not new; system perspectives enjoyed a turbulent journey in the last century.[5] Scientists adopted system perspectives after becoming frustrated by the shortcomings of traditional analytical approaches and practices. Unfortunately, the current state of systems science is troubling. Research has branched out into a variety of efforts that are difficult to reconcile. Research perspectives are developed in isolation from each other, and findings are difficult to translate into practice. Already 50 years ago, the leading system pioneer, Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, expressed frustration with the state of systems practice:

> If someone were to analyze current notions and fashionable catchwords, he would find "systems" high on the list. The concept has pervaded all fields of science and penetrated into popular thinking, jargon and mass media. … Professions and jobs have appeared in recent years which … go under names such as systems design, systems analysis, systems engineering. … Their practitioners are the "new utopians" of our time … at work creating a "New World," brave or otherwise.[6]

This assessment should serve as a warning regarding the current enthusiasm about systems approaches in the field of philanthropy. Given the state of system research, one wonders what might be the knowledge base that enables organizations to enact the promise of systems change.

To ground systems perspectives in contextual knowledge, some systems thinkers propose that, depending on the characteristics of systems, different systems warrant different types of system perspectives and work.[7] Would this be a helpful perspective for practice? Let me turn to classifying the types of system perspectives available.

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FOUR SYSTEM PERSPECTIVES

When most system thinkers and practitioners use the term "system" in philanthropy, they make two broad distinctions. The first is hard, versus soft/critical, system perspectives. This distinction marks differences in the assumptions they hold and the ways in which they look at systems:

- Hard system perspectives treat systems as real entities with defined boundaries that we can analyze objectively and improve with available knowledge and technologies to achieve uncontested objectives. Hard system perspectives seek to improve the performance of a system in a specific dimension. Coalitions of powerful actors provide external resources and solutions for a system.
- Soft/critical system perspectives treat systems as ways of thinking and reflecting about subjective images that people hold about social situations and perceived problems. This perspective seeks to explore differences in purpose, power, and voice; in opinions about what constitutes an improvement; and in evaluating the appropriateness of solutions. Soft/critical systems perspectives seek to shape an inquiry toward discovering motivations and options for progress. Even individuals or small organizations can mobilize local resources and work with a system.

The second distinction is organic, versus designed, systems:

- Designed systems refer to entities that are configured instrumentally to serve a specific purpose. Examples include task forces; organizations; functional systems, such as legal, health, and education systems; and governance mechanisms.
- Organic systems refer to social agglomerates, people who occupy a social or geographical space and relate as a result of informal social and historical processes. Examples include families, communities, tribes, villages, and societies.

We can map these distinctions onto a two-by-two diagram that sets out four system archetypes with examples: hard-designed, hard-organic, soft/critical-designed, and soft/critical-organic. (See "Four System Archetypes" on page 43.)

Such a rough classification can be a useful guide for further study. In an accompanying article, available on the website of the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (Stanford PACS), I draw on a decade of field research with prominent social enterprises in developing countries and offer examples of these four archetypes. However, Stanford PACS' Global Innovation for Impact Lab, which I co-direct, also learns from contemporary initiatives such as Co-Impact, a global collaborative of funders and program partners. This January, Co-Impact announced one of the most ambitious system change initiatives to date: $80 million in grants to support bold system change initiatives over the next five years to improve education, health, and economic

opportunity for an estimated nine million people across Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. The initiatives are just starting to operate, and the rough categorization I offer here serves only to illustrate the different assumptions underlying the four archetypes. This classification does not capture the complexity of the approaches but will, I hope, facilitate reflection on the similarities and differences of several contemporary system change initiatives in the coming years.

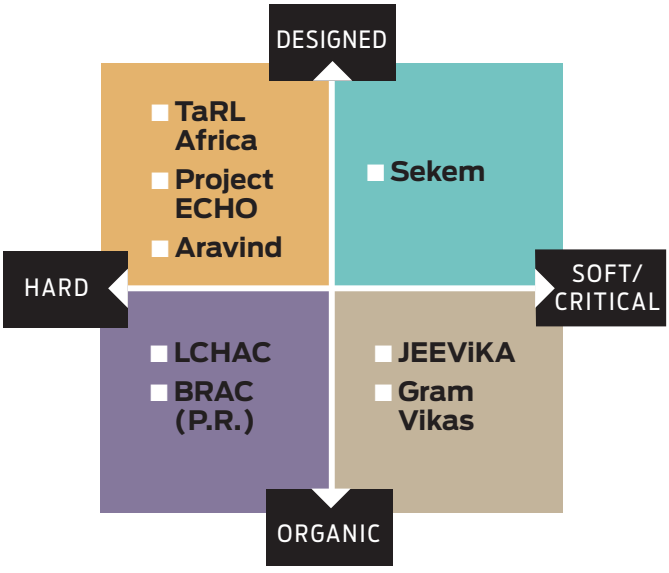
HARD SYSTEM PERSPECTIVES

Contemporary system scholars argue that hard system perspectives make sense for situations characterized by well-understood problems. When stakeholders with decision-making power agree on what the problem is, on what constitutes success, and on the effectiveness and objectives of a proposed solution, then hard system approaches may offer a promising template for action.

Designed hard system perspectives | Co-Impact supports Teaching at the Right Level Africa (TaRL), which aspires to improve the performance of education systems in African countries. TaRL addresses a very specific aspect of the education system: improving basic reading and math skills of primary-school children in grades three to five. TaRL draws a clear boundary within the education system by focusing on a specific skill set and age range. Most stakeholders recognize the underlying problem of children's underperforming in school and agree on the objectives and approach for improving skills. Improvements in math and reading performance can be assessed accurately. Pratham, the Indian NGO that pioneered the TaRL model; the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, who has tested Pratham's theory of change in randomized evaluations; and a collective of funders intend to support governments and local partners to implement a proven approach. Developing a detailed plan with prespecified resource requirements and performance milestones is also consistent with hard system perspectives.

Four System Archetypes

System perspectives fall into one of four categories, based on whether they are hard or soft and designed or organic.



A second example is Project ECHO India. ECHO implements a proven model of linking medical specialists with frontline health care providers through video technology to improve India's health system. Like TaRL, ECHO builds on an existing program template that incorporates expertise developed in New Mexico, where ECHO started in 2003; it has since expanded to 37 countries. The initiative specifies at the outset uncontroversial objectives that it seeks to meet to improve the health system; ECHO draws a clear boundary around a set of health issues and locations with adequate technology infrastructure, and it invests the precise resources needed to achieve its defined milestones.

Organic hard system perspectives | Two civil wars and an Ebola crisis have left many communities in Liberia without access to health care. The Liberia Community Health Assistants Program (LCHAP) collaborates with the government of Liberia to train health workers for these communities, as a substitute for the lack of an effective health system. Each community represents a concrete social system, and LCHAP's implementation relies mainly on providing specified resources and securing the robust commitment and consensus of powerful stakeholders. By standardizing practices in each community, the initiative could eventually integrate its trainees into the formal health system. LCHAP also reminds us that creating a new system is often easier than changing an existing one.

In the philanthropic sector, the adoption of hard system perspectives is more appealing, perhaps because they match important Western beliefs and biases, such as using expertise to solve problems, and employing formal strategies and plans with prespecified objectives. However, even mature health systems demonstrate striking differences in the worldviews of doctors, nurses, patients, the government, investors, and taxpayers. Stakeholders may disagree about whether a problem exists or what the most important one is. Or they may agree on the problem but disagree about causes and solutions, or about who should be in charge of improvements and how to evaluate progress or success. When philanthropic efforts focus successfully on one system aspect, powerful stakeholders may demand to redraw the boundaries of impact and include other system aspects. Or, as Pratham's experience in India illustrates, improving one aspect of the education system may fuel inflated stakeholder expectations. Despite Pratham's tremendous success and growth, the overall reading and math skills of youth in rural India have declined over the past decade. Associating Pratham wrongly with this lack of system-level impact may create tensions with the government.

Initiatives based on hard system premises are sensitive to even minimal deviations from their assumptions, particularly when strategies and funder expectations are formalized in clear plans that may constrain alternative courses of action when those plans fail. Robust change might require a more fundamental transformation of the architecture of the system to alter its tendency to re-create the same problems—an argument that the influential systems thinker Russell Ackoff made.[8] Implementers may thus find out the hard way that a soft system approach, which by design deals with multiple contrasting objectives and tensions, may have been a more effective one, despite its being slower and less predictable.

Hard system perspectives have proven more appropriate for designing technical systems to achieve clear and observable objec-

tives: weapons, engines, electrical circuits, modern water and sewage systems. Unfortunately, most social problems do not fit this template, and prominent system thinkers have suggested doing away altogether with hard system perspectives.

SOFT/CRITICAL SYSTEM PERSPECTIVES

A soft or critical approach rests on the belief that systems constitute multifaceted, dynamic situations that are impossible to understand through mere observation. Actors in the system have different worldviews, priorities, vulnerabilities, preferences, power, and objectives. Important aspects of systems may not be observable. Boundaries of concern will need to be interrogated and negotiated. Joint learning matters much more than applying and advancing existing knowledge and expertise. These states of affairs are often called "messy" or "wicked" for a reason.

Frustrated with the inadequacy of hard system approaches, the management scholar Peter Checkland has pushed the development of soft system methods grounded in more modest goals. He recommends asking questions such as: Can we generate alternative situations that people with different roles, status, and preferences can live with, even if those situations are not ideal from their perspective? Can we design change that is technically and culturally feasible and that does not trigger resistance that stifles progress? System researchers Michael Jackson and Werner Ulrich, among others, have extended soft system methods to situations characterized by conflict. Their critical system perspectives focus primarily on seeing the poor as citizens who need to be able to participate effectively in decisions that affect them. Critical perspectives seek to give voice to the marginalized and the silenced, and to balance this inquiry with pragmatic decisions to work with the willing and to do what one feels is just, rather than seeking to create a "utopia in which no inequalities exist."[9]

Designed soft/critical system perspectives | Sekem, an organization founded in 1977 that I have followed over the past 15 years, offers a good example of this archetype.[10] To address Egypt's environmental and social problems, Sekem designed an open community for people to see and experience a different reality for themselves, to slowly form an opinion about alternative futures, and to collectively—in a safe environment—reflect on their own lives and the norms and habits that contribute to social dysfunction. Sekem developed a desert oasis that was beautifully landscaped with artistic touches and had a large amphitheater, plentiful shade trees, and flower gardens at every turn. "I wanted beauty and grace not just in addition to the companies, but as an integral part from the start, spreading its influence over everything," says Sekem's founder, Ibrahim Abouleish. Sekem enabled people to express their individualism, to deliberate about their problems and ambitions, and to form a consensus about how to relate to one another and the natural environment. Over time, people who entered the Sekem world formed a community that contrasted starkly with the complex reality of Egypt—the system Sekem intended to transform. Sekem now acts as a mirror showing Egypt that it can enact a desirable future and new possibilities today; its bold vision has become a welcome symbol of pride and ambition against a backdrop of pessimism and hopelessness in the rest of Egypt.

Organic soft/critical system perspectives | Co-Impact supports an effort in Bihar, India, led by JEEViKA, the State Rural Livelihood Mission, to train vulnerable households to engage in business activities in rural communities by applying the graduation approach, an established development template for addressing extreme poverty. My lab's own research in the rural villages of Odisha, India, reveals an environment where people continue to be marginalized and abused because of their gender and designated caste and excluded from participating in economic activities. In this system, influential actors may resist efforts to change norms and power structures. Whether JEEViKA succeeds in such an environment may also depend on how it balances hard system assumptions with soft/critical system perspectives that enable people to explore their tensions and find productive ways of behaving and relating. JEEViKA presents a fascinating test case for understanding this system archetype in the coming years.

System perspectives remind us to hold off on reaching for solutions. Instead, they encourage us to invest more time and effort ...

A GENERAL ARCHITECTURE OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Each archetype I have reviewed constitutes a limited perspective that may reduce the potential of practitioners to enact effective interventions. Hard perspectives tend to ignore social complexity and underestimate the potential of local wisdom, resources, commitment, and ownership. Soft/critical perspectives often seem like utopian efforts that are incompatible with our pragmatic tendencies.

To bridge these divides, I propose a general architecture of social systems that comprises three dimensions. (See "The Architecture of Social Systems" on page 45.) Those who intend to adopt a system perspective need to pay attention to:

The **situation space**, the state of affairs in a situation of concern: What are the objective conditions in which people find themselves that offer opportunities and impose constraints upon human beings? What are the dynamics of change of a situation?

The **behavioral architecture**, the observable and unobservable forces at work that generate the characteristics of a situation: What are the economic, cognitive, normative, and power/political factors that enable and constrain people's thinking and acting? How does this architecture create situations of concern and their dynamics of change?

The **problem space**, the subjective interpretation and evaluation of whether a situation is troubling, and for whom: What are the nature and legitimacy of claims that a situation is a social problem that ought to be dealt with? How important is this problem compared with other problems and priorities, and who benefits and who suffers most?

The perspective I offer here integrates the objective assumptions of hard system perspectives (situation spaces) and the subjective assumptions of soft/critical perspectives (problem spaces). The third dimension of this system perspective, behavioral architecture, is the main target of system change and equally applicable to designed and organic systems.

The three system dimensions do not exist independently. They are perspectives—ways of seeing, exploring, and intervening in social realities. This architecture challenges the traditional assumptions about the existence of boundaries, which herein represent choices that depend on interests in or passions for certain populations, geographies, or problems. Boundaries may pragmatically reflect available resources and competencies. Boundaries may signify one's identity as a funder or implementer and where one draws the line of responsibility. As such, systems are situations of concern informed by the multiple perceived realities and interpretations of actors who seek to change the systems.

Let me explain each dimension in turn:

Situation space | A situation is a state of affairs of a system, the reality in which people find themselves. We can gather relevant facts about situations in terms of job opportunities, access to health or legal services, and abilities to participate in civic, economic, and political life. Situations also constrain people's choices—e.g., high levels of illiteracy, pollution, addiction, hunger, crime, or discrimination. The term "space" indicates that we choose to pay attention to a slice of social reality, a particular situation at the level of someone who is discriminated against, a community that suffers from health issues, or a whole country that is held back by an abuse of power.

The balance of opportunities and constraints determines the dynamics by which a system changes: Is a situation slowly improving, and can this upward trend be accelerated? Is a situation stagnant, so that we need to find ways of mobilizing a departure from the status quo? Is a situation deteriorating, and do we need to figure out how to stabilize it and then direct the dynamics of change toward slowly improving it?[11] By reflecting on these dynamics, we can become better informed about the priorities for designing an intervention and the ways in which we interact with systems.

Situations and observable facts present a superficial view of reality that can tempt us to take problems for granted and to apply ready-made solution templates, such as microfinance or smartphone-based apps. This attitude motivates reaching for shiny new technologies that may not substantively address the problem or that have unintended consequences. Consider, for example, the current tensions over Zipline, a California startup that uses drones as an efficient mechanism for getting medical supplies where and when they are needed in countries such as Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda. Despite the drones' success, health professionals in those countries have also criticized their use, claiming they are expensive and deprioritize the development of other aspects of an effective health system.

System perspectives remind us to hold off on reaching for solutions. Instead, they encourage us to invest more time and effort in creative ways of exploring and appreciating the architecture of situations in a specific context and the various perspectives that local stakeholders have. System work is akin to identifying the essential pieces of a puzzle, understanding how systems are configured to do what they do, and only then devising pathways toward generating a different configuration that everyone sees as an improvement.

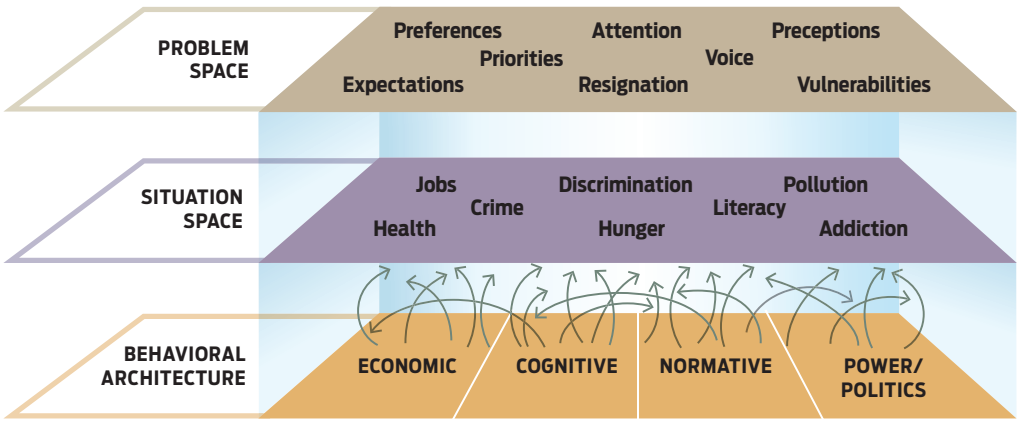
Interventions to improve situations face two fundamental challenges. First, many aspects of social systems are not directly observable. For example, beliefs, values, ambitions, power, and dependency structures often remain hidden within the realm of behavioral architectures. Second, people as actors in systems perceive very different realities. They may, for example, disagree about whether a situation is a problem and for whom, or about how important or urgent the alleged problem is. These aspects reside in problem spaces.

Behavioral architecture | Behavioral architectures are those parts of systems that cause situations to be a certain way. Exploring behavioral architectures entails understanding individuals and their relationships to other people, to institutions, and to the physical and natural environment. Accounting for the four dimensions of behavioral architectures—the economic, cognitive, normative, and power/politics dimensions—offers insights across several system levels: individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, and societies.[12] This account helps explain behavioral patterns such as competition, cooperation, exclusion, dominance, and abuse.

For example, consider how powerful elites in a village can exclude certain groups from par-

The Architecture of Social Systems

Adopting a system perspective requires analyzing a situation across three dimensions.



ticipating in village decisions. Norms, traditions, and enduring power and dependency structures that maintain persistent inequality in that village often shape this behavioral architecture. The four dimensions of behavioral architectures generate a creative tension between people's individual aspirations and their social context and material environment. This context influences what they can and cannot do. By examining the behavioral architecture, we can also more easily identify stakeholders who are instrumental to or can block change efforts, such as influential local champions, status-sensitive leaders, and powerful resisters. Organizations I have researched often make progress only when they find ways to unearth the norms, cognitive and economic abilities, or roles and dependencies in which the people they care about have been socialized.

System change requires that we intervene in behavioral architectures (causes), not situations (symptoms). This perspective will help to slow us down, for two reasons. First, important aspects of behavioral architectures are not directly observable. Becoming aware of them and understanding them requires that we get close to the situation of interest and that we establish trust and rapport with stakeholders. Only then will they start sharing aspects of situations and problems that are not readily visible to us, such as the sources of their vulnerabilities and the ways in which they are abused, marginalized, and excluded. This effort often requires doing things that are not in line with an organization's mission. For example, IDEO.org and Marie Stopes International discovered that addressing the troubling situation of unplanned teen pregnancy in Zambia required investments in unrelated activities, such as opening a nail salon, to build rapport with young girls. Over time, this judgment-free environment enabled the girls to address uncomfortable and contested topics, such as contraceptives and the reasons for their limited adoption.

Second, different behavioral architectures can generate situations that seem similar. We therefore need to suppress our desire to rely on our experience from other contexts, lest we apply familiar situation archetypes that are not at play in the situation at issue. Instead, we must understand the specific behavioral architecture that gives rise to a particular situation of interest. This variance of architectures across seemingly similar situations is what often derails efforts to replicate a solution in different contexts that appear similar on the surface.

Understanding the link between behavioral architectures and situations is central to systems perspectives. But to be effective, we also need to explore how people interpret the same situation differently. Differences determine who will support, resist, benefit, or suffer from change efforts and which pathways of change we can effectively explore.

Problem space | Problems do not exist objectively. We can think more productively about social problems by reflecting on the nature and legitimacy of claims that a situation is indeed troubling and ought to be dealt with.[13] People, even within close communities, may hold very different personal images of the world and the situations they find themselves in. People differ in their attitudes, motivations, sense of role or purpose, perceptions, beliefs, expectations, and habits. Judging a situation as problematic based on one set of values and expectations may not necessarily match the perception of local stakeholders.

Situations always reflect asymmetries in vulnerabilities and how benefits are distributed. Those who are suffering from a situation often coexist with those who benefit from it. Any change to sustained situations, no matter how troubling to some, is likely to be met with resistance. Recent soft- and critical-system practices focus on engaging stakeholders in situations of concern to make space for articulating their differences and how to overcome them.[14] This inquiry aims to unearth the multiple perspectives that people bring to a situation, to make explicit differences and sources of misunderstanding and conflict, and to explore tensions and contrasting perspectives constructively and intentionally.

Delaying the resolution of tensions, rather than enacting premature and temporary compromises, can often be a source for creative solutions. Soft/critical approaches seek to develop the potential of people by working with them, rather than "for" them, and to give them a voice in defining and owning their own solutions, rather than imposing solutions on them. The emphasis of implementers is not only to resolve differences but also to unearth local wisdom and to mobilize the resourcefulness of the poor. The focus is not to "solve" the poor's problems or to "reengineer" their systems but to co-produce, in small doses, a positive trajectory of change.

There are no magical objects or forces in systems or powerful levers that we can pull. There is simply a complex social reality.

TAKING SYSTEMS SERIOUSLY

One important argument follows from this overall system architecture: There are no magical objects or forces in systems or powerful levers that we can pull. There is simply a complex social reality. Whenever we refer to a social reality, we always refer to a system, because all individuals, social situations, groups, problems, and power relations are naturally parts of systems. Just using the term "system" without changing the mindset with which we approach troubling situations offers no benefit in terms of explanatory power or intervention design.

A system perspective also implies the coexistence of multiple realities and the need to explore and resolve subjective differences. But sociologists have warned us against falling victim to a naive subjectivism about social problems and against ignoring objective constraints that "affect both the choices that people make and the personal and social consequences of these choices," as sociologist Robert Merton wrote.[15] Taking situation spaces seriously requires grounding decisions in objective evidence. Taking problem spaces seriously reminds us that

not all important evidence is objective. Taking behavioral architectures seriously reminds us that not all evidence is visible. From this system perspective, designing intervention strategies in the comfort of one's home office is obviously an inefficient practice, with close to zero probability of success. Instead, system work requires that we get close to systems, even uncomfortably close. The willingness to enact this slow and difficult work of system change will test our resolve and reveal what we really care about: Do we seek to generate impact to demonstrate our effectiveness, or do we seek to serve communities and help them discover and create their own trajectories of change in their system?

The most important benefit of adopting the system perspective I have outlined may be the reduction and elimination of some pathologies in the philanthropic sector. They include an obsession with technical solutions, a sense of urgency to demonstrate large-scale impact, and the formulation of strategies with prespecified objectives designed by people who are not part of the target system. A system perspective helps us lower the risks of underspecifying problems and situations (a pathology that Johanna Mair and I have called "illusion of understanding") and of overestimating our ability to intervene in and change situations for the better (a pathology we called "illusion of competence").[16] These pathologies fuel high levels of enthusiasm and ambition; witness the current wave of big-bets philanthropy. But a widening gap between ambition and competence is all too often a recipe for disaster.[17]

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

How do we get better at the hard work of system change? We urgently need more focused research and we need to capture more perspectives and voices from the Global South. This article is a living document that I intend to develop, correct, and expand as I gather new insights. Questions that my research will address and that I hope *SSIR* readers will help explore in the coming years include: How do we enter and interact with systems effectively? For which types of situations are the assumptions of the four system archetypes most appropriate? What are practices that help unearth and map the dimensions of behavioral architectures? How do we build platforms for open communication and for exploring tensions and conflict? How can we adopt the tools of soft- and critical-systems practitioners for philanthropic work? How do we support and stabilize intermediate stages of system change and system transformation processes or risk system collapse?

Adopting system perspectives requires deep reflection and decision making about important aspects of our organizations. This is true no matter whether we are funders, implementers, or both. Following are three conversations that organizations considering system perspectives should have with all their staff. This discussion can launch them into inquiry about their intentions and improving their competencies in system change and thus effective philanthropic work in general.

Mission and Identity | What situations or problems do we pay attention to, and why? Where do we draw boundaries around situations, and what are our limits of responsibility as agents of change? How do we develop our roles, identities, ambitions, and capabilities? What does it mean to adopt a system lens, and what results do we expect? Which of our attitudes and mind-sets will we need to change?

Competencies | How do we evaluate progress, and which areas will we need to master? What if our knowledge and expertise matter little in systems—with what should we replace them? At what pace do funders make decisions about funding? Do we continue to drive rapid cycles of consecutive grantmaking, or should we align the pace of grant cycles with our ability for reflecting on outcomes and learnings from previous grants? How do system perspectives change our relationships with our grantees? Which support structures and competencies do we need to build? How do we develop a practice of soft/critical system approaches? Should this practice become a separate dedicated unit or the way we work in general?

Perspective | How do we explicitly or implicitly look at the world? Do we believe that systems "exist" in the real world? Do we prioritize hard or soft/critical perspectives for our work? Are we committed to a three-dimensional architecture of the sort that I have sketched? If not, what is our way of looking at the world or at systems, and what validates this perspective?

The idea that systems perspectives ideally slow us down is not just cute. Leaders of interventions need to find ways of managing these prolonged learning journeys and to enable the accumulation of deep contextual knowledge to justify their investments. Because this slow approach may not deliver "results" in the short run and thereby risks losing support from staff, funders, and the communities that organizations work with, we must find ways to sustain motivation and a sense of progress. Reducing the pace of decision making, of driving change, of disrupting social orders, and of fueling our appetite to report numbers that demonstrate how good, how smart, and how responsible we are may well be the most useful contribution to making philanthropic work more effective. ■

Notes

1 Christian Seelos and Johanna Mair, "Mastering System Change," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2018.

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4 C. West Churchman, *The Systems Approach*, New York: Delta/Dell Publishing, 1968.

5 Magnus Ramage and Karen Shipp, *Systems Thinkers*, London: Springer, 2009.

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7 Michael C. Jackson and Paul Keys, "Towards a System of Systems Methodologies," *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, vol. 35, no. 6, 1984.

8 Russell L. Ackoff, *Ackoff's Best: His Classic Writings on Management*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999.

9 Michael C. Jackson, *Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for Managers*, Chichester, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2003.

10 Seelos and Mair, "Mastering System Change."

11 *Ibid.*

12 The four dimensions are described in much more detail in Seelos and Mair, *Innovation and Scaling for Impact: How Effective Social Enterprises Do It*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2017.

13 Donileen Loseke, *Thinking About Social Problems*, New Brunswick, Canada: Transaction Publishers, 2008; Malcolm Spector and John I. Kitsuse, *Constructing Social Problems*, New Brunswick, Canada: Transaction Publishers, 2001.

14 Peter Checkland has created several practical tools and frameworks to facilitate this work; see also tools and frameworks created by Michael C. Jackson and by Werner Ulrich on critical and emancipatory system approaches.

15 Robert K. Merton, "The Sociology of Social Problems," in Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet, eds., *Contemporary Social Problems*, 4th ed., New York: Harcourt, 1976.

16 Seelos and Mair, *Innovation and Scaling for Impact*.

17 Seelos and Mair, "Mastering System Change."


NEWSPAPE

PHOTO BY CHARLES PHELPS CUSHING/ALAMY

The decline of local journalism in the United States is fueling a civic crisis. Philanthropy, government, and citizens must step in to save our communities. As someone who has funded a news startup in New York City, I suggest a path we can follow to renew our commitment to a vibrant press.

Eyes Upon the Street

BY JULIE SANDORF

A taxi swerved onto the sidewalk at the intersection of Fulton and Adelphi streets in Brooklyn's Fort Greene neighborhood and knocked over a pedestrian signal. This incident might be considered a story with a happy ending, since the only loss was the crosswalk post. But in a world without local news coverage, an accident averted is not a story at all, and neither, it turned out, was a traffic sign that remained broken for months afterward.

You would expect New York City to have moved quickly to repair the broken crosswalk light. After all, Mayor Bill de Blasio made preventing traffic deaths a top priority with his Vision Zero program, a comprehensive plan to make city streets safer through expanded enforcement, new signs, swifter repairs, and street designs. He announced his initiative just a few blocks from Fulton and Adelphi, an area of heavy and hazardous traffic, in 2014. In 2018, the city recorded only 200 traffic deaths, the lowest in a century, but the number of pedestrian fatalities, 117, grew from the previous year. Disappointed by this trend, de Blasio said he would do more.

Despite the mayor's promises, though, nothing happened with the crosswalk signal—except for the placement of an orange cone on top of the outcrop of wires where the light pole had been sheared away.

A busted traffic device may seem trivial, but it represents both a safety hazard and the community's festering frustration about whether anyone is even paying attention to their problems. It is just one tiny data point in a larger mosaic of civic crises that cities and towns across the United States are facing because of decaying infrastructure, lack of investment, fraying social services, political dysfunction, and public inattention.

In her 1961 classic, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs described how city life emerged from countless small relationships and residents' belief that decision makers understood them and their needs. She held that decisions about a city's development should be based on reality as observed on the street, not on theories or politics developed from afar. She famously described the importance of "eyes upon the street" to keep people safe. She meant this literally: pedestrians, shopkeepers, neighbors looking out their windows. But, given her profound commitment to observing city life accurately and then basing action on those observations, I think it's fair to extend her definition of watchful eyes to include journalists looking out for the neighborhood—and, by extension, whole towns and cities.

This inference brings me to one of the causes of our sustained civic crisis: the collapse of local news. Far fewer local journalists are working today in the United States than existed at the turn of the century. This is true even in New York, the capital of national media and the city I call home. This decline is much greater in the rest of the country, undermining our communities much like city planners,

ignorant of lived neighborhoods and blind to the ways cities really work, undermined urban life 60 years ago, according to Jacobs. She wanted planners to descend from their ivory towers and walk the streets. We need more reporters doing the same thing today. Either way, the missing piece is shoe-leather beat reporting: seeing, hearing, and even smelling what's going on block by block.

I want to discuss the collapse of local news coverage, what we can do to rebuild it, and why this problem is too important to be left only to people in the media, since journalists can't do it alone. This rebuilding is part of, although by no means all of, a civic-repair program we must pursue to restore the democratic promise of our cities and of our country.

NEWS DESERTS

The digital revolution has connected us in ways that no one could have imagined at the turn of the 21st century, reshaping how we purchase goods and services, how we seek and maintain friendships and intimate relationships, and how we communicate with each other. It has transformed the way we get news, what kinds of news we get, and how that content gets paid for. Under the traditional business model, newspapers cross-subsidize the cost of reporting with advertising and circulation sales. But the mass migration of ad revenues to the major tech platforms has upended that model. Google and Facebook alone capture almost 60 percent of digital ad spending in the United States and 77 percent in local markets, *The Wall Street Journal* reports.

Digital disruption has dealt the newspaper industry a devastating blow, according to data compiled by Michael Barthel, senior researcher at the Pew Research Center. In 2000, newspaper advertising revenues exceeded $48 billion. In 2009, they fell by almost 50 percent, to $27 billion, and by 2018, to $14.3 billion. Average weekday circulation numbers decreased from 55.8 million (print only) in 2000 to 29 million in 2018, a figure that includes both print and digital readers. The number of newsroom reporters dropped from 71,640 in 2004 to 39,210 in 2017, and media companies have eliminated nearly 60 percent of all newspaper jobs since 1990—more than in the depressed steel and coal industries.

The collapse of the old advertising model that supported journalism in the 20th century has been particularly destructive to local news. News deserts—a concept that would have been considered laughable a decade ago—are spreading like contagion and threatening the health, welfare, and civic vitality of small towns and big cities alike.

Almost 1,800 local newspapers closed between 2004 and 2018, leaving about 1,300 communities with no local news coverage.[1] The Gannett-GateHouse media merger, announced in August 2019, will be financed by burdening an already beleaguered business with $1.8 billion in debt and by slashing annual operating costs by upwards of $300 million. This step puts at risk more than 250 daily newspapers and hundreds more weekly and community papers located in almost every state in the country.

Midsize cities and larger metro areas are hardly faring better. Between 2012 and 2018, the median drop in circulation at metro papers such as the *Minneapolis StarTribune*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, and *Dallas Morning News* was between 41 and 45 percent, compared with an average 29 percent decline at the three preeminent national papers: *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Last May, the 182-year-old *New Orleans Times-Picayune* sold itself to its competitor and laid off all its staff, and *The Vindicator*, Youngstown, Ohio's, only newspaper, shut its doors on August 30, after a 150-year run.

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New York City's reign as the media capital of the world and its outsize population of almost 9 million residents does not render it immune to the ravages of the market failure that is devastating quality local journalism elsewhere in the country. Between 2013 and 2018, New York City lost more than 125 local journalists solely from the combination of layoffs, buyouts, or closures at *The New York Times*, the *Daily News*, *The Village Voice*, and *DNAinfo*. A survey of the *New York Times* Metro section documented a reduction in local stories per week from 153 in 2001 to 48 in 2017. The *Daily News* no longer employs a single beat reporter covering the outer boroughs, and *The Wall Street Journal* canceled its stand-alone Greater New York section in favor of much-trimmed-down coverage. By 2018, no one was covering the courthouses and the once fearsome city hall press corps was a mere shadow of its former self.

COSTS TO THE COMMUNITY

The decline of local coverage—a lack of eyes upon the street—leads to chronic civic problems. Jane Jacobs warned that one of the great destroyers of community was the shared feeling—and the reality—of not being listened to. One of her most powerful examples was an East Harlem housing project's forlorn plot of grass, which became a danger zone for its residents. A tenant explained:

> Nobody cared what we wanted when they built this place. They threw our houses down and pushed us here and pushed our friends somewhere else. We don't have a place around here to get a cup of coffee or a newspaper. … Nobody cared what we need. But the big men come and look at that grass and say, "Isn't it wonderful! Now the poor have everything!"

That painful cry of political abandonment can be heard across the country these days, even in New York. Last year, the comptroller's office issued a report highlighting the woeful state of playgrounds in New York City's public housing. In response, the Housing Authority (NYCHA) vowed to inspect all of its nearly 800 playgrounds within 90 days. It never happened. In fact, four months later, rusty monkey bars fell on top of two children at a New York City housing project in, yes, East Harlem.

It turned out that NYCHA has no record of inspections at this playground or at any other. "It's just ridiculous over there," said one grandmother, who has lived in this development for 30 years. "I love my grandkids. I never let them play there."

This past May, you could hear that same cry of abandonment at a city hall rally against pedestrian traffic deaths. Two years after the mayor said this topic was a priority, children were still dying under the wheels of buses. That streetlight in Brooklyn had been broken for two months. "Why does it have to take young people dying to fix a street?" asked a woman at the rally, whose son was killed by a Manhattan bus while crossing with the right of way.

In places that lack news coverage, when a traffic light falls or when a child is injured because her playground goes uninspected, nobody hears about it—and communities of common interest have an even harder time holding anyone publicly responsible.

A community is made up of shared moments, and local news is crucial for sharing these moments. If these moments are lost, we all lose. A dearth of journalists may be behind the crisis, but the problem is too important to be left only to journalists. The fabric of our communities is something we all have to take responsibility for, because the very future of our cities and towns is at stake.

This is not hyperbole. Recent studies have demonstrated this point. For example, one showed that the closure of local newspapers leads to an increase in municipal borrowing costs, because government expenditures go unscrutinized.[2] Another indicated that less local news coverage leads to the diminution of citizens' political knowledge and participation.[3] Cities with sharp declines in newsroom staffing had significantly reduced political competition in mayoral races.[4] And the decline in local news reporting has contributed to a hyperfocus on national politics and greater political polarization.[5]

The business model of subsidizing local news through advertising is dead. New business models require a broad mix of revenue sources.

Despite its importance, local news no longer scales commercially. This is a classic market failure; the private sector cannot meet a crucial community need. Philanthropy must step in to find new solutions, just as it has in the past with museums, libraries, and other cultural institutions.

We need a plan. Much like the public-private partnerships and community involvement that stimulated the revitalization of urban neighborhoods through the community development movement, we need to revitalize local coverage by building a new movement, of nonprofit journalism with a clear public mission shaped by business discipline and expertise. This means investing locally but thinking about building a critical mass of outlets that together demonstrate in markets both large and small the viability of new, noncommercial business models for local news. It means investing in technical assistance and expert guidance in building revenue streams, managing growth, developing audiences, and reaching out to communities. It means investing patient capital to restore an industry to sustainability so that it can serve the public.

I will be honest: This task is hard. I have just spent two years rounding up support for a new digital news organization for New York. I nearly gave up. But with the backing of a community-minded commercial media company and several fellow philanthropists, we launched our startup earlier this year, just in time to do something about that traffic light in Brooklyn.

A NEW VENTURE

The news organization that I helped launch is called *The City*. Its logo is a pigeon called Nellie, named after the trailblazing investigative reporter Nellie Bly, who had herself committed to the state asylum on Blackwell's Island (today's Roosevelt Island) in the late 19th century—a local story, for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, that became a national sensation. Bly's first-person account resulted in asylum reforms and an increased mental health budget.

The City's mission is to produce rigorously reported stories that reflect New Yorkers' concerns and experiences, connect people to the civic conversation, hold those in power to account, and ultimately drive action for public benefit. The newsroom is in a no-frills office in a ramshackle building in midtown Manhattan, but on any given day, reporters are out on the streets more than they are at their desks. Led by New York veteran journalists such as editor-in-chief Jere Hester and deputy editors Alyssa Katz and Hasani Gittens, *The City* has a diverse 19-person editorial and reporting team that aims to reflect New York. They include beat reporters based in each of the five boroughs and Albany; senior-level investigative and enterprise reporters; data journalists; and staff responsible for visuals, community engagement, and social media.

The City is filling gaps by covering a defined set of beats (transportation, housing, immigration, criminal justice, education, health) with an "eyes on the street" approach. These beats must be fluid; for example, public housing, beset by lead and mold, belongs to the health beat as much as to the housing beat. Publishing 18 original articles a week on average, *The City* connects the five boroughs by looking for local stories that are meaningful to a specific community and can lead to bigger stories. It is breaking and doggedly following up on neglect, incompetence, and outright corruption while demanding responses to issues that affect a wide breadth of New Yorkers.

A few days after one of *The City*'s reporters started asking about the streetlight, and the day after it published a story, complete with a picture of that sad orange cone, a new signal was at last installed. The publication also broke the story about the city's failure to inspect playgrounds. The reporter delved into NYCHA's own data and found an absence of actual inspections of playgrounds at public-housing sites.

This type of coverage is clearly still in demand. In just its first month of operation, stories from *The City* have been republished 23 times and quoted 143 times by 43 separate media organizations. *The New York Times* cited reporting by *The City* in an editorial criticizing the taint of conflict in Mayor de Blasio's fundraising. And *New York* magazine's Intelligencer partnered with *The City* to give a national platform to its coverage of the death of Layleen Polanco, a transgender woman who had been sent to Rikers Island city jail on misdemeanor charges because she couldn't make $500 bail. She died on her ninth consecutive day in "punitive segregation"—the phrase the corrections department uses for solitary

confinement. In response, department officials emptied the women's solitary unit.

These exchanges show how a healthy news ecosystem should work, with various independent news operations building on each other's work and fueling local conversation. If we want to maintain it, we need to find new ways to support it. For the foreseeable future, more of our local news will have to come from organizations like *The City*, whose model is nonprofit service journalism. The old business model of cross-subsidizing local news primarily through advertising is dead. New business models require a broad mix of revenue sources.

Take, for example, *The Texas Tribune*. Since its founding in 2009, the news organization has been among the most successful in proving the efficacy of this approach. Cofounded by Evan Smith, John Thornton, and Ross Ramsey, *The Texas Tribune* is a nonprofit, digital-first publication whose mission is to inform and engage Texans about public policy, politics, and issues to help them make better decisions in their civic lives. It launched with a staff of 17, an annual budget of just over $2 million, and $4 million in funding commitments from a diverse array of wealthy individuals, foundations, small donors, and corporate sponsors. Since its launch, it has become the largest statehouse bureau in the United States, hosting more than 50 events annually across the state. It also produces the Texas Tribune Festival, a nationally recognized event devoted to politics and policy in the Lone Star State.

Over the past 10 years, *The Texas Tribune* has raised $78 million and broadly variegated its revenue sources: 25 percent comes from foundations, 23 percent from individual donors, 19 percent from corporate sponsors, 18 percent from events, and 10 percent from members, according to its strategic vision. "It's all about revenue promiscuity," Thornton says of the successful growth and diversification of the organization's funding sources.

In developing its own business model, *The City* benefited significantly from following the path trod by the pioneers in the emerging nonprofit local news arena. This trail includes crafting an economically feasible budget that balances ambition with a realistic projection of the potential for local funding. It also requires an adequate "runway" of financial support—18 months to two years—to attract talented leadership and staff, demonstrate the impact of the reporting, and establish nonprofit viability through attracting a much wider array of revenue sources. Of the $10 million *The City* raised in its first year, approximately 65 percent came from five foundations, 30 percent from seven individual large donors, and 5 percent from small donors and corporate sponsors. *The City* anticipates that by the end of its third year, sources of revenue will be highly diversified, with a larger number of foundations contributing less than 50 percent, and corporate sponsors, large individual gifts, corporate sponsorship, and individual small contributions and memberships playing a much larger role.

FIVE SAVIORS

How do we use revenue promiscuity to reinvent local news? Let me address five different groups who are essential to its revival: philanthropists; news consumers; journalists and their media organizations; government; and the digital platforms, such as Google and Facebook, whose success is related directly to the market failure of local news.

Philanthropists | First, as demonstrated in the initial funding of such successful local nonprofit news operations as *The Texas Tribune*, *MinnPost*, *New Haven Independent*, *Voice of San Diego*, and *VTDigger*, among others, foundations and individual philanthropists have a vital and very specific role. When the market fails and critical services go wanting, philanthropy must step up as a loss leader to help finance the reinvention of the business of news as a public service. Philanthropic investment—alongside a clear business strategy that recognizes from the get-go the need to prove marketability by attracting as broad a range of funding sources as possible—is essential to nearly all successful nonprofits. "Performing arts organizations generally generate only one-third of their expenses from earned income," John Thornton says. "You wouldn't ask the symphony to fire the woodwinds just because it didn't sell enough tickets."

Reinvention of a viable local news industry requires providing the time and capital, and accepting a level of risk that simply does not exist in the commercial market. The task is left to philanthropy. For decades, the Charles H. Revson Foundation has supported media and public policy organizations that hold government institutions responsible, with a particular focus on New York City. Our immediate concern with the decline of local accountability reporting aligns with our mission and our long-standing values. Revson is smaller than the more famous media-supporting foundations. We have an endowment of around $172 million and allocate annual grants of $6-$8 million in four different subject areas: urban affairs, education, Jewish life, and biomedical research. Over the past decade, however, Revson has committed almost $8 million to strengthening local journalism in New York—an outsize commitment compared with our overall grantmaking.

During the two years we worked with our partners to launch *The City*, we drew from more than a decade of experience at 200-plus not-for-profit news outlets already operating around the country. We looked very closely at what has worked so far and what has failed. The good news is that the sector is growing, revenue streams are increasingly diversifying, and individual donors are making up larger proportions of revenue. State and local newsrooms account for about 50 percent of news nonprofits, covering a wide range of social, economic, and political beats.

One clear lesson from our research was that successful startups require money from multiple sources. Revson partnered with the Leon Levy Foundation, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, and other donors in staking *The City* to its $8.5 million in startup capital. Individual philanthropic donations from local civic and business leaders, such as Richard Ravitch, Rob Speyer, and Luis Miranda, signaled the potential for broader involvement from corporate sponsors and high-net-worth people. Since the organization's launch in April, it has raised an additional $1.5 million from foundation, individual, and corporate donors.

Imagine if every foundation devoted just 1 percent of its grantmaking to build nonprofit local journalism in this way. If we extrapolate from the Foundation Center's best estimates of US foundation giving in 2015, that would total about $620 million per year—well short of the $35 billion decline in news-industry revenue in recent years. But it is sufficient, if used smartly as venture capital, to seed nonprofit news organizations that can eventually restore the news ecosystem that has been lost.

Some of our nation's best philanthropic efforts have built great institutions, such as libraries, hospitals, and parks. Foundations can do the same for news. Whether a philanthropy's core interest is the arts, social justice, education, housing, or science, its concerns will only thrive in communities where basic information needs are served.

News consumers | Second, readers, viewers, and users must recognize that "nonprofit" does not mean "free." Covering the news costs money, whether the publisher's motive is civic or commercial. The Pew Research Center found that fewer than 15 percent of respondents to its poll had paid or given money to any local news outlet in 2018. When people tell me they love *The City* and read it every day, I explain that great local journalism requires great reporters and editors who should be paid decently for their service. I encourage them to become members of the organization—by donating as little or as much as they can. For $5 per month, the price of a latte, anyone can stake a claim to supporting this vital public service as a charitable contribution. A $5-per-month commitment from 20,000 New Yorkers would cover more than a quarter of *The City*'s current budget. Its formal membership campaign will launch in late 2019, six months after the site's launch, to give readers enough time to determine its value. And we're feeling optimistic—a simple "donate" button on the site has already yielded more than 600 members and generated more than $100,000 in revenue.

Journalists and media organizations | Third, journalists and news companies should moderate some of their competitive zeal. Their passion and drive are wonderful and still necessary, but so is cooperation. In fact, a partnership with a commercial enterprise gave us the confidence to launch *The City* in early April. That commercial publisher, New York Media (NYM), the parent company of *New York* magazine, provided *The City* with essential support, including computer systems, graphic design, and digital distribution. NYM saw *The City* as a natural, local complement to its national perspective, and *The City* saw an extraordinary opportunity to springboard from NYM's award-winning digital savvy and design expertise.

NYM has invested heavily in journalism of national scope, especially in coverage of Washington and Hollywood and in digital media, and has succeeded. But it sees the decline of local journalism as a problem for the industry and its own readership, and was eager to turn the tide. "When we saw the opportunity to provide support for a nonprofit journalism institution, one buffeted from the pressures of the digital advertising business, we jumped at the chance," NYM's editor-in-chief, David Haskell, says. "Pam [Wasserstein, chair and CEO of NYM] and Adam [Moss, former editor-in-chief of NYM] and I each considered it an honor to help. And we knew it would be a gift to our readers as well, to be able to point them to the work of our friends and hopefully, in the near future, showcase journalism created in partnership between the two institutions."

The City is seeking further partnerships that enable news organizations to focus on their strengths, following the sage advice of Jeff Jarvis, professor at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at the City University of New York, that in this era of strained budgets, newsrooms should do what they do best and link to the rest. *The City* has republished its articles in commercial outlets such as *The Queens Courier*, the *Brooklyn Eagle*, and *NBC New York*, and in nonprofit venues such as WNET/*MetroFocus* and WNYC, and its articles have been linked by dozens of community news sites, both nonprofit and for-profit. In turn, *The City* has republished reporting from other organizations, such as work on criminal justice from The Marshall Project and on education from Chalkbeat. *The City*'s reporters have also been regular guests on WNYC, and the public radio station also cohosted with *The City* a debate among candidates for Queens district attorney. Given the expense of local news and the loss of advertising revenue, no one publication can do it alone—a healthy news ecosystem requires a variety of voices partnering to report on a city as vast and as diverse as New York—from hyperlocal sites like the *West Side Rag*, *Bklyner*, and the *Norwood News* to borough-based operations and citywide outlets—for-profit and nonprofit alike.

Journalists and news companies should moderate some of their competitive zeal. Their passion and drive are wonderful, but so is cooperation.

Many other exciting journalistic partnerships are happening around the country, each reflective of its own community and journalistic assets. They include the Colorado Media Project, Resolve Philadelphia, the Texas Public Records Purchase, and the Detroit Journalism Cooperative. Each collaborative draws on the unique capacities and creativity of its own local news ecosystems to make the most of limited resources.

Journalistic organizations should also look beyond their own industry partners to the communities they serve. *The City* has just launched the Open Newsroom, a partnership with the Brooklyn Public Library, a trusted community institution whose mission of welcoming anyone and everyone to be well informed meshes with *The City*'s own mission. Open Newsroom will convene community meetings four times per year in each of six branch libraries to better understand how information finds its way into and through a community and to explore how to make the news, like branch libraries, an information source that reflects the communities it serves. The program launched with six sessions in three library branches this past summer, drawing hundreds of people who shared, among other things, how and where they get their news—and what news means to them.

Government | Fourth, government can support local journalism without violating journalistic independence and freedom of the press. The most obvious example is the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). Created by an act of Congress in 1967, CPB

channels federal funding to more than 1,500 locally owned public radio and television stations.

But more recent actions highlight new possibilities. Last year, for example, New Jersey committed to dedicating millions of dollars from the sale of two public television licenses to establish a nonprofit news incubator called the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium. The legislature and Governor Phil Murphy initially agreed to $5 million but, because of budgetary issues, have dedicated only up to $2 million. And in May 2019, Mayor de Blasio issued an executive order requiring that "all agencies of the City of New York shall ensure that, by the end of fiscal year 2020, and for every fiscal year thereafter, at least 50 percent of their annual print and digital publication advertising spending is going toward community and ethnic media outlets." In an annual media advertising budget ranging from $10 million to $20 million, a multimillion-dollar infusion of ad buys for local, community, and ethnic media will not only target communities that can benefit most from the ads but also help create sustainable community news operations—assuming the money is distributed reliably, without favoritism.

Another novel idea surfaced this past July in a white paper by a committee of academic experts led by Guy Rolnik, a professor at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.[6] It recommends public funding for legitimate journalistic organizations by allowing the IRS to enable every tax filer, via an income tax checkoff, to donate $50 to a favorite news outlet, with potential preferential treatment of local news. Although such an initiative could cost the federal government $13 billion annually, similar programs of tax-funded vouchers have been tried for campaign finance contributions. The mechanism here is clear; the question is whether the political will to try it exists.

Digital platforms | Finally, we should address the profiteering of digital media companies at the expense of news organizations. I suggest as a model the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA). Enacted by Congress in 1977, CRA was a much needed response to massive disinvestment and redlining by banks in urban neighborhoods across the country. The market had failed in these communities, and CRA required banks receiving deposits from those communities to reinvest in them. CRA investments have played a central role in the rebuilding of once-hollowed-out communities, and have also contributed to banking balance sheets.

Today we face a similar problem of disinvestment in the community through digital platforms taking advertising dollars away from local news outfits. According to a recent study by the News Media Alliance, Google's revenue from news content on Google Search and Google News is estimated at $4.7 billion. Moreover, a recent article in Nieman Lab reports that Facebook is a "server of information to two-thirds of American adults, and 50 percent of its users want to see more local news." Google and Facebook do not produce local news content but profit mightily from it through digital ad revenue and through their users' freely sharing that content produced by others. A CRA for local journalism would divert a slice of digital platform profits to invest in local news content creators.

Our nation's great nonprofit institutions rely on a mix of public, private, and charitable funding. We need to be creative about ways to use public funding to encourage all types of investment in local journalism. Revenue promiscuity will go a long way toward maintaining editorial independence—the more revenue sources, the less reliant an organization is on any one source, including public sources.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Still in its infancy, *The City* has enjoyed a promising launch. Its journalists broke a significant number of important local stories in their first three months. For example, they revealed that at least a dozen workers had been killed on the job in New York's booming construction business, yet only one of those deaths was properly reported to city agencies. To compound the problem, New York City and federal safety officials had different counts of the deaths. *The City*'s reporters also raised questions about the bidding process for a new ferry service, drawing the attention of the city comptroller and city council. They aggressively pursued the conflicts of interest in the mayor's fundraising. And, yes, they got that light restored at the corner of Fulton and Adelphi.

But their job is never-ending. Soon after emptying the women's solitary unit at Rikers because of Layleen Polanco's death, the NYC Department of Corrections quietly reopened it, placing eight women detainees in punitive solitary confinement. We know this because *The City* reported the reopening.

Despite such important work, *The City*'s long-term success is far from assured. In sharing a bit of what we have learned so far, I hope to encourage others who are taking the same risks in communities across the country or are considering it. We need you to do it. So far, nonprofit news organizations are nowhere close to restoring the number of reporters or the amount of news coverage that newspapers have slashed. But rays of hope exist. The Knight Foundation's $300 million commitment to local journalism has sprouted new initiatives, such as the American Journalism Project—a venture philanthropy nonprofit for local news—and Report for America, which places young talent in local news rooms. Knight Foundation and the Democracy Fund are also supporting organizations that are helping to build a more robust ecosystem for nonprofit local news, including the News Revenue Hub, the Institute for Nonprofit News, and NewsMatch.

Every community deserves news organizations looking out for it. What Jane Jacobs called the "first fundamental of successful city life" is still true: "People must take a modicum of responsibility for each other." Our job is to put more eyes back upon the streets. ■

Notes

1 See Penelope Muse Abernathy, "The Expanding News Desert," The Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media, School of Media and Journalism, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018, and Christine Schmidt, "Facebook Enters the News Desert Battle, Trying to Find Enough Local News for Its Today In Feature," *NiemanLab*, March 18, 2019.

2 Pengjie Gao, Chang Lee, and Dermot Murphy, "Financing Dies in Darkness? The Impact of Newspaper Closures on Public Finance," *Journal of Financial Economics*, forthcoming.

3 Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless, "The Decline of Local News and Its Effects: New Evidence from Longitudinal Data," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2018.

4 Meghan E. Rubado and Jay T. Jennings, "Political Consequences of the Endangered Local Watchdog: Newspaper Decline and Mayoral Elections in the United States," *Urban Affairs Review*, 2019.

5 Joshua P. Darr, Matthew P. Hitt, and Johanna L. Dunaway, "Newspaper Closures Polarize Voting Behavior," *Journal of Communication*, vol. 68, no. 6, 2018.

6 Guy Rolnik et al., "Protecting Journalism in the Age of Digital Platforms," report by the media subcommittee of the Committee for the Study of Digital Platforms, George J. Stigler Center for the Study of the Economy and the State, University of Chicago Booth School of Business, 2019.

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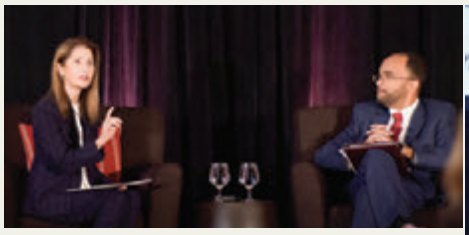
Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION Review

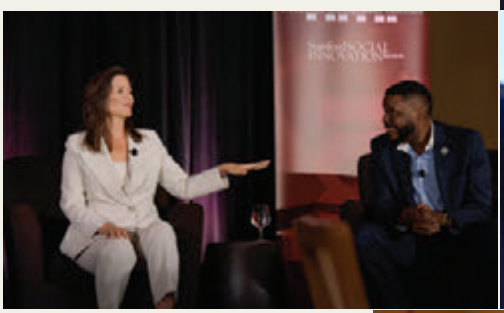
PEER to PEER

On September 11-12, 2019, *Stanford Social Innovation Review* hosted the 14th annual Nonprofit Management Institute "Transforming Anxiety into Active Leadership" at Stanford University



Kim Meredith, executive director of the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, and Tyrone McKinley Freeman, associate professor at the Indiana University Lilly Family School, opened NMI 2019 discussing the state of modern philanthropy and the true history of giving in the US.

Christian Seelos, codirector of the Global Innovation for Impact Lab at Stanford PACS, presented models that examined 'innovation pathologies' and organizational progress through innovation and scaling.

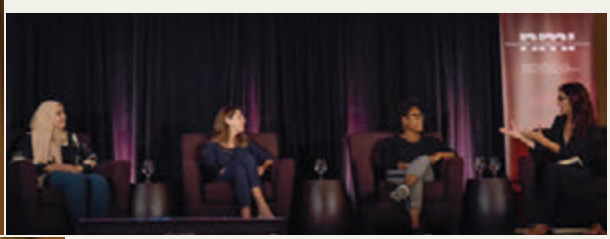


David La Piana of La Piana Consulting, Rinku Sen an author and strategist, and Bradford Smith of Candid introduced attendees to the upsides and risks of nonprofit mergers.

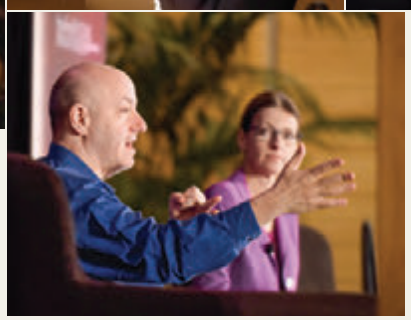
Doug Hattaway, president of Hattaway Communications, outlined the best ways to use the power of strategy, science, and storytelling to create long lasting and durable attitude change.

Oakland Mayor, Libby Schaaf, Stockton Mayor, Michael Tubbs, and Autumn McDonald from New America CA engaged in a fireside chat about local governments and nonprofits working together to address pressing challenges, and build successful partnerships.

Noted writer, director, actor, lecturer and story strategy consultant Jessica Blank provided attendees with an understanding of the neuroscience behind our response to story, an introduction to the structure that underlies all impactful stories, and how to use storytelling to trigger tangible and predictable emotional impact.



In this workshop lead by Leah Weiss, author, researcher, and lecturer at the Graduate School of Business at Stanford, attendees learned how to lead with acceptance and resilience using proven self-compassion and mindfulness techniques.



In this panel discussion, Marya Bangee from Harness, Nicole Starr from Participant Media, Courtney Cogburn from Columbia University, and moderator Jessica Blank shared ways that the entertainment industry has become an important partner to the nonprofit sector in helping to elevate discussion and motivate action around vital social issues.

Larry Kramer, president of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Charlotte Pera, president and CEO of ClimateWorks Foundation led a lively discussion about the impact of climate change on society and the work of nonprofits.

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VIEWPOINT
INSIGHTS FROM THE FRONT LINES

How to Think about Risk in Philanthropy

Foundation officers and endowment managers too often prefer exceedingly safe grants and investments because of misapplied principles, biases, and reputational concerns.

BY PAUL BREST & MARK WOLFSON

How should philanthropists think about risk when making grants? Suppose that your foundation is focused on Ebola. A new version of the deadly virus has emerged. In addition to being highly contagious, the virus mutates quickly, so if a vaccine were developed against next year's version, it would not be effective the following year.

Your foundation is willing to spend its entire grants budget of $10 million next year on one of the following projects:

- You can save 50,000 lives for certain by investing all your funds in protective suits.
- You may save one million lives with a probability of 10 percent by funding vaccine research. But the vaccine's low likelihood of success means there's a 90 percent probability that you won't save any lives at all.

What would you advise?

People intuitively assess everyday personal and financial decisions by considering the potential benefit of the outcome along with the likelihood of the outcome's occurring. If you were risk-neutral, you might bet $1 on a game if you had a 50 percent chance of winning $2. In fact, most people exhibit risk aversion in personal and financial decisions, and would not risk losing $1 unless there was a 50 percent chance of winning significantly more than $2.

With this background, let's look at the foundation's Ebola decision. A $10 million allocation to vaccine research is expected to save 100,000 lives (one million times 10 percent), twice as many lives as an allocation of $10 million to protective suits. If your objective is to maximize the number of statistical lives saved, option two is the better choice.

Donors are often confused about the appropriate levels of social risk and reward they should target in their philanthropy. They tell us they should bring the same risk aversion to *philanthropic* decision making that they display in their *personal investment* decision making. This is wrong.

THE BIAS BEHIND RISK AVERSION

Risk aversion is sensible in personal investments because losing most of your money impairs your quality of life far more than you would benefit by increasing your net wealth by even a large amount.

The general point is that the marginal utility of additional wealth or consumption is diminishing. To see this, imagine how much pleasure you'll get from eating a burger when you are really hungry. Then imagine how much *incremental* pleasure you'll get from eating a *second* burger, and then a *third* and a *fourth*. How much more delight will you enjoy from that fourth burger after eating three? Not much.

ILLUSTRATION BY LEWIS SCOTT

Along similar lines, you may well prefer an investment that enables you to buy one burger for certain rather than one that offers a 50 percent chance of four burgers and a 50 percent chance of not being able to buy any burgers at all—even though on average the riskier investment buys *twice* as many burgers as the safe investment would. Economics captures this point by saying that diminishing marginal utility gives rise to risk aversion.

Now suppose you are deciding how to spend your philanthropic budget. Your goal is saving lives. You must choose between two strategies:

- Safe strategy: Spend the money to save one life with certainty.
- Risky strategy: Spend the same amount of money for a 50 percent chance of saving four lives, but a 50 percent chance of saving no lives at all.

In conversations with philanthropists and business school students, we have found that many of them mistakenly choose the safe alternative, partly because they draw on the familiar, but inappropriate, analogy of managing their investment portfolio. They treat potential lives saved the same way they treat potential outcomes of investments that fund personal consumption.

But unlike people's diminishing marginal pleasure in consuming burgers, there is little reason to value saving a second, third, and fourth life less than the first life. Indeed, the loss of an

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The authors would like to acknowledge helpful comments from David Kreps and James Patell.

entire community might be *worse* than the loss of its individual members.

Beyond the misplaced analogy with personal financial investments, psychological factors may also play a role. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin captured an important psychological insight when he said that a single death is a tragedy but a million deaths is a statistic. Studies show that we are willing to donate much more to save the life of one identifiable individual than a large number of people who can't be identified.

People also tend to choose the certain but less valuable outcome because of what psychologists term "regret aversion." If you save some lives for certain, you may never look back and think of the greater number of lives you might have saved. But if you take the risk and no lives are saved, you may regret the certain alternative not chosen. And it's not just their own regret, but others' criticisms, that they may anticipate.

Of course, nothing says you must prefer saving the greatest number of statistical lives. For example, suppose you can't bear the thought of dying without having made a difference. Then you may place far more value on saving one life for sure than on saving many lives without certainty. But at least consider the extent to which your preference is based on a misplaced analogy to financial decisions, on psychological biases, or on how you or others may assess your decision in hindsight.

ENDOWMENT STRATEGY

The connection between grantmaking strategy and endowment investment strategy may not be obvious, but the frameworks are surprisingly similar.

Suppose that, like the foundation addressing Ebola, your foundation has the single goal of saving lives through disease reduction. And suppose that your preferences, denominated in lives saved, are linear—that is, you place precisely the same value on the second and third life saved as you do on the first.

As we have discussed, these preferences imply that you should favor making a grant that has a 50 percent chance of saving four lives (and a 50 percent chance of saving none) over one that saves a single life with certainty. The risky strategy has twice the expected value as the safe one.

Now suppose that your foundation's investment manager faces a choice between two investment strategies: One earns an expected annual rate of return of 6 percent with a standard deviation (or risk) of 10 percent; the other earns an expected return of 10 percent with a standard deviation of 20 percent. In the choice above, investment risk can be halved by pursuing the safer strategy but at the cost of a 40 percent reduction in expected financial return.

If this were your personal portfolio, you might well select the lower-risk strategy: The value you attach to each additional dollar earned is less than the value you place on the previous dollar. The higher-risk strategy increases the probability of a terrifyingly large reduction in your wealth.

But an endowment manager choosing the safer investment strategy would not achieve the foundation's desire to maximize the expected number of lives saved. That would call for taking a greater risk to achieve a greater return, thus enabling the foundation to make larger grants and thereby save more lives.

Put another way, investment returns aren't of value per se. They are valuable only insofar as they enable you to do something—in this case, to make grants that, in turn, save lives. So, if your preferences over lives saved is linear, just as you should not be willing to sacrifice statistical lives saved in exchange for greater certainty over the number of lives saved, you should not be willing to sacrifice the expected level of return on endowment assets in exchange for reduced financial risk. Doing so simply ensures that you fail to pursue your stated objective of maximizing the number of statistical lives saved.

The major difference between personal and foundation investments is that the former finances personal consumption, while the latter finances welfare enhancements in the lives of others. The relative importance of return and risk are not generally the same in these two different contexts.

Personal and foundation investments also differ in that while you and your family can rely only on your personal investment portfolio, your foundation is hardly the only entity addressing Ebola and other deadly diseases; other foundations as well as governments are concerned with the same problem. The risk tolerance of the broader community is greater than that of any individual actor, and the diverse investment strategies of the different entities addressing Ebola create an element of diversification that reduces the societal risk. Both of these considerations make greater risk-taking desirable.

Nonetheless, you may value your own foundation's longevity. For example, your foundation may have organizational expertise in addressing deadly diseases that would be dissipated significantly if staff were terminated following a significant loss on endowment investments.

We noted earlier that you may suffer regret and be the target of criticism if a risky grantmaking strategy fails. The same is true of a risky investment strategy. Indeed, your investment staff may be concerned that a strategy, well-conceived in foresight, will look reckless in hindsight—to their professional detriment. This worry may lead them to choose less risky investment strategies to protect their reputations.

Finally, the investment staff may be concerned about the tax penalty imposed on jeopardizing investments—"investments that show a lack of reasonable business care and prudence in providing for the long-term and short-term financial needs of the foundation for it to carry out its exempt function," according to IRS guidelines. The prospect of such a tax on excessive investment risk is unfortunate, because a decision to take large risks may actually enhance the foundation's exempt function of saving lives. Nonetheless, you would be well advised to consult counsel before deciding to engage in what others might consider an overly risky investment strategy. ■

VIEWPOINT

Opening Public Contracting to Citizen Participation

A new European effort to clean up public contracting includes the salutary proposal of recruiting ordinary citizens as monitors.

BY MAHMOUD FARAG

Public contracting is much closer to your daily life than you imagine. The roadway you drive, the airport you frequent, the school textbook your child studies, and the medicine that patients at public hospitals use are just a few examples of how public contracting affects you and billions of others across the globe. Public contracting has many costs, a significant amount of which is hidden. Every year, government authorities across the European Union spend 14 percent of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP) on public contracting—more than €2 trillion ($2.24 trillion). Public contracting is the biggest corruption risk for foreign bribery, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. By 2030, close to $6 trillion could be lost annually to corruption, mismanagement, and inefficiency in the construction industry.

Civil society has been working for years to make public contracting transparent and accountable. In late 2017, Transparency International, along with its partners—Open Contracting Partnership (OCP); CoST—the Infrastructure Transparency Initiative; Hivos; and Article 19—launched the Clean Contracting Manifesto. The effort issues a call for action and articulates a common agenda for all actors interested in public contracting, including civil society, governments, and international organizations.

The manifesto calls for effective and meaningful participation by affected communities. Since the 1990s, experts have led civil society organizations' efforts on public contracting, and they have prioritized legal and technical review of documents and included little community engagement. This has been a mistake. In the short term, the participation of citizens boosts the democratic legitimacy of civil society and thereby puts more pressure on government authorities. In the long term, the participation of citizens in monitoring public contracting increases their civic awareness and interest in public affairs, which can counteract today's political apathy, especially among young citizens.

The work of ActionAid Italy to secure public participation in the Integrity Pacts (IP) project is one of many projects that Transparency International and its partners have been implementing across the European Union. Funded by the European Commission, IP brings together government officials, businesses, NGOs, and private citizens to try to establish a "civil control mechanism for safeguarding EU funds." Specifically, it is working on 17 large public contracts totaling almost €1 billion ($1.1 billion) in 11 EU countries to ensure that they are transparent and in the public interest.

ILLUSTRATION BY LEWIS SCOTT

The IP initiative demonstrates how civic engagement can further the cause of clean public contracting. By helping to monitor public contracting, citizens can reclaim their ability to hold their government accountable. Through understanding the impact of public contracting on their daily lives, citizens become more aware of the need for transparency and accountability beyond this particular project and public contracting in general.

CITIZENS DISCOVER THEMSELVES

The experience of ActionAid Italy shows that civic engagement is possible even in the least favorable conditions. Italy is way below the EU average when it comes to perceptions of corruption—its citizens see the country as more venal than the citizens of other European countries see their own governments. Italy has suffered from the infiltration of organized criminal networks in public contracting, and Italians have fallen into political apathy as a result.

Between 2016 and 2021, as part of the IP effort, ActionAid Italy is monitoring the public contracting and implementation of two major tourism projects worth €2 million ($2.22 million) in Sibari, Italy. The organization is pursuing this with two partners: Gruppo Abele, which has more than five decades of experience with citizen engagement; and Monithon, an award-winning initiative to monitor the implementation of public policies in Italy. Together they have educated citizens on public contracting, taken them on field visits to see the locations of both projects, guided them on how to judge whether a public contract is clean and what red flags to look for, and arranged

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For their extremely useful comments on an earlier draft, I would like to thank Paola Liliana Buttiglione, Cinzia Roma, and Claire Martin.

This article is based on work under the Integrity Pacts project, coordinated by Transparency International and 15 partners in 11 EU countries, with funding from the European Commission.

for direct meetings between citizens and government officials to discuss the process.

To prepare for citizen participation in the project, ActionAid Italy staffers did a lot of background work. They identified 300 local contacts who were interested in monitoring the public contracting process; spent a full week in the field meeting with people to explain the project and what citizen participants needed to do, and spent several hours on the phone conversing with interested people.

To overcome distrust and apathy, ActionAid Italy focused on building relationships and gaining trust. The process began by inviting citizens to discuss their struggles and share their stories. "The process of building relationships is long and requires patience," says Cinzia Roma, community engagement manager at Gruppo Abele.

Citizens' participation in the project took many forms. They attended webinars to build their knowledge base on public contracting and to know the project developments. They participated in "integrity schools," which train the participants to put the knowledge gained in webinars into practice. The capacity-building program sought to provide citizens with a basic skill set that included knowledge of legal transparency requirements and how to work with open data, how to read and understand procurement documents, and how to use spreadsheets and employ social networks and crowd-mapping tools. Participants in integrity schools also met with government officials and voiced their concerns and asked questions about the public contracting process. They also took part in civic monitoring labs to pass on the information they gained about public contracting to fellow citizens. Finally, they participated in field visits to witness the real-life impact of their work.

To ensure the commitment of citizen participants in monitoring the implementation of the two tourism projects, ActionAid Italy developed civic monitoring regulations that define the relationship between them and participating citizens and outline their mutual obligations and responsibilities. The regulations included, for example, a confidentiality clause, since some of the public contracting documents accessed are restricted by an agreement between the government and ActionAid Italy and are not accessible for the wider public under Italy's access-to-information law.

After their participation, citizens were interviewed on video to share their experiences. "Before participating in the project," one member says, "I did not know how to be a real citizen." Another participant says, "For years, citizens have perceived public works as useless and a mere waste of money, but by having access to the documents and with the Integrity Pacts methodology, one has a say in what is happening and what the government is doing." These accounts suggest that the short-term value of their participation in the particular public contracting process may be outweighed by the long-term value of behavioral changes that get citizens involved in public affairs.

DEMOCRACY AT ITS BEST

So far, the experience shows that engaging citizens in public contracting is worth it. In fact, participants have become more civically active generally. Some of them have started attending political rallies. Others participated in an ActionAid Italy campaign on gender-based violence and in a workshop on migrants and social inclusion. They are networking across Italy with other associations and groups committed to civic activism.

Participants have also moved on to monitor other public contracting projects. For example, two members are currently working on signing an agreement with the Calabrian municipality of Paola to monitor all public contracting projects. Other participants have drafted an agreement to be shared with the prefecture office of Cosenza, another city in Calabria, to adopt measures aimed at improving the quality of public services for citizens by, among other steps, applying Integrity Pact methods in public contracting. Citizen participants have shown increased willingness and capacity to monitor public contracting projects in the future. They have developed a growing confidence that uncovered wrongdoing will be investigated.

Creating avenues for direct interaction between citizens and public authorities is paramount. Such interactions and meetings add a human face to all the work that citizens do and offer an opportunity for both parties to build trust and collaborate. Through these meetings, citizens listen firsthand to public authorities about their plans and the challenges they face. Authorities also listen to citizens, who represent the wider constituency that will benefit from the project, about their concerns.

Managing the expectations and emotions of citizen participants is also important. Participants are volunteering their time and effort, and they expect the public contracting process to move forward as expected in a transparent and accountable way. When the public contracting authority did not give ActionAid Italy the opportunity to comment on the tendered documents in good time, in accordance with the Integrity Pact and monitoring agreement, citizens accused ActionAid Italy of protecting the authorities. The organization responded immediately to their concerns by hosting a webinar that clarified the terms of the agreement with the public authorities about their monitoring role and what ActionAid would do to alert authorities about any problems they found.

ActionAid Italy also organized social events. The legal and technical trainings on public contracting and the analysis of documents can be very boring. Informal gatherings can boost the overall experience and help participants to get to know each other and become comrades. It is essential to organize citizens into working groups so that they can collaborate well together and keep each other motivated.

By doing all this work, ActionAid Italy contributes to rebuilding the relationship between citizens and public authorities. This is about getting all those actors to speak and listen to each other, to trust each other, and to work collaboratively toward the public good. It represents democratic government at its best. ■

VIEWPOINT

Building the Field of Sustainable Development

To help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), foundations should apply last century's patient approaches to field building in international security.

BY SARAH E. MENDELSON

Not long ago, at the dawn of the internet age, philanthropy operated differently. News of grants traveled slowly, through the US postal system. Donors appeared more patient, less interested in instant measurement, and more committed to long-term investments, including in people.

I benefited from this era. In the 1980s and 1990s while I was in graduate school, major US foundations collaborated to jointly invest in the next generation of scholars as well as in academic institutions and ideas. They underwrote fellowships at world-class universities, where our networks grew to include people who would become friends and mentors for life; invitations to convenings around the world to help grow a new cohort of researchers and practitioners; and the time to develop expertise that ultimately informed efforts inside and outside government to shape policies. Their investments slowly but surely revitalized a field of inquiry with fresh topics and a greater diversity of researchers.

Contrast that with today. Pick up the latest *Stanford Social Innovation Review* and you see philanthropy dedicated to "big bets," "scaling up," "failing fast," "quick wins," "grand challenges," and "impact investing." These big-and-fast approaches all reflect the era in which we now live, but they may not be best suited to the challenges we currently face.

Consider, for example, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—17 global objectives to create a more equitable and viable planet by 2030. What if foundations applied the kinds of field-building exercises that they conducted in international security to sustainable development? What if, as part of their SDG portfolios, foundations were investing not only in quick wins but also in young people and educational institutions to develop the next generation of experts—what I call Cohort 2030?

As a beneficiary of such field building, I maintain that to grow the workforce that will advance the SDGs—particularly those associated with building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies ("the SDG16+ agenda")—foundations ought to bring back approaches they relied on decades ago.

THREE LESSONS

The SDGs represent a historic, multiyear process in which the international community identified the needs and the opportunities of a broadened agenda on sustainable development. That process, which my US Department of State and USAID colleagues and I participated in, included input from academics, governments around the world, civil society organizations, and, notably, millions of young people. (Perhaps it is no coincidence that the lead US negotiator through much of that SDG agenda-building process and my predecessor at the US Mission to the United Nations [USUN], Elizabeth Cousens, also benefited from the same field-building exercise in international security.)

As with the effort to broaden and diversify the field of international security, the SDGs, the framework adopted in 2015 by UN member states, will require a transformation in the training of young people. We need academic programs that break down the silos of those working, for example, in international development and those in domestic public policy. We are well past the post-Vietnam era that triggered the earlier field-building exercise but in perhaps an equally grave geopolitical moment. The scale of threats today to the global order, the polarization inside societies, the clashes between open and closed systems, the decline in democracy, and the crisis in human rights are potentially catastrophic. Achieving the SDGs will require ambitious new thinking developed through older, more patient approaches.

We fortunately know how the field-building exercise in international security unfolded. Among other published work on the topic, the MacArthur/Carnegie Group on International Security supported an influential 1984 study led by former Ford Foundation President McGeorge Bundy. Titled "To Make a Difference: A Report on Needs and Opportunities for Philanthropic Action in the Field of International Security," the report can be found today in The Rockefeller Foundation's archives. Scholars and the

ILLUSTRATION BY LEWIS SCOTT

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major foundations believed that the field suffered from a post-Vietnam hangover: It was unpopular; focused too narrowly on great-power relations; and overlooked the many transnational forces that would challenge global security, such as forced migration, climate change, and the role of technology.

Specifically, the intellectual history of the field-building exercise in international security yields three lessons for growing the cohort of leaders who will help advance the SDGs through 2030 and beyond.

First, redefining the field emerged then as a top priority for philanthropy. While the world has agreed upon a 2030 agenda, there is a lot of work to do to ensure that the field of sustainable development is better understood. Sustainability emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as primarily an environmental issue, and to this day, most people equate sustainability with environmental concern. The SDGs, by contrast, represent a total reimagining of development and sustainability. They are universal and apply to all of us—development happens everywhere—and they reflect a more complex, far-reaching definition of sustainability. To create a sustainable world, violence and corruption must be reduced, inequality must be tackled, access to justice must expand, and people must not be bought and sold. Today, sustainability is not only about energy and land use, just as international security is not only about nuclear weapons.

Second, recognizing the need for collective action exemplified that era of philanthropy. Around certain SDG clusters—those relating to climate, for example—donor dialogues and philanthropic collective action is occurring. This development is welcome, but it does not yet include, for example, the SDG16+ agenda. In fact, many philanthropies that have traditionally funded human rights work have stopped altogether or continue to invest in it but without aligning their work with the SDGs. In this way, they are missing the opportunity to broaden and refresh field building in human rights and social justice. On this issue of collective action, the Bundy report offers the following observation, which remains relevant:

> Foundations, like universities, governments, and even individuals, do not always find it easy to work well together when each in its own way would like somehow to be the best of its kind. Yet the history of organized philanthropy strongly argues that while honorable competition of this kind is understandable … competition based on mutual ignorance can often lead to avoidable inefficiency.

Third, patient philanthropy acknowledges the long game and focuses on generational change. Today's venture capitalization of philanthropy has happened in parallel with the rise of Silicon Valley and the global spread of information technology. Longer-term investments and patient philanthropy have largely given way to a desire to be seen as innovative, supporting technocratic solutions implemented with speed. But many of the problems we confront today related to peace, justice, and security do not lend themselves to quick or easy fixes. Fast philanthropy should be balanced by a renewed commitment to patient philanthropy to tackle fundamental, persistent problems. In particular, field-building an area of expertise and growing a new cohort requires extensive practice, patience, and support for multiple, iterative opportunities for intellectual and professional growth.

A GENERATION OF SDG LEADERS

Some of the big US foundations might well argue that they have not substantially shifted from long-term investments. In a recent newsletter, Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, notes the need to "invest in the architects and the architecture of progress—the individuals, ideas, and institutions that make change happen." The Carnegie Corporation continues to support networks of scholars and research at universities. No doubt there are other examples. Overall, however, the collaborative investments to educate a next generation of scholars and practitioners at a number of the world's leading universities and research institutes have largely fallen out of fashion.

Yet the slower, generational approaches have continued relevance in the 21st century, even if they do not immediately generate results. For example, a grant from one foundation helped me develop expertise in combating human trafficking that I applied more than a decade later to shaping new USAID policies. I eventually helped organize the first-ever session in 70 years on the issue at the UN Security Council, featuring a young Yezidi, Nadia Murad, who had survived enslavement by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 for her efforts to end sexual violence in armed conflict. Investments in young leaders can drive outcomes that do not show up on a dashboard or a results framework but shape US foreign or domestic policies decades later.

If foundations pivoted to patient philanthropy on the SDGs, they would include support for pre- and postdoctoral fellowships and create research consortia, as they did in international security. Universities need to be teaching and researching the broader concept of sustainable development embodied in the SDGs that transcends a narrow environmental focus—just as international security as a field grew beyond great-power rivalries and nuclear deterrence—and they may need a nudge from philanthropy to do so. For example, foundations could promote the next generation of human rights experts trained not only in the traditional legal frameworks that have dominated the field but also in the wide variety of economic and social rights that the SDGs seek to address.

In short, donors can help facilitate SDG literacy in universities in the United States and all over the world. By supporting collaborations among young scholars, practitioners, and universities, when 2030 arrives, we will have a greater chance to generate an "SDG effect" that will help to realize these global goals. If done robustly, it could include the growth of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, led partly by the Cohort 2030 that they helped develop. ■

VIEWPOINT

Artists in Local Government

Local government artist-in-residence programs must include opportunities for artists and public sector workers to collaborate on public sector innovation.

BY JOANNA WORONKOWICZ & JOHN MICHAEL SCHERT

In 1977, Mierle Laderman Ukeles became the unsalaried artist-in-residence for the New York City Department of Sanitation. The self-described "maintenance artist" became famous in this role with her *Touch Sanitation* project, which involved her shaking the hands of 8,500 city sanitation workers and saying, "Thank you for keeping New York City alive," while documenting her activities through photographs.

Ukeles' work is known as both political art *and* social practice art. Political art documents social and political systems, while social practice art relies on social engagement. Both share the goal of advocating for social change. Her work inspired New York City's Public Artists in Residence program (PAIR), which began in 2015. It matches artists with city agencies, so that artists can work "collaboratively" to "propose and implement creative solutions to pressing civic challenges."

Cities across the United States have or are starting artist-in-residence programs. They typically have artists work on projects within local government to enable them to use their creativity to find innovative solutions to public sector problems. For example, Boston's Artist-in-Residence (AIR) program states that as part of the program, artists have the "chance to exchange ideas and co-design civic practice proposals."

While Ukeles helped lay the groundwork for artists working in the public sector, critics have argued that her work was less about social change and more about her own artistic practice. Similarly, current versions of local government artist-in-residence programs typically stop short of figuring out how to induce social change by focusing too much on the artists' narrowly defined art projects. Often what is missing from these programs is the opportunity for artists to work directly with public sector workers on addressing public sector problems.

One of the motivations behind such programs is that artists are creative problem solvers and that they engender more creative environments. If this is true, then the presence of artists in the public sector could give way to more innovation. Local governments, by running artist-in-residence programs, should therefore enable artists to participate more directly in civic work, in order to see if they can stimulate innovation and spark social change.

ARTISTS, CREATIVITY, AND COLLABORATION

Artists may be accustomed to exercising their creativity solely through their artistic medium(s). But recent research on pairing artists with industry, as well as the popularity of artist-in-residence programs in both industry and government, suggest that artists possess general factors of creativity that allow them to work across domains.

For decades, researchers have debated whether creativity is domain specific or domain general. If it is domain specific, then an artist may be creative when practicing her art, but not when working in computer science. To be sure, people can be creative in more than one domain, but it is rare to find a polymath—someone who is highly creative in multiple domains. By contrast, if creativity is domain general, an artist who uses creativity when practicing her art can also exercise that creativity in unrelated domains.

Researchers have also recognized that there is a combination of factors that determine a person's overall creativity. The current consensus is that some factors of creativity apply only within domains while others apply across domains and are more generalizable.

The Amusement Park Theoretical (APT) model offers a convenient framework for understanding how creativity can be both domain specific and domain general by conceiving of creativity as a hierarchy of factors. The first level includes general factors, such as intelligence and motivation, which are necessary to any creative domain. The second level includes general thematic areas, such as arts, science, sports, and entrepreneurship. The third level includes more specific domains, such as music, visual arts, computer science, and psychology, that require specific skill sets. The fourth and final level includes micro-domains, such as haiku within poetry, Shakespeare within theater, and cognitive

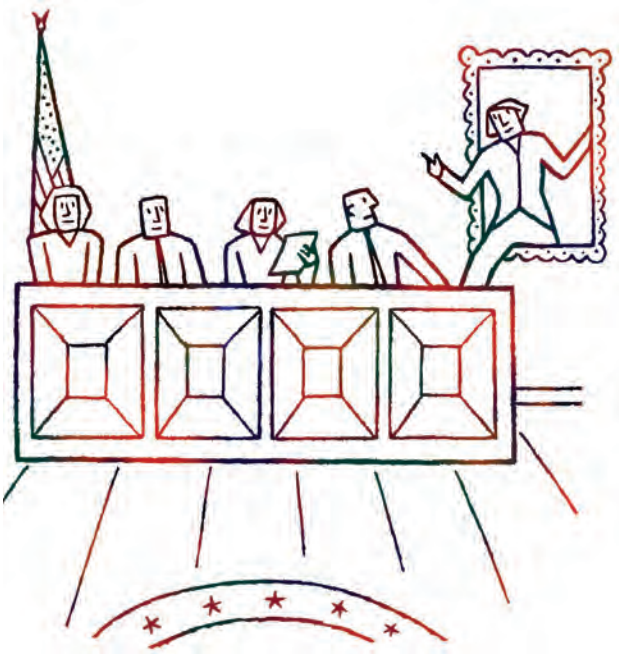

ILLUSTRATION BY LEWIS SCOTT

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We gratefully acknowledge the research assistance of Jessica Sherrod Hale (PhD candidate at the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University) in preparing this article.

psychology within psychology, that involve individual specialization and expertise.

The APT model helps explain why industry and government, through artist-in-residence programs, seek to embed artists in nonarts settings to help others working in those settings be more innovative. The idea is that artists possess general factors of creativity that enable them to work across domains. Some of these factors: adaptiveness to foreign environments, autonomous decision making and idea generation, capacity to deal with uncertainty and discomfort, and willingness to depart from norms and create new frameworks. Moreover, depending on their medium(s), artists can offer domain-specific factors of creativity that transfer across domains, such as spatial reasoning (visual artists consulting on urban planning projects) and analysis (choreographers codesigning public transit systems alongside engineers), and public speaking (actors coaching lawyers on delivering effective courtroom communications).

The creative capacity of artists to work across domains is only one part of the formula for understanding how local government artist-in-residence programs can help stimulate innovation. The other and perhaps more important part is the collaborative potential of artists working with public sector workers to find creative solutions to public sector problems.

There are several possible mechanisms for understanding whether including artists in collaborative problem solving can lead to more creative solutions. In general, research on team creativity suggests that the synergistic creativity of diverse teams might be greater than the aggregate of individual creativity, especially when accounting for inputs such as team composition and processes for problem solving. For example, the creativity of a team can be enhanced through job-relevant diversity; artists can contribute here by having different knowledge bases and methods of problem solving. Artists can also promote team conflict, prevent groupthink, and encourage the elaboration of ideas among team members—all of which can bolster team creativity.

Artists can also act as creative role models through demonstrating, supporting, and encouraging engagement by nonartists in the creative process. Artists can illustrate the benefit of taking risks and accepting failure—in effect helping to create a safe space that is conducive to creativity.

PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION

To get the most from artists in advancing public sector innovation, it is not sufficient simply to allow them to participate. Local government must become receptive to finding new ways to design and implement policies and to provide public services, through either product or process enhancements.

While the term "innovation" is not often used when describing public sector work, innovation does take place within local government. Many city governments create departments of innovation to emphasize its importance in the public sector. Furthermore, the term "innovation" might have a different meaning in the context of the public sector. Whereas private sector innovation often has to do with delivering economic benefits, public sector innovation goals often include improvements in the quality of production or delivery of public services.

The practice of introducing artist-in-residence programs in local government is an innovation in and of itself; however, the application of integrating artists' abilities in public sector work is still relatively foreign. To date, there are too few examples of artists working with public sector workers in finding innovative solutions to public sector problems.

Nevertheless, there is ample opportunity to understand the role of artists in public sector problem solving. First, existing local government artist-in-residence programs can be a vehicle for discovering the transferability of artist skill sets to the public sector. Given the newness of many of these programs, there is still flexibility and leeway in program design and implementation. Programs could incorporate initial training periods when artists work within a specific local government department and become oriented with the methods and processes for how that department functions in delivering public services. After this initial period, artists could propose a project that addressed an apparent public sector problem with an explicit goal of providing a solution.

Alternatively, artists could be matched with local government departments with corresponding creative needs. For instance, in 2015, Los Angeles named oral historian and artist Alan Nakagawa the city's first creative catalyst and tasked him to help the Department of Transportation with its Vision Zero initiative to eliminate traffic deaths by 2025. Nakagawa has attended DOT meetings, helped officials with their communications to the public, and worked with local safety advocates to raise public awareness. This type of approach could ensure that residencies are focused on public sector and policy-related outcomes, as opposed to outcomes solely related to artistic work.

Second, researchers should study the role of artists in public sector innovation. The Arts, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation Lab, a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, is currently analyzing data from running experiments on collaborative problem solving in the public sector. These behavioral experiments are meant to test the effect of including artists in teams of public sector workers tasked with proposing innovative solutions to public sector problems. Coupled with programmatic efforts, the results from these experiments can help illustrate whether the public sector has something to learn from artists in the way of innovation.

Most important, the opportunity to discover whether pairing artists with the public sector can be mutually beneficial is contingent on allowing artists and public sector workers to step outside of their prescribed occupational boundaries and work in roles that are unrelated to their specific domains. It might just be that art is universal, not to the extent that anyone can do art, but that art can be applied in universally useful ways. ■

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REALIZING DEMOCRACY

This supplement to *SSIR* was funded by the FORD FOUNDATION as part of the REALIZING DEMOCRACY project.

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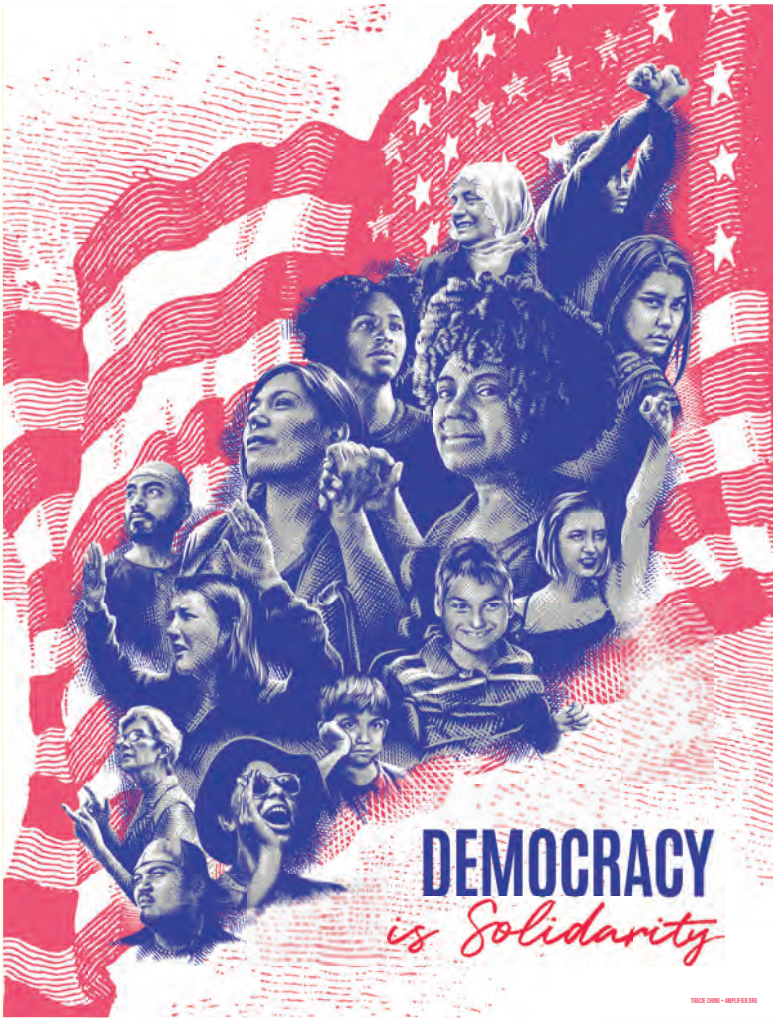

ART BY TRACIE CHING

The artwork for this series was commissioned by Amplifier, a design lab that builds art to amplify the voices of grassroots movements.

Art on the previous page by
THOMAS WIMBERLY

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Realizing Democracy

As long as it is more profitable to rig the rules than play by them, our better angels are unlikely to thrive.

BY K. SABEEL RAHMAN

We are facing a moment of crisis and reinvention in American democracy. But the current crisis is not limited to disagreements about ethics, corruption, executive power, or the skewing of election results. The crisis of American democracy is a deeper, more chronic one arising from systemic racial and gender exclusion, entrenched economic inequality, and technological and ecological transformations that undermine dreams of collective action and inclusive shared self-governance. Democracy has always been an aspirational ideal—one that, in practice, American politics has consistently failed to realize.

In past times of crisis, American democracy has undergone radical and often constitutional transformation. The Civil War and the efforts to eradicate slavery led to Reconstruction and its transformational push for democracy, racial equity, and economic freedom. The inequities, insecurities, and new forms of corporate power arising from the Industrial Revolution provoked the rise of Progressive Era social movements and the institutional and constitutional reforms of the New Deal. The Civil Rights Movement sparked a "Second Reconstruction" of expanded rights and democratic institutions. Now, we are similarly in a unique moment of possibility, renewal, and reinvention.

The essays in this supplement to *Stanford Social Innovation Review* speak to an increasingly shared understanding among policymakers, civil society leaders, and scholars that democracy reform today must address these underlying systemic roots of exclusion and inequality. This means democracy-reform policies must be connected to parallel fights around rebuilding civil society, building an inclusive economy, and reinventing the practice of governance itself. We will explore why our democracy is in crisis today, what the emergent experiments are, how new approaches show promise in tackling the roots of those problems, and how social change practitioners can advance a more transformative, radically inclusive vision of democracy that addresses structural problems and raises new possibilities.

K. Sabeel Rahman *is the president of Demos and an associate professor of law at Brooklyn Law School.*

THE POLARIZATION OF POWER

The crisis of democracy is one of concentrated political and economic power where a small elite—from corporations to politically influential interest groups—have outsize influence on public policy and social and economic life. Reorienting democracy reform to address these power disparities represents a distinct and important shift for the social change ecosystem because it is a departure from more conventional accounts of why our democracy is failing.

There are two narratives that dominate conventional accounts of democratic failure: norms and polarization. The norms account emphasizes the importance of unwritten rules of political and civic conduct, particularly among political parties, candidates, and the presidency.

By bringing together theoretical insights and on-the-ground case studies, this supplement offers a framework for realizing an inclusive multiracial democracy.

When these norms—including the mutual toleration of dissent and respect for informal procedures of presidential consultation, disclosure, and decision making—are violated, the formal structures of institutions can quickly become shells, encasing a more authoritarian and explosive form of politics. In the polarization account, as the two parties become more ideologically and demographically polarized, the result is a decrease in compromise and increasing scorched earth, "hardball" politics that bring our political system to a halt.

Both narratives speak to a real set of concerns. But a narrow focus on norms or polarization suggests a narrow reform agenda in which the answer to the democratic crisis lies in cultivating greater civic virtue and cross-partisan collaboration, particularly among elected officials. However, these solutions do not address the deeper political and economic inequities that afflict democracy today; such deeper challenges cannot be solved by an appeal to virtue and good faith alone.

Furthermore, the focus on norms and polarization is misleading insofar as it implies a desire to return to the idyll of depolarized midcentury politics—a period that papered over other forms of undemocratic and inegalitarian problems. First, the period of bipartisan compromise from the 1950s to the 1970s was an artificial period of Democratic Party hegemony in the US Congress, leading to a Republican Party that was more oriented toward compromise than the contestation for power. Second, the period of depolarization was also one of implicit unity around deeply undemocratic presumptions, as both parties operated under the ambit of a New Deal order that had made its peace with the Jim Crow regime of racial inequity—and with the systematic exclusion of women and people of color from the 20th century social contract.

Indeed, the move to a more polarized party system has its origins in the realignment of parties around race and civil rights after 1964. These origins are not in a decay of civic virtue but in an increasingly sharp battle over those most democratic of values: the defense of racial and economic inclusion. In the 1940s, movements for racial justice and worker rights gradually linked civil rights and economic liberalism in state-level political coalitions. By the 1960s, the exodus of Southern Democrats to the Republican Party in opposition to civil rights was well underway. These civil rights opponents forged common cause with business interests that were keen to dismantle the New Deal regulatory state that undergirded midcentury economic inclusion.

Since then, as the country's demographics have shifted, it has become increasingly profitable for large corporations, wealthy constituencies, and defenders of traditional racial and gender hierarchies to further rig the American democracy and economy to maintain their wealth and power. It is not a coincidence that conservative interest groups have deployed their control over state legislatures and the ideas infrastructure to advance policies like "right to work" and voter-suppression tactics, both of which share a common purpose of limiting the countervailing power of workers and communities of color. Indeed, as scholars have documented, the problem of polarization is asymmetric, as is the proliferation of hardball tactics to stretch constitutional rules of the game.

Put another way, the problems of polarization and norm-busting originate from the

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coalition of conservative interests that oppose economic inclusion and civil rights. At the same time, these interests were legitimized by a moral and political discourse that couched these policies in a language of traditional values and free-market conservatism. For many Americans, these moral values—of self-reliance, of neutrality, of traditional community norms—had real meaning and import, and helped provide wider support for these policies that had clear beneficiaries. But the engine of these political developments was rooted in these powerful, undemocratic interests.

This historical trajectory suggests that the aspirations for greater civility, collaboration, and democratic responsiveness actually require structural reforms that break this concentration of power and restore economic and political guardrails. What we need is a set of structural reforms that rebalance the terms of political contestation and economic participation.

ART BY ROMMY TORRICO

REFORM FOR SHARED GOVERNANCE

There is a second challenge for democracy reform that stems not from the active hostility of opposing interest groups, but from the limitations of prevailing visions of social reform.

There has been no shortage of economic reforms aimed at expanding opportunity: investments in education, the promotion of credit and financial literacy, investments in job training programs, and more. But these interventions have been woefully inadequate, and economic inequality has been increasing for decades while social mobility has been declining. Similarly, "race-neutral" attempts to address racial discrimination do little to address the deep, cumulative inequities that shape everything from the physical structure of our cities to the gaps in worker protections. And "good government" reforms like greater transparency and expanded civic engagement have not been enough to rebalance inequities in political voice and power.

These conventional reform efforts fall short because they leave in place underlying structural inequities of power, ownership, and control. This is what is at stake in contemporary debates about "neoliberal" conceptions of markets and "color-blind" conceptions of racial inclusion. Without a different way of thinking about reform, it is difficult to actually dismantle these inequities.

A structural approach to democracy reform, by contrast, would focus on eliminating these systemic drivers of our democracy crisis and building the rules, associations, and institutions we need to ensure a more equitable balance of political power and a more inclusive economy and society. This means targeting reforms to the underlying background rules of the game, rebalancing political and economic power, and dismantling systemic forms of racialized and gendered exclusion.

Consider, for example, the difference between trying to solve the problem of precarious and gig-ified work through job training programs versus changes to the rules of corporate governance, shareholder power, and the safety net, which would alter the very push for firms to cut labor costs in the first place. Or simply contrast increasing governmental transparency with institutionalized participation and representation for marginalized communities within zoning boards or federal agencies. Furthermore, this structural approach pushes us to think outside of the conventional silo of "democracy reform," looking instead to the realities of how democracy reform and inclusive democracy requires also addressing disparities of economic power, and disparities of power between communities seeking to organize and participate in civil society.

This focus on power and structural reform points to another critical shift in our social-change ecosystem as well, in the very ways in which we approach the organizing of civil society and governance itself. Too often grassroots communities are either ignored or engaged with as "end users" or "clients"—funded to execute specific initiatives and projects (such as voter registration or direct services), but not to build durable grassroots capacity and infrastructure that cuts across specific policy fights and issue campaigns.

Similarly, too often governing is understood as a technocratic, elite endeavor where experts identify solutions that are then implemented by policymakers—as opposed to a shared practice of *co-governing* where communities, policymakers, and experts work together to share political

power. In short, the United States has a civic and political infrastructure that is not oriented towards the *building of the capacities for shared self-rule* among communities and among policymakers alike.

THREE PATHS FORWARD

This supplement outlines three dimensions of understanding and approaching the work of democracy reform.

The first set of essays explores what structural democracy reform requires in the domain of civil society. Democracy requires a civil society infrastructure that can provide an effective counterweight to the great concentrations of wealth and power that continue to exert influence on our economic, social, cultural, and political lives. This also means that we need a civil society infrastructure that can both speak to and help bring together the different lived experiences of powerlessness and inequity into a shared conversation about community, moral values, and collective action that cuts across lines of race, gender, and class. We can create new forms of inclusive, multiracial, bottom-up civic power.

But achieving this kind of civic power requires an infrastructure that surpasses flash-in-the-pan moments of mobilization, protest, and voting, and instead channels participation through durable organizations that can deepen the efficacy and power of communities. We need advocacy strategies that can build durable grassroots power that outlasts any one election or campaign. This aspiration, in turn, raises important questions both for the practice of organizing and the civic engagement sphere—including how we resource and support grassroots groups.

Second, we examine what structural democracy reform requires in the domain of government. For example, the reliance of state legislators on external lobbyists for policy research has helped enable the outsize influence of business interests, while the limitations of our voting system and gerrymandered districts and the role of money politics reduce the accountability and responsiveness of elected officials to "we the people."

At the same time, a reliance on technocratic top-down policymaking—even in the presence of "good governance" reforms that enhance transparency and governmental efficiency—can leave those communities most affected by public policy without real voice or accountability. In contrast, we explore how policymaking can deepen democracy and build power by, for example, expanding the scope for participatory and inclusive governance. These ideas point to a democracy reform agenda that affects both constitutional structures and day-to-day bureaucracies of governance—and a shift in how policymakers themselves approach their work.

Third, we delve into what structural democracy reform requires in the domain of the economy. Historically, economic power has been understood as a threat to democracy. A democracy cannot survive when individual firms or actors have so much wealth and economic power that they can effectively control the fates of whole communities. Liberal democracy has always rested on the assumption that markets and governments work in mutually reinforcing ways. But just as economic freedom and political freedom go together, so too do economic oppression and political oppression go together. A democracy marked by deep inequities of wealth—operating simultaneously along class, race, and gender lines—is one in which political democracy is fundamentally limited and unstable, as economic exclusion and concentrated power easily spill over into political exclusion. As we imagine a deeply inclusive and power-balanced political democracy, we must also imagine a similarly radically transformed inclusive economy that balances power, opportunity, and wealth.

This means pushing beyond more conventional forms of economic reform to envision more structural ones. For example, we need to do more than just investing in financial literacy or job training as ways to better equip workers and consumers for surviving in today's economy. We need to also look at how background rules of corporate governance, antitrust regulation, financial regulation, and the like have created an incentive structure that encourages extractive vulture capitalism that concentrates wealth rather than driving innovation and equity.

By bringing together theoretical insights and on-the-ground case studies, this supplement offers a conceptual framework for realizing an inclusive multiracial democracy. Following this path will require more innovation, creativity, and bold reform agendas, which in turn will generate further case studies and opportunities for learning. This expansive approach to realizing democracy is not a partisan affair. Indeed, the policies that have helped perpetuate inequality have often been advanced by Democrats and Republicans alike. And the kinds of structural reforms that these essays propose cut across familiar lines of party or constituency. We do not pretend to have a blueprint for realizing our democratic aspirations, but we hope that in setting a direction and a framework, we can point toward a path forward. ●

Problems of Power

Fixing democracy demands the building and aligning of people's motivation and authority to act.

BY HAHRIE HAN

Power operates in every domain of human life: in families and communities; in social, civic, and economic organizations; and in political states and regimes. Reclaiming democracy means contending with power.

Yet reformers are often reluctant to confront problems of power. Revealing underlying power dynamics can be complex and uncomfortable. It is often tempting to try to solve problems by instead looking for policy fixes, new technologies, and informational solutions.

In fact, some problems can be solved through policy, technology, and information. For instance, when doctors wanted to reduce the rate of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in the early 1990s, they launched a campaign to teach parents to put babies to sleep on their backs instead of on their stomachs. Once parents had the knowledge that babies who sleep on their backs are less likely to suffocate, they made the necessary change and the SIDS rates dramatically declined. When scientists used technology to create the polio vaccine, they were able to basically eradicate polio. In these examples, there is an alignment, broadly speaking, between the motivation to act and the authority to act. Because parents have both the motivation to protect their children and the authority to determine how they sleep, when they had the information they needed, they adjusted their behaviors.

Problems of power, however, are different because there is usually a misalignment between motivation and authority. Either those who have the motivation to make change lack the authority or capacity to act, or those who have the authority lack the motivation. Solving problems of power, then, requires bringing motivation and authority into alignment.

Recasting challenges of democracy as problems of power makes visible a distinct set of solutions. Considered in this frame, the embrace

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of antidemocratic authoritarian ideologies around the world is not just a rejection of particular candidates, parties, or policies. Instead, it is a reflection of the profound mismatch between the motivations or interests of the public and the actions of those with authority to act. If people are left feeling powerless, they might believe they have no choice but to blow up the system.

But giving up on democracy is not the only solution. Reformers can also seek to strengthen the capacity of people to exercise their voices in the democratic process—and instantiate the authority they have to hold economic and political leaders accountable within institutions. Realizing democracy must be about building the motivation, capacity, and authority that people of all kinds need to act as a source of countervailing power to institutions of the economy and the state. That is realizing the promise of democracy.

But this is only possible if reformers understand the link between the way people behave toward each other in their daily lives and how those daily experiences shapes people's willingness and ability to act within a democracy. Every day, at home, at work, in places of worship, and in community spaces, people have positive and negative experiences with power, the state, corporations, and the democratic process. From those experiences, people develop their own beliefs about how power should be developed and deployed, as well as how to construct their own definition of democracy. In the process, they develop the motivational, practical, and material capacities that inform their ability to act in public life.

However, reformers often seek structural change at the level of institutional or policy change without seeking to change the way people experience power in their everyday lives. As such, there is nowhere to build the capacity that people need to hold institutions and policies accountable. Research on the idea of "policy drift" shows that even when unique political coalitions are formed to pass policy, the policy often drifts from its original intent in implementation, shifting to reflect the underlying power dynamics in a policy domain or community. Reformers can pass campaign finance laws to get money out of politics and voter registration laws that make it easier to participate, but unless they also address underlying questions about the disproportionate influence of the wealthy and the lack of motivation and capacity among many to vote, the underlying problem remains unsolved.

Solving problems of power in today's democracy thus entails two crucial pieces. First, reformers must invest in the institutions of civil society, the economy, and the state through which people develop the capacities of democratic life. People are not born with the capacity they need to engage in public life; it must be cultivated. People need places to go to learn the value of engaging with others, develop the skills they need to negotiate difference, and cultivate the emotional resilience necessary to take the interpersonal risks associated with collective action. In other words, people need places to learn how to exercise their own agency. People must also have the autonomy and material conditions necessary to exercise their right to choose to act. Many people experience democracy as nothing more than the opportunity to vote for uninspiring candidates, and they see the workplace as nothing more than a site of labor extraction. When these same people reach out to community organizations, often they are treated as nothing more than names on a list. Instead, the places where people work, interact, and socialize should be places where they can build the motivations and skills they need for public life. People must experience agency in their private lives before they can become a source of countervailing power in public life.

Second, reformers must strengthen organizations through which people can exercise their power to act as a countervailing force to corporations and the state. Civil society organizations are not just where people go to learn the skills and practices of democracy; they are also sites of transformation where people's actions turn into power and influence over sociopolitical outcomes. These organizations do not transform people's participation into power by acting merely as canvassing organizations or neutral repositories for people's actions. Instead, they have to strengthen and expand ties between people, build social bridges in places where they do not otherwise exist, generate people's willingness to commit to each other, and expand people's inclination to think differently about the things they might want or the futures they might imagine. Doing all of these things means that these organizations need the leadership, structure, and governance processes that are grounded in constituency to make them powerful.

The challenge of democracy in the 21st century comes from a society that has neglected the challenge of enabling people's power. Even in civil society, catchy slogans, nifty apps, and policy debates have replaced the hard work of building capacity for democratic life and strengthening organizations that translate that capacity into the ability to hold power accountable. The precarity of this historical moment, then, comes not only from the enormity of the problems we face, but also from the mismatch between the scale of the challenge and the hope offered by the solutions on the table. TED Talks and social media alike promise solutions that fit in a 7-minute video or 280-character missive. Authoritarian campaigns promise presidential candidates and parties as saviors. But none of those will work. Instead, the most intractable social problems are problems that require power-oriented solutions. The question is whether we will do the hard work of investing in the institutions, processes, and practices of civil society, the economy, and governance to make it real. ●

Reclaiming Civil Society

Organizers have a significant role in renewing democracy through the creation of an inclusive constituency.

BY MARSHALL GANZ & ART REYES III

The promise of American democracy is at greater risk than at any time since the 1930s. Among the most important factors of America's democracy crisis is an acute erosion in the power of civil society to assert its influence on both government and private wealth.

Since the dawn of the republic, civil society has served as the principal source of the collective capacity to engage effectively in democratic politics. Creating this capacity required what Alexis de Tocqueville, in *Democracy in America*, described as "knowledge of how to combine": leadership practices people learn to transform individual self-interests into common interests, build bonds of solidarity, and acquire skills of democratic self-governance, including deliberation, decision making, accountability, strategizing, and taking action.

Within the context of a democratic state, civil society is a vital source of autonomous power dependent neither on government nor on private wealth—but it is capable of influencing both. This requires turning individual resources into collective power, often through the mechanism

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of government. Political scientist Sidney Verba once observed that liberal democracy is a gamble that equality of voice can balance inequality of resources. Inequality of power—especially political power—can cripple democratic practice even more than inequality of wealth. In the American context, racism has often been used by economic elites as a weapon of division to hold on to political power to realize economic gain. This also influenced the creation of antidemocratic electoral institutions—the electoral college, the US Senate, and noncompetitive "first by the post" legislative districts—that privilege rural over urban, acres of land over numbers of people, white people over everyone else, and the past over the future. This has increasingly yielded political representation that is sharply divergent from the trajectory of American demographic, geographic, and occupational growth and development.

Philosopher Elizabeth Anderson describes inequality of power as inequality of freedom, understood as agency: the emotional, cognitive, and material capacity to make the choices that shape our lives. Freedom depends upon how equally this agency is distributed in a community, organization, or nation. The promise of equal voice means little in the absence of a capacity to combine voices economically and politically to challenge the power of private wealth to capture government for its own ends.

Organizers develop leadership, build community with that leadership, and create power from the resources of that community. Organizing is not about providing services to grateful clients like a nonprofit or nongovernmental organization. Nor is it about marketing products to paying customers like a company. Organizers bring people together to form a constituency—a community that can stand together, learn together, decide together, act together, and win together. Given the rich diversity of 21st century America, it is both challenging and important to build a multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious, and gender equitable society. This kind of robust, pluralistic civil society requires effective organizing, which only thrives in a robust, pluralistic civil society.

ART BY CELESTE BYERS

CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER ASSAULT

The opportunity to participate in civic life—unions, churches, fraternal organizations, social movements, and other associations—equipped Americans of all walks of life with the power to govern themselves and to use that power to influence political and economic life. The atrophy of these civil goods and replacement with top-down models of service and advocacy—or market-like digital mobilization—has left Americans with a diminished capacity for self-government, transforming them from active citizens into political customers or nonprofit clients. This has radically weakened civil society as a foundation for our democracy.

This is not to romanticize the past. For much of our history, civic associations were segregated by race, gender, status, and class. At times, these divisions were transcended, often to the benefit of their constituencies, such as in the early Populist movement, or at particular moments in the labor movement. Because this could threaten holders of private wealth, including banks, industrialists, and large landowners, they found ways to make strategic use of institutionalized and consequential division, especially based on race.

Since the 1970s, convergent developments on the left and the right have eroded our civic infrastructure to the point that it is hard to imagine we can regenerate American democracy without a parallel and radically inclusive civic regeneration.

The erosion of civic infrastructure unfolded in counterpoint with an evisceration of government itself. In spite of the challenges of globalization, financialization, and digitalization, efforts to manage them in the public interest were scuttled by political choices that enabled the privileged to grow more privileged. The Republican Party transformed itself by embracing a racist, misogynistic, xenophobic reaction to the civil rights movements combined with a strident neoliberal reaction to economic challenges of the 1970s. And this assault on democratic government, the tax revenue it needed to work, and the regulatory power to the government's responsibilities to its citizens—including, but not limited to health, education, and criminal justice—have only further enriched the wealthy.

Progressives have struggled with how to respond effectively to this challenge, their efforts complicated by the capacious racial, gender,

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class, and generational diversity inherent in their vision. Generational conflict over the Vietnam War also contributed to a breach with organized labor, an essential component of any broad-based democratic coalition. This made it harder to defend attacks on unions, and resulted in the erosion of worker protections and the upending of the economy. Conflicts over school integration accelerated the decline of white support for public schools and stimulated privatization. The election of Ronald Reagan, who launched his campaign from Philadelphia, Mississippi—where three civil rights workers were murdered in 1964— reasserted the link of racial animus with corporate interest, which laid the groundwork for racist policies like mass incarceration. The reluctant opening of narrow public and private power hierarchies to tokenized women and people of color masked the fact that the structural reforms were needed to lift everyone.

Civil society has thus been under assault from two different directions at once: closing the schools of democracy and the economic and political colonization of civil society itself.

Public life was once anchored in great free schools of democracy in which citizens could build collective civic capacity with each other. Unfortunately, these schools have been turned into a political marketplace. Customers shop their individual preferences and exit at will if dissatisfied. Since the 1970s, electoral professionals have created a new political industry using profitable new tools that transformed the electoral means of production from a civic process into a market process. They subdivide and redefine constituencies as individual types with whom mail—and later, digital—technology enabled direct, if very shallow, communication. Relational commitment has been replaced by momentary transactions. Instead of bringing people together, they drive them apart with polling, television, direct mail, computer targeting, and digital media. Finally, the 1976 Supreme Court ruling in *Buckley v. Valeo* that "money is speech" created an unregulated political marketplace in which an almost infinite demand for money is driven by professionals who make more money when they spend more. This $12.6 billion election industry has turned politics into marketing, campaigns into advertising, candidates into brands, voters into data points, and debate into messaging.

Meanwhile, autonomous self-governing membership associations are being replaced by nonprofit firms that offer services to clients (or beneficiaries) but are in reality accountable only to the high-net-worth individuals and foundations who fund them and who are accountable to no one. They are the "private few" whose exponential accumulation of wealth reduces the capacity of a "public many," especially the most marginalized, to support their own organizations. This helps to explain why so many of the "pop-up" groups that emerged in reaction to US President Donald Trump's election fell victim to what feminist sociologist Jo Freeman called the "tyranny of structurelessness." Although they reclaimed some autonomy in the midterm elections, they continue to struggle with meeting, deliberating, decision making, and mutual accountability. With a few exceptions, they also continue to struggle with how to govern themselves to scale at regional, state, and national levels. They had not acquired what Tocqueville called "habits of the heart," micro practices that can turn motivation into the macro power needed to create real change.

Building multiracial, gender-inclusive power requires rooting organizing in a shared identity and linked fate built via deep listening both within and across communities.

Organizing in the 21st century requires dealing with both challenges. Most organizing depends more on funders than on constituencies. Funders who want to make good on their investments measure impact as a return on investment. In electoral terms, dollars per vote. In advocacy terms, dollars per call, per visit, or per signature. Elite funders attempt to purchase short-term policy or electoral outcomes while at the same time undermining the capacity of ordinary people to organize, mobilize, and deploy their own power to make democracy work.

REGENERATING CIVIL SOCIETY

Despite the significant erosion of civil society, the current moment offers opportunities for robust revival. The motivation has been stimulated by almost daily violations of moral, economic, and political justice, most evident in the mobilizations by women, young people, and people of color. The challenge is one of turning motivation into the power we need to build a new democracy that is inclusive, equitable, and accountable.

Community organizers who have accepted the challenge of regenerating Tocqueville's schools of democracy struggle to make democracy work. For it is skilled organizing that can turn community into constituency by relationship-building, developing public narrative, creative strategizing, wise structuring, and effective action. In fact, the seeds needed to regenerate a robust and inclusive civil society can be found in the work of disciplined, creative, and committed organizers across America.

For example, We the People-Michigan (WTPMI) is building a multiracial, gender-inclusive, and working-class infrastructure. Organizers bring together white, indigenous, black, and brown communities with a common purpose. They facilitate community organizing workshops across the state to recruit and develop leadership. Grassroots leaders in turn learned to conduct campaigns tailored to their own communities.

In one case, WTPMI worked with an undocumented immigrant-led organization, Movimiento Cosecha Kalamazoo, to launch a campaign that stopped the county sheriff from detaining individuals by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) beyond their release date. They also won local legislation that requires the city and county of Kalamazoo to sever financial ties with ICE. They developed the shared leadership who organize their communities to create the power they needed to hold their local officials accountable.

We the People–Keweenaw, which represents the rural Keweenaw Peninsula in the northernmost part of Michigan, trained a cohort of 30 local leaders and launched an independent voter organizing project. They ultimately elected a progressive woman as a county commissioner in a conservative rural county. These campaigns were driven by volunteer leadership who created the intentional space to build relationships. They told stories not only to communicate, but to articulate core values and deepen trust. They built a clear organizational structure with roles and responsibilities, and they strategized to develop leadership even as they mobilized effective action.

Building multiracial, gender-inclusive power requires rooting organizing in a deep sense of shared identity and linked fate. This can be built via deep listening both within and across the communities themselves—not by messaging experts and pollsters. In 2018, WTPMI partnered with organizations across the state, like Detroit Action, 482Forward, and Jobs with Justice, and together they organized six months of listening sessions in black and brown neighborhoods, in rural white communities, among undocumented people, with formerly incarcerated people, and

with working-class white and black people living on opposite sides of one of the starkest racial-divide lines in the country: Detroit metro's Eight Mile Road. People worked together to lead their own fights based on a shared analysis and a sense of linked fate.

REGENERATING WE THE PEOPLE

Campaigns like these can be building blocks of national strategy. But swing states like Michigan often find themselves targeted by national funders seeking short-term mobilization in pursuit of issue or electoral outcomes. Strategy and tactics are not locally generated but are decided upon by funders, pollsters, and consultants. Under these conditions, organizers and community leaders can find themselves playing the role of brokers or vendors who mediate between capital and community. This dynamic plays out each election cycle, and it undermines the agency and power of the very communities it purports to support.

Committed organizers and communities often find themselves in similar quandaries. Real change only happens when they can anchor their financial, temporal, and human resources within their constituencies, growing organizational sinews that are firm and flexible enough to link local, state, and national strategy, and organizations powerful enough to reassert their agency.

Powerful social movements have depended on their constituencies more than on funders. Public sector support can be a real option as it was with the "community action projects" of the Great Society era or the Action program led by organizers Sam Brown and John Lewis in the Carter administration. The Reagan administration, however, ended these programs under the rubric of "defunding the left." In response, many community organizations turned to full-time canvassing to fill the gap. But this turned out to be another form of mobilizing—not organizing—that turned young people who wanted to learn organizing into a renewable resource. Churches and unions have been key sources of support. They generate resources by creating moral value within their constituencies, not by producing profit in the marketplace. The reality is that solving the democracy problem requires the restoration of significant autonomy to an organized civil society.

Finding our way forward must begin with organizing. We can bring together experienced organizers who are committed to empowering their constituencies at a whole new level. But we will never find our way to regenerating our democracy if we don't begin now. ●

People Power

Powerful organization, rather than efficient mobilization, is the way to re-center people in our political life.

BY DORAN SCHRANTZ, MICHELLE OYAKAWA & LIZ MCKENNA

The continued decline of Americans' active participation in many aspects of public life is perceived to be common knowledge. Voting rates are one measure of citizen engagement, but there are many others, including campaign donations, volunteer hours, protest participation, online activism, and the density of community groups in a given location. Curiously, many of these numbers have gone up even as the overall health of our democracy—the policies and institutions at work for the people—has decayed.

The assumption that scale is synonymous with impact should be interrogated—these mobilizations produce scale absent of impact, participation without commitment.

In this context, many organizations have designed solutions grounded in a belief in the power of mass mobilization in which they equate an increase in civic activity with a stronger democracy. This logic, however, wrongly assumes "scale" and "depth" to be mutually exclusive. "Scale" means the quantitative breadth covered by an activity—numbers of conversations with likely voters, numbers of names on a list, or numbers of "likes" or "engagements" on social media. The assumption is that the greater the scale, the higher the probability of impact—here, the higher probability of electoral victories or policies passed—in the political or policy arena.

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Furthermore, to achieve scaled programs that can produce these prized numbers, paid civic engagement programs are incentivized to prioritize efficiency in order to maximize the number of transactions over depth of relationships—either with an individual or with a community.

The underlying assumption that scale is synonymous with impact should be interrogated—these mobilization outfits produce scale absent of impact, participation without commitment, and breadth without the depth needed to sustain it. Given these challenges and the reality of a political system unresponsive to the demands of the larger public, programs of action should combine scale with impact.

FAITH DELEGATE STORY

In 2018, the community-based organizing organization Faith in Minnesota (FiMN) eschewed the standard, scaled political programs and instead devised a two-year campaign and strategy around the Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) state endorsing convention for governor. FiMN first elected and then organized a bloc of 207 delegates and alternates, comprising 11 percent of the total number of delegates and the largest bloc at the convention. These "faith delegates" came into the party process more committed to one another, their organization, and to their shared agenda than to any particular candidate or to the party. The delegates remained uncommitted until they voted as a bloc and agreed to only support the candidate that the collective had agreed to together.

FiMN wanted more than politicians' attention. The organization's strategy had four intentions: to define the public agenda for the 2018 governor's race; to ensure that the campaign narrative of the DFL candidate for governor directly addressed Islamophobia, racism, and white nationalism; to prepare the ground for an election that would build a mandate for a "bold governing agenda"; and to ensure that the constituency of FiMN would be in a co-governing relationship with the new governor's administration. With more than 200 organized delegates with voting power at the convention, FiMN had enough disciplined people power to determine the outcome of the endorsing convention—and, more broadly, to shape the agenda and narrative of the candidates for governor in 2018.

In the past, many large organizations, such as labor unions and interest groups, similarly

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sought to affect the outcome of the DFL state endorsing convention. Yet when it came time to endorse, they had always failed to hold their bloc together. Several candidate's campaigns and their allies attempted to "split the bloc" of FiMN by appealing to individual delegates, whose personal preferences for each of the three major candidates did indeed vary. Although historical precedent suggested there was no way the bloc would hold, the FiMN delegation was successful.

How did FiMN arrive at this moment of collective discipline? They first invited 500 members of its base to be core organizers of the path to the state convention. Those volunteers were invited to organize others to attend precinct caucuses, to build their own individual "campaign" to become a state delegate, and to remain uncommitted to any campaign or candidate until it was clear how FiMN would act as a collective. These volunteer leaders organized close to 2,000 people to attend house meetings six months in advance of the state convention. Then, FiMN's 500 volunteer organizers trained and transported 3,500 people to attend precinct caucuses, equipped 1,500 FiMN supporters to attend Senate District conventions, and ultimately made it possible for FiMN to secure 11 percent of the total DFL endorsing convention.

The secret of the success of this program was the investment in the 500 volunteer organizers. Most of these grassroots volunteers had never been to precinct caucuses and certainly had never attended a party endorsing convention. These 500 leaders are connected to community-based, member institutions of FiMN such as childcare centers, barbershops, congregations, and mosques. Of the total delegation to the state convention, close to half were people of color, a third were from rural and small towns, a quarter were Muslim, more than two-thirds had never before participated in a party process, and many had never even voted in an election. In other words, communities of people who are constantly politically redlined out of the democratic process were part of the most influential voting bloc at the Minnesota DFL (Democratic) nominating convention.

TAKEAWAYS FOR COLLECTIVE POWER

While FiMN was leading this strategy, a team of researchers prospectively tracked the campaign to document, analyze, and learn from how the organization built and wielded people power.

Leadership advocating for racial and economic justice in rural and small-town regions makes the difference in whether or not a policy even gets a hearing at the state capitol.

Three takeaways crystalized from the interviews, participant and direct observation, and 10 years of leadership and membership data accumulated by FiMN.

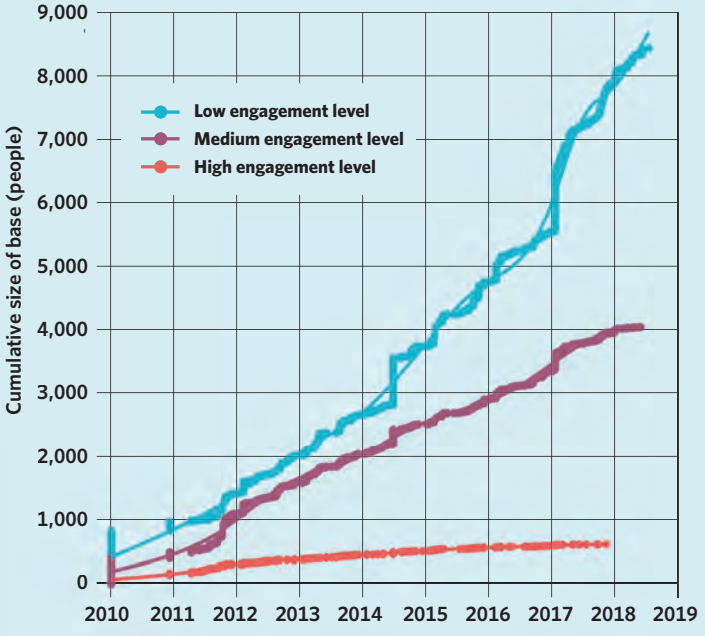
Sustained "super" leadership | Prior to the campaign, FiMN's 500 faith delegates had participated in a median of five activities. Many of the delegates were thus a part of FiMN's preexisting base of highly engaged volunteer leaders, while others were brought in through the campaign. Since 2010, the base has grown to now include more than 13,000 Minnesotans.

FiMN spends most of the organization's time and energy on leadership development, rather than on episodic mobilizations built around urgent calls (or clicks) to action. What this means in practice is that a significant amount of organizational resources are invested in developing "super leaders" (reflected in the steadily growing high-engagement line in Figure 1). They are the reason FiMN—a relatively small community organization with a team of 12 paid organizers—was able to reach tens of thousands of caucus-goers and voters in 2018. Although smaller in number than FiMN's lower-engagement membership, which tend to show the steepest increase in participation around election cycles, the super leaders are the core of the organization.

Wielding people power: a combination of organizing and mobilizing | The researchers found that it was not only the number of events that FiMN members participated in that was associated with the organization's leadership capacities and political power, but also the quality and sequence of their participation. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, which conceives of most civic-engagement work as voter-facing mobilization work, the findings show that the majority of FiMN's faith delegates become committed—to each other and to the collective—in the organizational context of meetings, trainings, and strategy sessions. At these trainings and meetings, leaders of different races, religions, and social classes related to one another, practiced democratic and public skills, discovered their own capacity to lead, and learned how to engage other people in shared strategic action. FiMN was able to draw on the civic and relational capital it had built over the years to deploy when it counted.

The Power of Super Leaders

The chart below depicts Faith in Minnesota's base growth over time. Since 2010, FiMN's steady growth (scale) has been attributed to an investment in super leaders (depth).



A multiracial, multiregional, and multifaith base | The mass mobilization approach would prescribe a strategy whereby FiMN built its programs around "high-propensity voters"—a euphemism often used to refer to middle-class white voters living in places like Minnesota's Twin Cities. After conducting a power analysis, however, FiMN chose to instead build a statewide base of leadership that was multiracial, multiregional, multifaith, with multiple centers of power that could be networked into shared strategy and called to take collective action, as happened during the 2018 election.

It took five years to build multiple centers of leadership within key regional centers. FiMN now has a presence in small towns, mosques, barbershops, and congregations across the state. The organization now has chapters and teams of leadership growing in the small towns and regional centers that represent a critical constituency for governing power in Minnesota. Leadership advocating for racial and economic justice in rural and small-town regions makes the difference in whether or not a policy even gets a hearing at the state capitol. FiMN's faith delegate campaign sheds light on how civic organizations can build power by investing in a well-trained base of people who are committed to one another.

But questions remain: What, for example, are the tradeoffs of funneling large amounts of money to civic organizations during election years, while starving them of the funds required to do sustained, relational, multiyear organizing on off-years? And what are the organizational conditions—the structures, routines, decision making, and data practices—that enable members to both have a voice in overall strategy and still act as a disciplined collective? How do we distribute not just capacity but strategic capacity?

Although it is more challenging to document or "measure" depth than scale, FiMN's faith delegate campaign transformed the level of influence of the organization in the public arena. This new power is shared by the whole base and has caused both an expansion in the capacity to influence policy and systems, but also an expansion in membership and engagement. Those who are volunteer leaders in FiMN have a visceral experience of politics working for them—not just working for a candidate or a particular issue or a cause. This creates a virtuous cycle where more people become involved because those who have had a direct experience of public power invite others to join in the journey. ●

Revitalizing People-Based Government

Revived civic infrastructure at the state level is necessary to realize the promise of democracy.

BY ALEXANDER HERTEL-FERNANDEZ & REP. CARLOS GUILLERMO SMITH

Closer in proximity to citizens than the federal government, states are thought to embody the virtues of decentralization and self-government. Americans, so the argument goes, are better positioned to check the activities of their local and state politicians than those elected to the more distant US Congress. Therefore, state and local policy should be more responsive to public preferences than federal policy. Beyond political representation, having 50 state governors and legislatures competing for public support ought to spur more innovation and experimentation; they should be what Louis Brandeis has memorably dubbed America's "laboratories of democracy." But do these rosy assessments of the states hold up under closer scrutiny?

STILL DEMOCRACY'S LABORATORIES?

Recent political events suggest that American federalism is playing exactly the democracy-bolstering role envisioned by the Constitution's framers. States, for instance, are checking the power of the federal government, challenging the Trump administration on its decisions related to immigration restrictions and implementation of the decennial census. States are also innovating in areas where the federal government has failed to act: on the minimum wage, climate change, and protections for the LGBTQ community.

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But at the same time many states are curbing their democratic processes, like taking steps to restrict political participation—either by making it harder for individuals to vote or weakening grassroots associations that organize citizens. Furthermore, in a growing number of states the geographic distribution of voters, combined with partisan redistricting, means that even large majorities of the popular vote do not necessarily translate into legislative majorities, entrenching minority legislative control. And even when large majorities of voters bypass legislatures to approve ballot measures—like expanded health insurance for poor adults, campaign finance reforms, and broadened voting rights—some state governments have rolled back such measures or even ignored them altogether.

For example, after Floridians voted overwhelmingly to re-enfranchise over a million former felons, the Republican-controlled legislature voted to create punitive barriers to ex-felon voting. In recognizing the success of progressive strategies to bypass the conservative legislature and make appeals directly to voters, conservatives in control of the Florida state legislature subsequently approved a bill with onerous new requirements for future ballot initiatives.

Another antidemocratic strategy involves state preemption. Once a tool used to curb conflicts between local government and states by bringing local governments in line with state policy, it is now aggressively used by conservatives to strip local authority from city governments and force an antiregulatory, corporate agenda that disproportionately harms marginalized communities. Examples in Florida from the 2019 legislative session include enactment of legislation that preempts local laws concerning sanctuary cities, wireless internet siting, and inclusionary housing. And an even more egregious use of punitive preemption is an older Florida law that puts local officials at risk of removal from office or fines of up to $5,000 for adopting local laws to prevent gun violence.

In light of these abuses of state legislative power, it should come as no surprise that recent research documents only a weak electoral connection between state legislators and their voters: state legislators who cast roll call votes out of step with their constituents are unlikely to be punished in subsequent elections. In fact, this kind of legislative accountability is *lower* in the states than in Congress.

Three interrelated features of the states currently undermine their potential as sites for robust democracy. Some are longstanding characteristics of the states, while others are more

recent developments. Together, they form a toxic brew that is increasingly exploited by concentrated economic interests—wealthy individuals and private-sector businesses—in the pursuit of policies opposed by majorities of Americans that ultimately exacerbate political and economic inequalities. These features include:

- **Low visibility of state politics.** In the Federalist Papers, Constitutional framers Alexander Hamilton and James Madison assumed that state governments would loom larger in the minds of Americans than would the more distant federal government. In practice, the reverse has been true: Americans know much more about the federal government than their own states. According to statistics from the American National Election Study and the Cooperative Congressional Election Study, about 4 of 10 Americans say that they cannot name the political party that controls their state senate or house—twice as many as for the party in control of the US Senate or House. Without this basic civic knowledge, it seems unlikely that citizens can adequately hold their state politicians accountable. While scholars have bemoaned the lack of media coverage of state politics compared to national politics for decades, the problem has worsened in recent decades with the demise of state-house reporting. The Pew Research Center, for instance, found that the number of full-time reporters covering state capitols fell by 35 percent from 2003 to 2014.
- **Nationalization of state politics.** At the core of the "laboratories of democracy" vision of the states is that governors and legislatures will compete with one another to develop new and effective policies that appeal to their constituents. This assumes, however, that voters will recognize and reward innovative policies. But voters often struggle to even recognize the party in control of government, let alone have knowledge about their legislative records. There is also strong evidence that state politics has nationalized in ways that undermine state government accountability as voters increasingly cast ballots for state races that reflect their national political views, rather than state issues. Nationalization thus dampens electoral accountability for state politicians. It also means that policy innovation and emulation is likely to happen only among states on the same side of the partisan divide—Democrats copy only from fellow Democrats; Republicans from fellow Republicans.
- **Understaffed and under-resourced legislatures.** For state governments to adequately respond to the needs of their constituents and generate new policy, elected officials must have baseline legislative resources. Yet in many states, legislating remains a part-time job with minimal staff help. In more than a dozen states, for instance, legislative salaries average less than $20,000. Low salaries necessitate legislators hold another job to make ends meet; the consequence is that elected officials often report only spending about half their time legislating. Faced with these constraints, many state legislators rely heavily on outside interest groups for bill ideas, research, and political advice. Unfortunately, these groups are often a front for wealthy or corporate interests. The ironic consequence is that part-time, sparsely staffed citizen legislatures wind up relying most heavily on disconnected, outside groups for legislation.

In states where these three factors are combined, legislative agendas tend to be most closely aligned with the goals of the wealthy few and out of touch with the interests of the general public.

STATE CAPTURE

Together, these three features have been increasingly exploited by well-resourced political actors representing narrow interests: wealthy donors, private-sector businesses, and conservative advocacy groups seeking to shift state policy and politics. As recently documented in (article coauthor) Alex Hertel-Fernandez's *State Capture: How Conservative Activists, Big Businesses, and Wealthy Donors Reshaped the American States—and the Nation*, organizations like Americans for Prosperity (AFP; a grassroots federated advocacy group at the heart of the Koch brothers' political network), State Policy Network (SPN; a coalition of state-level conservative think tanks), and American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC; provides model legislation and support to conservative state legislators) have since the 1970s successfully constructed an infrastructure capable of electing friendly lawmakers, flipping legislative chambers, and promoting a coordinated legislative agenda across the states.

These groups succeed by providing state legislators with the exact resources—including model bills, research support, political strategy, and mobilizing power—that legislators often lack. Regardless of partisanship and ideology, legislators in states with fewer staff, shorter sessions, and lower salaries are more likely to copy and paste bill ideas from corporate-backed conservative networks. The right-leaning networks have also taken advantage of the nationalization of state politics by promoting a common legislative agenda in states under full conservative control. And these networks have taken advantage of the weak electoral accountability faced by state legislators to promote policies that are otherwise quite unpopular with voters.

Despite opposition by most Americans, these right-wing networks have rolled back environmental standards and efforts to address climate change, restricted access to the ballot box, cut labor standards and union rights, slashed tax revenue and public spending, curbed reproductive rights, and stymied efforts to regulate access to firearms. The net effect of these policies has been to exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities, with especially pernicious consequences for already-disadvantaged segments of the population, especially people of color.

Beyond their direct social and economic consequences, many of these conservative networks' policies are intended not only to materially benefit particular economic constituencies—wealthy individuals and large businesses—but more generally to tilt the political playing field to disempower ordinary citizens from expressing their political preferences. Conservative networks do not shy away from thinking about policy as a means of power-building.

RECLAIMING STATE DEMOCRACY

There are three takeaways from federalism's failings for the creation of a people-centered government:

- **Build civil society organizations.** A strategy for reclaiming state government for the people will require investments in organizations that connect citizens with their elected officials to provide ordinary Americans with the information and resources they need to hold politicians accountable in all states. Reversing these trends will likely involve creative and diverse solutions in each state. One example is Capitol News, a project in Illinois that helps local outlets cover state legislative debates and which focuses especially closely on "news deserts." Capitol News does this by creating content that other local editors and publishers can use in online and offline publications.
- **Focus civil society organizations on the right institutions and levers of government.** To say that civic organizations are

important is not to imply that we simply need more organizations. Instead, advocates for people-focused democracy need to ensure that they can count on organizations that complement one another at the right scales and levels of government. Conservative activists recognize the power, for instance, of having networks that can mobilize legislators (like ALEC) or engage citizens (like AFP) across the typical issue silos in the conservative movement to help coordinate longer-term governing agendas. These right-wing organizations also identified and targeted key leverage points in political institutions, like mobilizing citizens to contact state officials or providing model bill ideas to understaffed legislators.

It would also be a mistake for progressives to simply blindly copy the organizations that have worked on the right. Instead, they would be wise to think about figuring out the needs of interested legislators and their constituents. That is what the State Innovation Exchange (SiX) is doing for state legislators across the country. SiX is a progressive resource center that supports legislators with policy research and a cross-state network, spreads awareness of state policies and legislators, and connects elected officials directly with their constituents.

- **Use policy to build, retain, and support grassroots political power.** Reviving grassroots democracy in the states will require approaching policymaking not just to solve economic and social problems, but also to build political power. As conservative activists discovered, policy can be a tool for cementing alliances between otherwise diverse interests, building grassroots constituencies, bolstering organizations that can help politicians win elected office, and undermining opponents by cutting off resources or making it harder for them to participate in politics. Advocates of people-centered democracy would be wise to think in similar terms about opportunities to use policy to boost the resources that ordinary citizens have to participate in politics, to reduce the political clout of concentrated wealth, and to construct durable coalitions of allies.

Some of these power-building proposals are relatively straightforward, like broadening access to the ballot box or making it easier for workers to organize on the job in labor organizations, including unions. But political officials should also think about whether they can create stronger incentives for political participation throughout the policymaking process—like giving community groups resources to organize members and to create inclusive internal processes around decision making. Similarly, a power-building lens would prioritize efforts to divide opponents—for instance, peeling off supportive businesses—early on in the policymaking process.

As political observer Grant McConnell noted decades ago, the "advantages of disorganized politics" in the states—above all, weak mediating organizations like parties and civic associations—"accrue quite impartially to whatever groups, interests, or individuals are [already] powerful in any way." To break this cycle and restore political power to ordinary citizens over entrenched minorities is a tall order—but necessary if American federalism is to live up to its democratic ideals. ●

Representing the People

Community organizations nationwide are helping to reimagine the role of law enforcement by pushing prosecutors to embrace a new criminal justice reform agenda and collaborating with attorneys general to protect working people.

BY ARISHA HATCH & TERRI GERSTEIN

The past several years has brought a reexamination of the role of law enforcement in confronting some of the key challenges facing our democracy. This new vision of the prosecutor's role includes dismantling elements of the criminal justice system that perpetuate racial and economic inequities, affirmatively wielding power in response to community concerns, and addressing economic exploitation, power disparities, and abuses of authority.

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Terri Gerstein *is the director of the State and Local Enforcement Project at the Harvard Labor and Worklife Program. She was formerly the Labor Bureau Chief in the New York State Attorney General's Office.*

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

There are close to 2,400 elected prosecutors in the United States. These prosecutors are mostly white, mostly male, and approximately 85 percent of them run for their positions completely unopposed. Along with their staff, they make daily discretionary decisions large and small that impact the lives of predominantly black, brown, and working-class communities. "Tough on crime" rhetoric and policies—perpetuated by Ronald Reagan's War on Drugs, the 1994 Crime Bill, law enforcement television shows like *COPS* and *Law & Order*, and the nightly local news—became the metric for law enforcement at the expense of safe, healthy, thriving, and empowered communities. Police unions were the critical endorsements that district attorney (DA) candidates needed to vie for, and, once elected, the groups deemed most worthy of consideration. And although in court filings, prosecutors' offices technically represented "The People," many interests of working-class communities became the least of their concerns.

In 2015, Color Of Change, the nation's largest online racial justice organization, gathered about 10 community organizations from across the country to reimagine the role of prosecutors. Many community-level organizations had been working in silos for decades to push back against a growing incarceration economy and cultural attitudes that had destroyed their communities. At that event, the organizations crafted six demands of prosecutors: to be transparent; to hold police accountable for overreaches and unnecessary violence; to treat kids like kids; to exercise their discretion and decline to prosecute petty and poverty-related offenses (like marijuana possession); to avoid the use of bail as leverage to incarcerate poor people before trial; and to avoid partisan prosecutions connected to immigration, the death penalty, and abortion.

At the national level, the power of the elected DA was finally emerging as a viable intervention in the effort to reform discriminatory policing and mass incarceration—a tangible victory for activists in the Black Lives Matter movement. Many organizations had independently reached the same conclusion: at minimum, more DA races—often a launching point for higher political office and yet ignored by both major political parties—should be contested.

The work is already underway. In early 2017, a former prosecutor and public defender, Whitney Tymas, created Justice & Public Safety PAC, a network of state political action committees that recruits, vets, and conducts

research and polling on candidates and even supports them with television ads. Later that year, Miriam Krinsky's organization Fair and Just Prosecution began to provide a support network and training for progressive elected prosecutors navigating the reinvention of their offices. In 2018, Color Of Change began compiling a first-of-its-kind database of elected prosecutors, including centralized contact information and a means to track prosecutors' commitment to the six demands. Color Of Change PAC began reaching out to black voters nationwide with contested prosecutor races on the ballot, knocking on doors, sending text messages, and hosting community town halls to alert people that they had a choice in their upcoming election. In late 2018, grassroots organizer Becky Bond and racial justice activist Shaun King launched Real Justice PAC to support progressive prosecutor candidates in their campaign efforts.

These efforts have shown results. Progressive prosecutors have been elected in 13 cities across America. Even Bob McCulloch, the 26-year incumbent prosecutor in St. Louis county, Missouri, who refused to indict the officer who killed Mike Brown, has been replaced. Local and national community organizations joined together to host local prosecutor debates and to launch "First 100 Days" campaigns connected to the six demands, resulting in key policy and practice changes. For example, in Cook County, Illinois, progressive prosecutor Kim Foxx has reduced incarceration rates by 20 percent; violent crime also has decreased locally. She has also become a model for prosecutor transparency after an unprecedented data release summarizing case-level data dating back to roughly 2010. After Larry Krasner took office in Philadelphia in 2018, he ordered prosecutors in his office to stop charging people for possession of marijuana and related drug paraphernalia. He also sued 10 big pharmaceutical companies for their role in the opioid crisis. More than 40 prosecutors have signed a letter pledging not to support a wave of new state antichoice laws.

But progress hasn't come without setbacks and backlash. In 2017, more than 300 grassroots activists took to Florida's state capitol to protect newly elected state attorney Aramis Ayala, who then-governor Charlie Crist threatened to remove from office after media reports of her opposition to the death penalty. (She later announced that she wouldn't run for reelection in 2020.) In August, FOX News host Tucker Carlson, aided by US Attorney William McSwain, dedicated a segment to attacking Krasner. The same month at a fraternal order of police national conference, US Attorney General William Barr, coauthor of a 1992 Department of Justice report called "The Case for More Incarceration," criticized "the emergence … of district attorneys that style themselves as 'social justice' reformers."

Nonetheless, community groups and national political organizations continue to reimagine the prosecutor's office as one responsive to the people. In the four years since hosting its first meeting on the subject, Color Of Change's annual convenings have quadrupled in size and now serve as a congregating space for community groups seeking local reform. Prosecutors are now a focal point for community organizations in close to 20 states and growing.

REIMAGINING LAW ENFORCEMENT

Along with criminal justice reform, a progressive law enforcement office would use its powers to fight abuses in which the powerful prey on people from working-class or marginalized communities. This would include taking on abusive landlords, predatory lenders, corrupt elected officials, hate crime perpetrators, and corporate and government leaders whose decisions have devastating consequences for ordinary people, such as poisoned water. And it would involve doing so in collaboration with affected communities and grassroots organizations.

The growing momentum among state and local law enforcement to enforce workers' rights provides a concrete example of what progressive law enforcement might look like. This work of state attorneys general (AGs) and local prosecutors (DAs) emerges in a context of political and economic developments over the last several decades that have left workers in a terribly precarious situation. These trends include low union density, subcontracting and other "fissuring" of the workplace, forced arbitration, technological changes, employer concentration and resulting monopsony, and most recently, the Trump administration's antiworker agenda and immigration enforcement policies. They have resulted in high rates of violations of workplace laws among many employers, and degradation of working conditions. Historically, AGs and DAs have left such matters to federal and state labor departments and the private bar, but in the past several years, a growing number have begun to include protection of workers as a part of their office's mission.

State attorneys general have been at the forefront of this trend. Five years ago, only three AG offices had dedicated workers' rights units (California, Massachusetts, and New York); now, six others have joined them (the District of Columbia, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania).

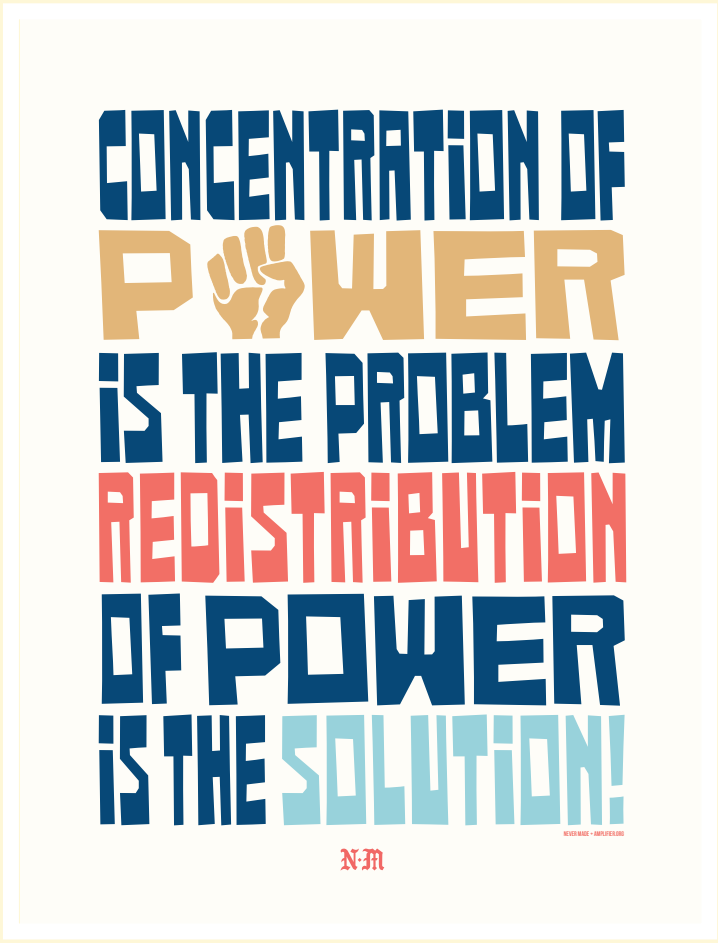
These new units were created because AGs made the decision to prioritize worker issues, and units have been developed with community input. The inception of the workers' rights unit in the Washington, DC, AG's office provides an example of the synergistic interplay between community and government in giving rise to these developments. Worker organizations, including unions and DC Jobs With Justice, pressed for a 2016 law granting the AG's office jurisdiction to handle wage cases; the following year, DC Attorney General Karl Racine created a workers' rights unit in the office.

The creation of a dedicated unit ensures that an office will be involved in workers' rights in a continuous, proactive, strategic, and in-depth manner—not as a one-time event. It embeds workers' rights lawyering within the agency; specialized attorneys develop ongoing relationships with advocacy groups, unions, and worker centers. Establishment of a dedicated unit institutionalizes the work, increasing the likelihood that it will continue beyond a particular administration.

AG offices with dedicated workers' rights units have brought cases to combat wage theft, payroll fraud, unfair noncompete agreements, and wrongful treatment of workers as independent contractors instead of employees (misclassification). These cases have involved small employers in the underground economy and national corporations such as Domino's Pizza, WeWork, Jimmy John's, and the national electrical contractor Power Design, among others. Some AGs also have played a leading role in the legislative process. In 2019, Minnesota AG Keith Ellison was instrumental in achieving stronger antiwage theft laws, and New York AG Letitia James proposed legislation to strengthen antiretaliation protections for immigrant workers.

The focus on workers' rights in key offices has helped create opportunities for a greater number of state AGs to take on labor issues through participation in multistate efforts, such as opposing proposed federal antiworker regulations, filing a lawsuit against the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and investigating no-poach agreements used by fast food franchisors.

Workers' rights enforcement requires extensive collaboration and partnership with civil society—worker centers, unions, advocacy



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groups—because these groups are based in communities, know conditions on the ground, and have the trust of workers who may be unlikely to reach out to the government. The AG offices that have taken on this work have developed relationships with community and worker organizations within their jurisdiction. These collaborations allow groups to have ongoing conversations with and access to the AG offices, including referring cases, raising issues of concern, and helping offices develop cases by, for example, identifying potential targets and bringing witnesses to an office. In addition, many AG offices have chosen attorneys with past experience as workers' rights lawyers or in advocacy organizations. These lawyers bring their perspective, relationships, and experience with them.

This collaboration is not without guardrails. AG offices conduct their enforcement work independently, and must be unbiased in their investigations. Being unbiased, however, is distinct from being neutral. As California Labor Secretary Julie Su wrote, "We are not neutral about what fundamental protections must exist in the workplace. We are on the side of the law." But there are important limits to community input. For example, AG offices independently make the decisions about what cases to bring, what evidence is needed, how to build a case, whether to handle a case civilly or criminally, and what parties to sue or charge. These limitations are appropriate; the AG brings cases on behalf of the people. Nonetheless, AG offices take worker organizations seriously as partners; constituencies do not drive the agenda, but they have meaningful impact and a real voice.

As workers' rights enforcement becomes institutionalized within some AG offices, one next-level question is whether the collaborative relationships between government and community organizations can also be institutionalized. Two programs within the Massachusetts AG's Office offer possible answers. The Fair Labor Division has regularly scheduled meetings with a labor advisory council (comprised of labor leaders) and also with the Fair Wage Campaign (comprised of immigrant worker centers and legal services offices). A different program in the office awards grants to local consumer advocacy groups for outreach and education to consumers; a similar program could be created for worker advocacy groups.

In addition to AGs, a number of DAs are taking on employer committed crimes against workers, bringing prosecutions for crimes including wage theft (under, for example, larceny, theft of services, or explicit wage theft statutes), payroll fraud, human trafficking, workplace sexual assault, and predictable and preventable workplace fatalities. The Center for Progressive Reform has created a first-of-its-kind "Crimes Against Workers" database that lists many state criminal prosecutions of employers.

This work requires law enforcement officials to think differently. Treating wage theft as "theft" requires understanding economic inequities and the imbalance of power between workers and employers. Some DAs are stepping into the breach that leaves so many workers vulnerable to exploitation, using their authority to be responsive to a new set of problems stemming from power imbalances. They are using their power to redress harms caused to people who have less power in society. In so doing, prosecutors can inherently shift the balance, demonstrating to employers and workers alike that people who speak up can bring about change, that there are limits to employers' power, and that bosses cannot act with total impunity.

As with AG offices, DA involvement in these cases requires collaboration and relationships with community and worker organizations. It also requires new methods of learning about cases and trends. While a typical criminal prosecution might originate with the police, employer crime cases often come through referrals from community-based and worker organizations.

In this work, and in other cases confronting corporate abuse, DAs and AGs are taking a broader view of what it means to represent "the people." More than simply standing up in court, it means deep engagement and partnership with a wide range of organizations in civil society, and in fact, with the people themselves. ●

This supplement to *SSIR* was funded by the FORD FOUNDATION as part of the REALIZING DEMOCRACY project.

Democratize the Economy

Democratizing economic power can break the cycle of self-reinforcing inequality and remake American democracy.

BY FELICIA WONG, K. SABEEL RAHMAN & DORIAN WARREN

The US democracy crisis is not only a matter of voting; it is also a deeply economic crisis. The sharp and growing imbalance between the wealthy and the rest of Americans dramatically alters how public policy itself is formulated—and what those policies ultimately look like. American politicians and policymakers are consistently more responsive to the preferences of the wealthy, which drives public policies that further concentrate wealth and power for the most resourced constituencies and corporations. The result is a vicious cycle where economic inequality breeds political inequality, which in turn exacerbates economic inequality. That cycle can only be broken if we understand how these inequalities work and feed each other.

DEEP ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

We are mired in a rampant and historic crisis of economic inequality, as more and more wealth is concentrated at the top. We can measure this in a number of different ways. Take wages: since the 1980s, American productivity (measured as how much workers produce per hour) has increased, but wages have been stagnant. Or economic security: even though we have seen headline indicators of aggregate economic strength, for many Americans, economic conditions remain precarious and far from secure (which is defined as having an income that is enough to meet basic expenses, including modest asset accumulation). Or consider business concentration: corporations have become larger, more powerful, and more profitable within their market sectors, which has led to higher prices, fewer new and innovative businesses, lower wages, and less worker autonomy.

These various measures of economic inequality suggest that the fundamental problem is not the lack of worker skills, which would imply that more and better education is the central answer. Nor is the problem simply a matter of annual income, though income inequality is a serious issue. No, the core economic problem is one of power, with wealth and influence concentrated at the top of American society and business.

This is the economic crux of our democracy crisis: Very few people and firms have outsized political influence. This leads to inequality-increasing policies that favor the wealthy. In other words, democracy in the United States closely approaches what political scientist Jeffrey A. Winters calls "civil oligarchy"—rule by the wealthy few wherein the role of the state is to enforce property claims on behalf of the ruling class, and where the greatest threat to that class is taxation or some other form of income redistribution. And, of course, American civil oligarchy is heavily skewed by patterns of durable racial and gender inequalities.

Realizing a truly inclusive democracy requires tackling this parallel problem of economic power. Economic policy has to be understood as involving more than the conventional list of kitchen table issues like wages, benefits, household debt, and safety net policies (Social Security, Medicare, unemployment). Economic policy also goes beyond technical, macroeconomic concerns of GDP growth and stability (meaning lack of financial crises). While these issues are important, they must be understood as part of a larger conversation about the governance of our economy. What matters is not just the quantity and distribution of resources and opportunities; it also matters a great deal who has the power to shape our economic life and how they exercise that power.

THREE CHALLENGES

We call for democratizing economic power. This means policymakers today must tackle three key challenges. First, the extreme concentration of economic control in the hands of a small number of corporate and financial firms must be dismantled and rebalanced. Second, the countervailing power of both government and civil society, particularly workers, must be expanded to ensure that economic decisions reflect the full range of interests and constituencies. Third, communities—especially those most affected—must have more direct influence in the business of economic decision making, whether it is within the firm, on the local zoning board, or in the administration of national policymaking at the federal level. The principles of belonging and inclusion must be at the forefront of this effort, especially in a multiracial America.

Our hypothesis is that rebalancing power in this way will drive more growth and lessen the cumulative economic inequalities (of income, wealth, security, and access) of the last 40 years. Policymakers must do so in ways that actually make the US economy more democratic, which means creating more inclusive decision making at various levels of policy.

THE NEOLIBERAL STRANGLEHOLD

For much of the late 20th century, economic policymaking and public political discourse operated from the presumption that markets would bring more growth, better distribution, and less systematic racial and gender exclusion. It's the result of explicit narrative strategies to make these ideas seem like common sense, and it started as an intellectual idea, developed mostly by Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek, and others who formed the backbone of the Mont Pelerin Society and, ultimately, the Chicago School of Economics.

But as neoliberalism evolved, it became more than just a preference for market systems to solve both economic and social problems. It also involved a deep distrust of, and deliberate resistance to, the public in two ways. First was opposition to the government providing public goods. Neoliberals, at minimum, portrayed government as prone to capture, inefficiency, and failure. Maximally, neoliberals equated "the state" with Soviet-style communist central planning. All of this led to the "smaller government, less regulation, lower taxes" mantra that became central to American politics by the 1980s, even as conservatives embarked on a project not to liberate markets, but to use the state to encase them.

The second opposition to the idea of the public involved an attempt to resist the popular exercise of voice and decision making exemplified in the civil rights and women's rights movements of the 1960s and '70s. Economic experts, businessmen, and politicians especially objected to the state when its power was used to expand civil rights regimes. As historian N.B.D. Connolly reminds us, neoliberalism of the '70s and '80s was "a story about backlash and the panic-selling of state functions—literal 'white flight' from liberalism."

Neoliberalism, then, may have started primarily as economics, but it became politics: the use

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of power to make sure that some had access and others didn't. By the 1980s, American democracy was structured around a political alliance of free-market thinkers, big-business interests hostile to the New Deal settlement, social conservatives, antifeminists, and anticivil rights groups. Not everyone with these views signed on to everything that their political bedfellows believed, but this configuration of interests proved to be a powerful foundation for the conservative dominance of politics and public policy for the last half century.

The neoliberal ideological undercurrent has helped drive, legitimize, and validate a policy agenda that has not delivered the equitable growth it once promised. Instead, it has further concentrated economic wealth and power and further weakened democratic reforms. "Right to work" laws in the states have proliferated, as have a slew of judicial opinions that have severely undermined the ability of workers to organize. The antigovernment and antitax revolution of the Reagan era led to a persisting proliferation of "balanced budget" requirements at the state and local levels, and sporadic spasms of concern about the federal deficit. The result was less economic security and less voice for working people, and proposals to cut public provision of health care or other income supports were validated by the argument that people need to "stand on their own two feet." But such fiscal prudence is curiously absent in the face of conservative dismantling of the government's tax base.

We also see these presumptions in shaping liberal policy vision. Consider how even with unified control of the federal government, the Obama administration stopped short of the kind of economic stimulus that was needed to arrest the slide into the Great Recession of 2008. Or the predilection of many liberal reformers to prefer incremental improvements in the safety net through hidden transfers like tax credits rather than through more politically sustainable and inequality-reducing commitments to public provision and public options.

The result of these conservative policy ideas—and these self-limited liberal reforms—has been to facilitate the economic inequality and control that now shapes the vast majority of Americans' lives.

DE-RIGGING THE ECONOMY

By contrast, building a more inclusive economy and democracy requires policies that address three critical front lines:

- **Create a new policy agenda to shift economic power.** This new agenda must dismantle the concentration of corporate power and its control over the economy itself. We should look at new antitrust efforts, from stronger enforcement to new standards of effective competition (taking into account harms to workers, suppliers, and market competition generally, rather than focusing on price alone).
- **Build up the countervailing power of government and civil society.** The decline of labor unions is a key reason why wages have stayed stagnant and the electoral returns have shifted in favor of conservatives. Furthermore, the dismantling of government regulatory regimes has further concentrated wealth and power in the corporate sector. The gutting of federal budgets and tax receipts has similarly fueled the hollowing out of the modern safety net. An inclusive economy requires robust government and robust worker organizing to push for and defend these policies in the political arena.
- **Craft institutional designs that democratize economic governance more broadly.** These must lie outside the episodic moments of elections and focus on the day-to-day of economic policymaking. To better distribute wealth and opportunity requires the workers and communities most affected to have a voice in the governance of these economic institutions. New forms of worker voice and more democratic forms of governing corporations, shifting firms from acting like quasi-authoritarian "private governments" to workplaces that treat stakeholders equitably, can help ensure an equitable flow of value.

The crises of democracy and inequality are deeply interrelated. Concentration of political power helps ensure that public policies continue to serve the interests of the wealthy and well-resourced. Meanwhile, concentration of economic power helps megacorporations and wealthy interests dominate, while also ensuring a concentration of political influence that blunts policies that could undermine this vicious cycle. Realizing democracy requires democratizing economic power across the areas of corporate power, public power, and inclusive economic governance.

But while the crisis of economic and political inequality is severe, we are also in a moment of remarkable innovation and mobilization in public policy and civil society. These developments, if pursued to reality, can help break the vicious cycle of self-reinforcing inequality and replace it with a more virtuous cycle of self-reinforcing democracy. ●

Workplace Power

Linking worker movements to social ones can free democracy from corporate clutches.

BY ANDREA DEHLENDORF & MICHELLE MILLER

Healthy, inclusive democracies and economies need working people to thrive. In the United States, 80 percent of working people currently live paycheck to paycheck. Full-time jobs with benefits are increasingly a relic of the past. Private equity firms currently own businesses employing close to six million people, and the largest US employers, like Walmart and Amazon, amass private power that rivals that of the state and destabilizes democracy. Corporate and financial sector giants use profits generated in part by those who work to enrich already-wealthy executives and shareholders instead of investing back to people who work. To rebalance our democracy and economy, a real system of economic checks and balances must exist to ensure that working people have power in their workplaces.

In response to catastrophic levels of inequality, economic instability, and imbalance of power, working people are taking direct, collective action. They are challenging their employers to raise pay, increase stability, and address structural racial and gender inequality in the workplace. These decentralized movements increasingly espouse critiques of concentrated power and use workplace organizing to contest it. They link immediate kitchen table economic issues to how corporate and financial sectors are governed and operate, extending to their broader social, economic, and environmental impacts. These emerging movements are winning concrete gains by challenging the corporate and financial sectors' power that is causing inequality.

These campaigns are led from the bottom up with support from emergent labor and community groups building new organization models as well as traditional unions. They are aided by social and digital media platforms that have cre-

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ated a context where millions of working people can share their experiences, build a shared consciousness of their experiences at work, and create distributed online and on-the-ground actions. Some of these movements are organic; others receive focused organizational support from groups like United for Respect (UFR) and Coworker, Jobs with Justice, Bargaining for the Common Good, and traditional unions.

Using social networks and internal communications networks within corporations themselves, people are claiming virtual space to link dynamically with on-the-ground power building and collective action directly aimed at corporate decision makers. Organizing outside of the traditional union infrastructure has opened up new approaches for institutionalizing the power of working people. As these efforts begin to take shape, there has also been the strengthening of organizational infrastructure to support organizing led by working people. Broad public support for people taking workplace action is growing.

At Coworker and UFR, we have experienced an unprecedented increase in requests for support and training on how to campaign, talk to coworkers, and understand workplace rights and labor laws.

ART BY NEVER MADE

IMPACT IN A NEW MOMENT

Coworker is a digital-first organization that supports worker-led organizing using a campaign platform, social technology tools, and media strategy in combination with direct leadership support. We support organizing where there's otherwise no infrastructure or entry point to the labor movement. We have nurtured the growth of digital collectives of people working at places like Starbucks, Uber, REI, and Publix, assisting people working in the mostly low-wage service sector.

Over the last couple of years, we have heard from tech workers across the industry who are concerned about the human rights impacts of the technology they are building. They are concerned about the potential for tech to enable surveillance, harassment, and detainment of marginalized populations. At Google, employees have organized around a host of issues, including diversity and equity policies, opposing the use of artificial intelligence for drone surveillance, and equal treatment of contract workers. This employee-led organizing has demonstrated possibility to people working across the tech sector, setting off a wave of organizing in other companies and significantly altering the way stories about them are reported. The tech press has become more critical, more probing of the power of these companies. In companies like Google, which exercise social, political, and economic power that rivals that of the state, employees are one of the few checks on the continued expansion of that power. This work is part of a wave of pro-democracy organizing that demands shared governance over institutions with outsized power and influence.

UFR is a national organization that merges online and on-the-ground organizing strategies to reach, connect, and activate the 16 million people who work in the retail sector. Retail clerks, stockers, and others are facing some of the most devastating economic pain and instability in the United States as the industry consolidates, Walmart and Amazon grow and destabilize and dehumanize the workplace, and smaller retailers are driven out of business as a consequence of extractive investment and competition with a monopoly. UFR has a base of hundreds of thousands and a reach of millions of people working in low-wage jobs.

UFR's Toys "R" Us campaign demonstrates how we execute fast, deep engagement in the service sector workforce and politicize issues of jobs and the economy among women and working-class voters. Last year, 33,000 people were forced out of their jobs after private equity firms bankrupted the company. In a few short months, UFR leaders and organizers reached more than 10,000 Toys "R" Us workers online, conducted over 2,000 one-on-one organizing conversations, carried out 400 actions, and developed 150 leaders. Toys "R" Us workers actively engaged nationwide, from taking direct action in their stores to giving public testimony at pension fund meetings, in the fight to win severance pay from the private equity owners. Their activism led to a historic settlement with the private equity firms for a $20 million hardship fund.

In the aftermath, UFR leaders worked closely with Senator Elizabeth Warren and other key elected leaders and partners, including Americans for Financial Reform, to introduce the Stop Wall Street Looting Act of 2019 to create guardrails for the industry. With the trail of private equity-driven retail bankruptcies that followed Toys "R" Us, from Shopko to Gymboree to Sears, it was clear that there needed to be federal regulation that curbed the industry's worst practices and investment strategies. The Stop Wall Street Looting Act has provisions to mitigate these dangerous investment strategies and ensure that portfolio companies, consumers, workers, and investors are protected. This historic bill levels the playing field for those who have felt abused by private equity, whether it is retail workers facing job loss, public pension funds struggling to get greater fee disclosures, or those challenging private equity's profiteering from immigrant detention facilities. The voice of working people who had been directly impacted has been critically important to the development of regulation that we hope will grow and evolve a more equitable business model that does not profit at the expense of people or the planet.

A BRAVE NEW WORLD

What ties all this and similar campaigns together is people using their collective voice to impact working conditions and corporate decision making on issues of existential importance, rewriting the rules so that they work for all of us. Teachers went on strike for increased pay, reduced class sizes, and expanded student programs. Tech programmers at Amazon used their voice as shareholders to push on sustainability practices. Wayfair tech workers demonstrated to protest their employer's role in supplying furniture to immigrant detention centers. Nurses have long campaigned for quality patient care for those they serve and universal health care. Bank tellers and loan officers called for changes to compensation so that pay is not tied to extractive sales quotas, as well as a role in regulation. From teachers to bank tellers to programmers, working people are wielding their voices and power to challenge core decisions on how government and corporations—which could not function without their labor—are run.

These new movements will strengthen existing organizations and inspire new ones. They also create a moment for introspection and reflection to move forward: How can labor and movement organizations respond to this spike in interest and willingness? Can we translate that popularity into lasting power? How can working people rewrite the rules of how we build and hold power where we work, win economic stability, and fundamentally transform the ways we govern corporations? How do we embrace the tremendous reach and energy of social media and digital tools and build infrastructure that institutionalizes them into lasting bases of power?

We can win only by unifying campaigns for power and democracy in the workplace to social movements. To create multiracial, participatory, and equitable institutions owned by working people, we need to question the fundamental principles and design of our current democratic and economic systems. ●

Reversing Income Inequality

The Los Angeles teachers' strike is a master class in using unions to build bases and secure progressive wins.

BY JANE MCALEVEY

When Margaret Thatcher infamously said, "And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families," she wasn't making an observation. She was declaring a strategy to unmake a once-powerful working class. For several decades, at least since Thatcher and Ronald Reagan delivered severe blows to unions in their respective countries, it has been open season on workers. Academics and policymakers argue about how to preserve or restore a decent quality of life for workers—all for naught.

These endless debates about how to reverse income inequality and restore and strengthen democracy are a constant distraction from a more urgent need: workers who can organize together to form fighting organizations capable of effective mass collective action. Two of the most democratizing movements in US history—the union movement of the 1930s and 1940s, and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s—both relied heavily on confronting a seemingly unshakable power structure with direct-action organizing. Both movements understood that challenging power required power-building strategies. The only strategic advantage that the non-elite have over billionaires and the political elite is population size. To win elections or policy or political support, those large numbers must create sustainable, demonstrable supermajorities capable of persuading corporations and the political elite to come to the negotiating table.

The best evidence that unions continue to be not only relevant but urgent is the explosion of labor strikes over the past 18 months. These include the multicity, multistate strike by low-wage immigrant workers against Marriott, the largest hotel corporation in the world; the uprising by 31,000 Stop & Shop workers in New England; and the enormous strikes in the education sector, like the one in Los Angeles. The victories have been uneven, but each strike either has stopped egregious corporate behavior or has led to progressive breakthroughs not seen in decades.

When it comes to the Los Angeles teachers' strike, the policy wins are more enforceable than legislation because workers have secured the right to redress if employers try to evade implementation. More important, the teachers, students, and parents together built organizations capable of implementing their achievements. According to Alex Caputo-Pearl, an award-winning high school teacher of 22 years and president of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), "We knew they'd never agree to our demands, including Green Spaces, creating an Immigrants Defense Fund [US Immigration and Customs Enforcement had been increasingly targeting schools], a big expansion of school nurses and guidance counselors, or our top demand to reduce the number of kids per class, unless and until we were out on strike with parents standing united behind the demands."

Caputo-Pearl knew this because the students, the parents, and their teachers were pitted against a recently appointed school board superintendent who was a hedge fund billionaire with zero experience in the education field. Less than 60 days after his appointment in May 2018, Austin Beutner published a report titled "Hard Choices," which declared that teachers were overpaid and overcompensated, and called for a 47 percent reduction in their benefits, which he declared to be "too generous." This is in Los Angeles, where full-time workers live in their cars and buy gym memberships to shower. With per pupil spending in California ranked 47th in the nation, Beutner declared that teachers—who

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buy pencils, paper, and tampons for their students—were overpaid, setting the stage for what became the first strike in 30 years. The school board management had been steadily converting public schools in Los Angeles into private corporate charter schools, the largest and most steady expansion in the nation. Beutner's report was a declaration of his intent to defeat the teachers' union in a head-on confrontation. After all, teachers' unions were flat on their backs, right?

For the six months following the release of his report, under his direction the school board repeatedly attempted to get legal injunctions and used lawsuits and other tactical gimmicks to try to weaken and demoralize the teachers. What blocked him was a four-year effort of the best teachers who rebuilt their once-do-nothing union into a powerhouse organizing machine.

Each policy achievement was won contractually through the collective bargaining process. In Los Angeles, many of the demands presented by the teachers' union were proposals that parent groups and the broader community had been trying to win for years, without success. Examples include forcing annual reductions in class size by capping student-teacher ratios; securing more wraparound services for low-income youth and youth of color by hiring more school nurses, librarians, and counselors; and making vast improvements in wages and health-care benefits for the mostly women of color workforce. The policy wins have also included specific measures that challenge direct and indirect racism, including banning so-called random searches, almost all of which target youth of color and ultimately direct them to the prison, not college, pipeline.

Ending random searches was a central issue in the negotiations. The teachers won an experimental ban on these racist practices in 30 schools, and the victory emboldened the racial justice community and raised its expectations for a total ban across all 900 Los Angeles schools. To secure the district-wide policy, the teachers led a movement that translated their all-out worker strike into an all-out picket-lines-to-the-polls election for a vacancy on the school board—a campaign that had to begin on the heels of the strike. Despite exhaustion, by May, they had elected a progressive school board candidate, setting the stage for the June 2019 banning of searches that research shows were anything but random.

ART BY NICOLAS LAMPERT

Another example of a remarkable achievement from the 100 percent out strike was the win for Green Spaces. Hedgefund bankers representing the corporate wing of the Democratic Party dug in their heels against the 34,00 teachers demanding improvements to the physical, emotional, and mental health of more than half a million students of color. Despite their resistance, the new contract calls for the school board to immediately form a Green Space Task Force that includes representatives from the LA Unified School District (LAUSD), UTLA (the union), and the City of Los Angeles. LAUSD will work with UTLA, the City of Los Angeles, the County of Los Angeles, and appropriate nonprofit partners to create—to the maximum extent possible—adequate green space for student physical activity.

According to the task force plan, green space will be constructed in order of priority: schools without any existing green space and not located near parks; followed by schools without any existing green space; and, finally, schools with small amounts of green space and communities with limited to no access to parks and recreation.

That was big, but the Green Spaces provision also calls for removing the metal bungalows used as classrooms on K-12 campuses across the district. The structures, which resemble shipping containers, are a manifestation of the disinvestment in America's public schools and the disinvestment in the American public. At one point, the city considered buying some used bungalows from the school district to use as shelters for the rapidly expanding homeless population, but it ultimately decided against the idea because the containers were in such poor condition. Yet they were deemed good enough for low-income kids to spend most waking hours in, allegedly learning the skills that would prepare them for life. The idea of equality of opportunity would be a joke if not for teachers fighting through their union, with their heart and feet, to make it so.

Los Angeles's progressive educators led a master class in how to rebuild strong, socially

relevant unions, and how to expand their base by building solidarity with students, parents, and the broader community. It happened fast, and the results are a model for exactly what needs to happen nationwide. These victories required power, not merely "a voice."

Good strikes force the very consensus building that America needs, and the sooner we reprioritize unions, the sooner we can reclaim democracy. ●

Other People's Money

Better education about the role of effective governance ensures that markets and institutions serve society.

BY ANAT R. ADMATI

The debates about our economic system are sometimes framed as a stark choice between market-based capitalism and government-controlled socialism. But the actual choices are much more complicated. Corporations, which control much of our economic activity today, owe their existence to governments. Although they do not vote in elections, the economic and political power of corporations and their impact on democracy are immense. The challenge arises from the tension between functioning democracy on one hand and narrowly defined business practices on the other hand. For the market economy to serve society in a democracy, more citizens must become educated about the forces that shape the system, including corporations and governments, and the key role of effective governance in determining the outcomes.

In his famous 1970 essay "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase its Profits," Milton Friedman championed "free-market capitalism" where managers should "make as much money as possible while conforming to the rules of society." He presumed that businesses operate in an environment of "open and free competition without deception and fraud," but he failed to discuss whether or under what conditions this assumption is true. In fact, markets are unlikely to become competitive and devoid of deception and fraud on their own, and capitalism cannot deliver on its promise without effective governments.

Friedman warned against "the iron fist of government bureaucrats" that the concerns of chief executives about corporate social responsibility would bring back. But a key role of government is to enable markets and to protect stakeholders when market forces fail to do so properly. The civil servants ("bureaucrats") who Friedman mentioned derisively are essential for enforcing contracts, ensuring competition, administrating justice, protecting rights, and dealing with fraud and deception when conventions, accepted business practices, or cultural norms fail to hold actors accountable to socially acceptable behavior. Governments also maintain infrastructure and provide important services, including public safety, benefits that many ignore or take for granted. If governments fail to design and enforce appropriate laws for individuals, businesses and markets, then it no longer follows that managers who solely focus on making as much money as possible are fulfilling their social responsibility.

The critical issues lie not in the *size* of government, but rather in the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of the individuals and institutions that act on its behalf. To fully realize the benefits of democracy, political systems and government institutions must embody the collective choices of all citizens, and the rules of the game must be designed and enforced to serve the social good.

Particularly insidious challenges to democracy arise when corporations become involved in the writing of the rules that apply to everyone, including themselves.

These days, well-functioning democracies are few and far between. Democracy itself appears to be in retreat around the world, and trust in private and government institutions, particularly in the United States, is low. In a 2018 poll conducted by Harvard University's Institute of Politics, nearly two-thirds of Americans ages 18–29 expressed fear for the future of democracy in America, and in a 2018 Gallup Poll, only 25 percent of Americans expressed "a lot" or "a great deal" of confidence in big business. Public trust in the US government seems to be at a near historical low. Unfocused anger with "the system" can be misdirected by demagogues and lead us away from the right solutions. To tackle effectively the lack of trust and the distortions in our prevailing economic system and in our democracy, we must first diagnose their underlying causes.

The problems plaguing democracy and capitalism are largely rooted in the complex interactions between corporations, governments, and individuals. These interactions are fraught with conflicts of interest, wide gaps in information and expertise, and the potential for abuse of power. Effective governance is key. How do we ensure transparency to hold the powerful accountable in the private and public sectors? How do we prevent conflicted experts and narrow interests from having excessive impact, particularly on issues that appear complex and confusing to nonexperts and the public? Ultimately, how can we trust those with power in corporations and in government institutions who have important impact over our lives to avoid abusing their power and causing harm?

Corporations and governments have numerous points of contact. Some interactions are primarily transactional: when corporations sell goods and services to government bodies, including essential services such as prisons, security forces, transportation, weapons, health care and medicines, for example. Some corporations act as private watchdogs, providing credit ratings and financial audits to private and government entities. Financial institutions are involved in funding governments as investors and intermediaries. Consultants offer advice to governments as well as to corporations. Media corporations inform the public about government bodies as well as on private sector corporations. In all these engagements, conflicts of interests and information gaps create numerous opportunities for abuse of entrusted power. Corruption can occur even if nobody breaks laws.

Particularly insidious challenges to democracy arise when corporations become involved in the writing of the rules that apply to everyone, including themselves, or interfere with

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enforcement. The problem is not new, but it has been exacerbated with increases in corporate lobbying activity. Over their history, US corporations have used the legal system to gain many legal rights and fight against government rules. Some of the legal rights of corporations are important to their ability to benefit society; others, however, such as political speech and religious rights, aren't directly linked to any social benefits. Yet, the 2010 decision by the US Supreme Court in the case *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* allows corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money on campaign contributions and political activity.

When corporate engagement with governments serves narrow interests and money is critical for campaigns and influence, the system causes "corruptive dependencies," exacerbates inequality, and leads to the perception that our "captured economy" is rigged and unjust. Corporations can also pit governments in different jurisdictions against each other, leading governments to offer them privileges that may not benefit the public, or to weaken useful rules so as to help some corporations succeed even at the cost of harming citizens. Examples of corporations undermining democracy through policy engagement are rampant in the financial sector and in the pharmaceutical, coal, and gun industries.

I first encountered these issues when looking at the banking sector after the financial crisis of 2007–2009, which led me to realize that many of the assumptions about markets and corporations that are routinely made in research and teaching about financial markets and corporations are false. The crisis was not, as some conveniently imply, akin to an unpreventable natural disaster; rather, it was the result of failed corporate governance and poorly designed and ineffective rules that tolerated waste, fraud, and an enormous buildup of unnecessary risk. The rules effectively rewarded recklessness and exacerbated the fragility of the system.

In *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*, Adam Tooze describes how developments before 2007 and since, including the extraordinary actions by governments and central banks and the narratives and public anger surrounding the events, exposed the enormous harm that free-market capitalism and government failures can cause. The crisis transformed our economic, political and geopolitical landscape in ways that continue to have substantial impact on us today.

Over the last decade, I have engaged with trying to improve the rules for the financial system, and I witnessed with dismay and concern how distorted incentives, averted eyes, and insufficient accountability have led markets and governments to fail society. The reformed rules after the financial crisis do not reflect the full lessons of the crisis and maintain a largely unchanged system that is inefficient, reckless, and opaque. Some rules are too costly and counterproductive, while others are unnecessarily complex, yet weak and inadequate, benefiting few and harming and endangering the rest unnecessarily.

In "It Takes a Village to Maintain a Dangerous Financial System," I discuss the actions and motivations of the numerous enablers in the private sector, government, and even academia that are collectively responsible for this situation. These enablers remain unaccountable because the issues appear complex and confusing to the public. Flawed claims contribute to the confusion, muddle the debate, and continue to impact policy and cause harm. Creating a better financial system requires that citizens become savvier as consumers of the system and better informed about its flaws and what can be done to correct them. Teaching at universities can help, but much more is needed to challenge the entrenched system.

It is important to place governments in a better position to design and enforce proper rules ... and citizens in a better position to hold all those in power accountable.

Similar problems arise in many policy areas in which experts might be conflicted and where the harm, or specific flaws in corporate governance and policy, are difficult for nonexperts to detect or know how to correct. Examples include financial disclosures, technology, and the environment. The recent scandal involving Boeing and the Federal Aviation Administration shows that even in aviation safety, distorted incentives in the private and public sectors can cause preventable harm. Other recent examples where corporations or government bodies caused or tolerated harm that their employees and leaders could have prevented but failed to do so are Purdue Pharma, Equifax, Theranos, Facebook, and Wells Fargo. Even when investigations reveal some of the culprits of harm, the typical outcome of excessive endangerment and misconduct by corporation is a fine paid by shareholders and minimal if any consequences for leaders, raising questions about the justice system in a corporate context.

So far, those in the business community and business schools concerned with the loss of trust in capitalism or with problems such as climate change and inequality have focused on private-sector solutions involving philanthropy, social entrepreneurship, and impact investment. Perhaps in response to backlash against their focus on "shareholder value," 181 chief executives in the United States recently vowed, without being specific about how their practices might change, to consider all stakeholders.

Voluntary actions by the private sector can be useful, but they cannot solve society's big problems or replace governments altogether. Worse, the focus on private-sector solutions perpetuates the flaw in Friedman's analysis by ignoring the critical role that governments must play and distracting us away from ensuring that governments act properly in our collective interests. By assuming that governments are unable or unwilling to solve social problems, those who focus on private-sector solutions fail to ask why governments might be dysfunctional or to reflect on or take responsibility for their own role in causing harm or weakening governments.

Indeed, those who practice free-market capitalism today and count on governments to protect their property rights and safety may cause harm and undermine governments and democracy in their pursuit of profit. For example, to achieve success, managers may seek outsize subsidies and tax breaks and lobby to weaken beneficial safety standards or environmental regulations. They may also find it useful to confuse policymakers and the public so as to maintain market power or get away with reckless practices. Even if these actions do not violate the letter of existing laws, they may contradict the spirit of the laws and hinder their enforcement. And self-regulation is unlikely to suffice when stock-based compensation and pressure from aggressive investors create strong incentives to respond to the standard success metrics.

We can do more to tackle the governance problems at the nexus of corporations and democracy and improve the system. To root out subtle and often invisible forms of corruption and to ensure that markets, corporations, and

governments serve society, it is important to place governments in a better position to design and enforce proper rules, including for markets and corporations, and citizens in a better position to hold all those in power accountable.

To be effective, government bodies need appropriate resources, unconflicted expertise, and capable civil servants who are not prone to being corrupted. Well-designed rules can correct distortions, protect the public, and help markets work better, but poorly designed rules can exacerbate distortions. The details may be complex, but at least some citizens should be able to evaluate the rules and they should help citizens to hold those who write and enforce the rules properly accountable. Academic institutions and independent media can play important roles by providing unconflicted expertise as well as exposing governance and policy failures. And it is imperative that more people see through flawed and misleading claims that can scare or confuse politicians and voters to benefit narrow interests. Such strategies must not win.

Education is key to achieving these goals. Business schools, in particular, should work to eliminate some of the information asymmetries that lead to flawed rules, deception schemes, and lack of accountability. More generally, higher education programs should practice and promote civic-minded leadership and emphasize the importance of good governance mechanisms. As I have proposed in a recent piece at *Harvard Business Review*, doing so involves nuanced discussions of policy challenges related to business and society, collaborations to break disciplinary silos, and broader engagement across identity groups to elevate the level of public discourse beyond ideology and anger. A better informed and engaged citizenry can push, among other things, for badly needed reforms to campaign finance laws, improved transparency for corporations, and policies to improve governance and accountability in all institutions.

We face significant challenge in ensuring that our institutions are trustworthy. But we must first look beyond simplistic and misleading narratives about our choices. We do not have to choose between capitalism and socialism or between markets and big government. Rather, we must work to create a system in which corporations can thrive without distorting the economy and democracy, and in which governments write and enforce proper rules for all. Better education on the issues would be a good start. It is up to all of us. ●

Against Nostalgia

Three takeaways to establish the structural and institutional guardrails necessary to achieving the democracy we need and deserve.

BY LISA GARCÍA BEDOLLA

The articles in this supplement outline the changes that need to happen within civil society, government, and the economy in order for our society to realize its full democratic promise, arguably, for the first time.

The articles' authors propose and explain the key principles needed in order to establish those guardrails. The goal is to provide a holistic diagnosis of the problem—one that does not romanticize history but instead learns critical lessons from it. The stories from the field are meant to exemplify the courageous transformation that is already happening across the country.

Building People Power | The stories from Faith in Minnesota and the Los Angeles teachers strike make it clear that transformative changes are possible when organizations foster a sense of belonging and power within their communities. That sense grows out of relationships, the core of which are the authentic conversations that organizers have with their community members. For these transformations to be real, the knowledge community members bring must be valued rather than relying on the opinions of highly paid political consultants who are parachuted in for a campaign but have no connection to the community, no understanding of its context, and no sense of its history. Real changes must be grounded in all three, with relationship-building at the core. Realizing democracy requires bridge crossing within and across communities in order to ensure that the people can serve as a countervailing force that holds state and economic actors accountable.

Reversing Institutional Capture | A government cannot be seen as democratic if it is not accountable to its people. America's founders believed that state and local government were less dangerous than the federal government because they were closer to, and therefore more accountable to, the people. Hertel-Fernandez and Smith's analysis suggests the Founders may have been wrong, showing how state governments have, for a variety of reasons, been captured by "the political interests of the well-organized, wealthy few at the expense of the broader public." Yet Hatch and Gerstein make clear that state and local government can also be seen as potential sites of democratic opportunity, as is evident in their success electing progressive prosecutors and working with attorneys general in localities across the country.

Their story shows what happens when attorneys general and district attorneys take a "broader view of what it means to represent 'The People.'" Their success suggests that when it comes to governmental transformation the collective imagination needs to be bigger. Changing the institutions themselves in fundamental ways in addition to changing the people within those institutions can turn incremental policy tweaks into transformative policy change.

Building a Democratic Economy | Democracy must value people over profits. Basic assumptions about markets, their value, and their efficiencies, need to shift. One of the most important changes that needs to happen is the acceptance of government as a countervailing force that is necessary and whose job it is to regulate markets in order to ensure that they serve the public good. The good news is that our current levels of economic inequality are the product of policy choices made over the past four decades. That means that those changes can be undone and government power can be used to check market power and ensure a more equitable distribution of economic resources. In order for this change to happen, the meaning of the economy must be broadened to include the workplace as a site of democracy and democratic practice.

Previous reform efforts have attempted to focus on one part of the problem—be it voting, government reform, or workplace issues. These essays make clear that all these factors are important and interrelated. American democracy has never been fully realized—for most of the nation's history, the majority of the US population was excluded from the franchise and alienated from their basic rights. The current democratic crisis has its roots in, among other things, resistance to the attempts by social movements, such as the civil rights movement, to demand access and fairness within our democratic institutions. Within that context, incremental reforms that tweak at the margins will not work. Without a serious, concerted, and holistic effort to address issues of power and inequality across civil society, government, and the economy, our democracy will never be fully realized. ●

Lisa García Bedolla *is cofounder of the Center on Democracy and Organizing and vice provost for Graduate Studies and dean of the Graduate Division at UC Berkeley.*

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The **Realizing Democracy** project is a year-long learning series reimagining the relationship among civil society, government, and the economy—asking what it would take to realize the full promise of democracy in the United States. Longstanding but deepening crises have combined to create significant limitations for the practice of self-government, which should center everyday people and communities. What's more, the interrelated crises affecting civil society, government and the economy compound each other—and tend to deepen inequality in a vicious cycle—undermining people's ability to create the world they want and deserve. But we can choose a different, more inclusive path, one grounded in people-centered democracy and the nation's most deeply shared values. A new path would elevate innovative forms of inclusive leadership, respond to technology and other drivers of change, and offer frameworks for taking action on the challenges that affect us all—and generations to come. Realizing Democracy is a collaboration between Community Change, the Center for the Study of Democracy and Organizing, Demos, Ford Foundation, and the Open Society Foundations.

RESEARCH

HIGHLIGHTS FROM SCHOLARLY JOURNALS

DANIELA BLEI is a historian, writer, and editor of scholarly books. Her writing can be seen here: daniela-blei.com/writing. She tweets sporadically: @tothelastpage.

EDUCATION

Brilliant Rule-Breakers

BY DANIELA BLEI

Today, girls outperform boys in almost every academic subject. On average, girls earn higher grades and graduate from high school at higher rates, and women enroll in college in much greater numbers. While these gendered achievement gaps have created the impression that boys are the newly disadvantaged at school, education researchers say that growing talk of a "boy crisis" belies reality in the classroom. They have consistently found that from kindergarten through college, students view boys and men as more intelligent than girls and women. How does school reproduce this traditional gender hierarchy?

To better understand how school practices contribute to gendered status beliefs, Michela Musto, a sociologist and postdoctoral fellow at the Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University, embedded herself in a racially diverse suburban middle school in Los Angeles for two-and-a-half years. Most sociological studies of schools examine low-income urban areas, but Mountain Heights Middle School, where Musto conducted ethnographic research and 196 interviews, is a high-performing public institution with an enrollment of more than 1,000 students that includes both affluent and non-affluent families.

And while many sociologists have studied the relationship between gender and academic achievement in K-12 settings, the bulk of this research looks at teachers, administrators, or parents. Instead, Musto says, "I wanted to understand school from the student's perspective." To capture everyday experience, she observed classes and joined students at lunch, dances, and extracurricular activities.

Musto was interested in middle school because "what happens there sets the stage for broader patterns of inequality that continue throughout the entire educational experience and even into the workforce," she says. Early adolescence is a formative time, when students "try on various identities and make important decisions about their anticipated career paths," Musto writes.

Musto's research scrutinized two classroom dynamics in particular: first, how educators—mostly white college-educated women—enforced rules or responded to boys breaking them; and second, how educators disciplined white, Asian-American, and Latino boys differently.

In an "exquisitely nuanced investigation," says Andrei Cimpian, professor of psychology at New York University, Musto "illustrates how gender-brilliance stereotypes emerge out of the dynamics of teacher-student interactions in school, how they intersect with children's racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, and how they shape children's behaviors and aspirations over time."

Musto uncovered major differences in students' perceptions of intelligence, depending on race and course level. In sixth-grade higher-level (honors or advanced) courses, where affluent students identifying as white or Asian-American were overrepresented, teachers tolerated rule-breaking by boys, allowing them to disrupt and monopolize classroom discussion. This was especially the case for white boys, who were tacitly rewarded for their interruptions. Meanwhile, their Asian-American peers were discouraged from talking out of turn. Girls in higher-level courses had fewer opportunities to speak, and by eighth grade, students believed that boys were smarter and the best boys were "exceptional." By the end of middle school, girls expressed less confidence in their public speaking abilities.

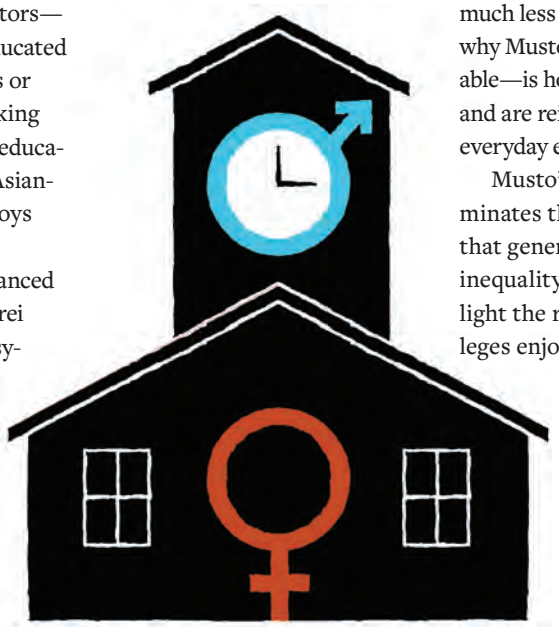


ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM McCAULEY

But in sixth-grade lower-level (standard or remedial) courses, where less affluent students identifying as Latinx were overrepresented, a stricter classroom environment prevailed. Teachers did not tolerate boys' disruptions. Girls were more active participants in classroom discussion and were less likely to have their views challenged by interrupting boys. Fearing punishment, the boys became disengaged and even marginalized. By eighth grade, students described girls as smarter, and girls expressed more confidence when it came to public speaking, but students did not regard any girls as "exceptional."

"Musto's research fills an important gap," Cimpian says. "We knew that gender-brilliance stereotypes are widespread, that they are acquired early in life, and that they present an obstacle to women's success in many prestigious careers, including those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). What we knew much less about—and this is why Musto's research is so valuable—is how they play out in and are reinforced by children's everyday experiences."

Musto's research also illuminates the many dynamics that generate and reinforce inequality. Her findings highlight the race and class privileges enjoyed by white boys as well as the disadvantages that Latinx boys encounter. "If we're not looking at how gender and race intersect to shape students' experiences," Musto

says, "it's possible to miss that certain boys are doing very well, and that school is set up to help these boys get ahead, even as other boys are falling behind." Her classroom-level analysis shows the extent to which academic tracking reproduces inequality, benefiting some students at the expense of others.

Michela Musto, "Brilliant or Bad: The Gendered Social Construction of Exceptionalism in Early Adolescence," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 84, no. 3, 2019, pp. 369–393.

NONPROFITS & NGOS

Advocacy from the Shadows

BY DANIELA BLEI

Around the world, organizations working to effect social change must contend with political pressures and cultural forces that impede their efforts. This is especially the case when entrenched elites have the power to silence opposition and punish organizations that challenge the status quo. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups often pledge political or religious neutrality to operate in these environments, but in recent years, high-profile international organizations have been ejected from their host countries for perceived failures to abide by these promises.

In a new paper, Laura Claus, professor of strategy and entrepreneurship at the University College London School of Management, and Paul Tracey, professor of business and organization at the Judge Business School at the University of Cambridge, examine how NGOs navigate such obstacles. Claus and Tracey were interested in how organizations can challenge "guarded institutions"—structures and systems that are protected by elites through coercion or repression—when the price of speaking out or mobilizing against them is high.

"Most studies of institutional change assume organizations have the ability to voice dissent openly," Claus says. "What happens in other contexts when strategies from those settings aren't viable?"

Claus and Tracey's paper reconstructs how an international children's rights organization worked in Indonesia to disrupt child marriage, a guarded institution in the country. To protect the organization from retaliation, Claus and Tracey use the pseudonym ICO.

Tracey met ICO officers at an innovation seminar and introduced Claus, who soon traveled to its New York City headquarters to discuss its work with Indonesian social activists. Following an invitation to its field office, Claus embarked on her first trip to Jakarta, where she conducted an average of three interviews a day for six weeks. Alongside 105 interviews with employees and partners of the organization, Claus and Tracey collected archival sources, including sensitive documents, media coverage, and materials from public debates.

Child marriage is highly institutionalized in Indonesia, and recent reform efforts have been blocked by the country's Constitutional Court. The practice of marrying off girls as young as possible violates international law and endangers girls' health and well-being but remains for many Indonesians a way of life. "In addition to being taken for granted, child marriage is powerfully protected by elites, typically religious elites," Claus says. For ICO, a large organization that was perceived as Western, speaking out against this guarded institution risked expulsion, or having its health, education, and nutrition services terminated.

So ICO decided to combat child marriage surreptitiously by building a secret coalition of partners—what Claus and Tracey call an "alter ego." Their partners formed an Indonesian social movement that appeared to come from the grassroots but was in fact orchestrated from above.

The organization's undercover campaign began with visits to universities and schools to educate students on the devastating effects of child marriage. "It turned out that some student groups wanted to participate," Claus says. "ICO was invisible but behind them." The organization worked with student activists and other partners who became the public face of the social movement.

"Claus and Tracey show that guarded institutions can be challenged by facilitating grassroots opposition that is not easily traced to an individual actor or organization," says Tom Lawrence, professor of strategic management at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School.

The turning point came on June 18, 2015, when Indonesia's Constitutional Court announced its decision to uphold child marriage. The coalition anticipated this possibility and ignited a social protest movement in response. Dissenters took to the streets of Jakarta, and student groups traveled to rural areas to meet with and educate villagers. As these grassroots efforts grew and won the support of national politicians, the scales tipped in favor of reform. In 2018, Indonesia's marriage law was ruled unconstitutional.

Claus and Tracey's findings challenge organizational theorists who have long drawn distinctions between "astroturfing" campaigns that are fabricated, or organized from above, and authentic grassroots movements that emerge from below. They show that by engaging local activists, youth groups, and other partners, ICO created a grassroots movement. Astroturfing allowed the organization to incubate dissent and build relationships. A controversial public event then served as a catalyst for "real" grassroots mobilization.

"The lessons extend well beyond authoritarian and ideological regimes," Lawrence says. "Even in liberal democratic societies, some institutions are protected by the ability of their guardians to punish opponents economically or politically, as has been seen repeatedly in the case of firearms regulation in the United States."

Laura Claus and Paul Tracey, "Making Change from Behind a Mask: How Organizations Challenge Guarded Institutions by Sparking Grassroots Activism," *Academy of Management Journal*, August 15, 2019, pp. 1–67.

BOOKS
REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTABLE TITLES

PAUL BREST is professor emeritus at Stanford Law School and a faculty codirector of the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society's Effective Philanthropy Learning Initiative.

How to Measure—and Manage—Performance

Alnoor Ebrahim's *Measuring Social Change* offers leaders a framework for performance measurement and management in the social sector.

BY PAUL BREST

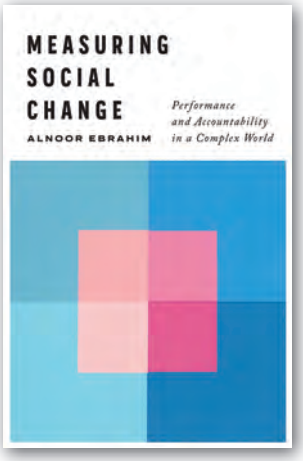
The title of Alnoor Ebrahim's important *Measuring Social Change* understates the scope of his thesis. It is a work on *managing* social change—highly readable, engaging, and illustrated by rich in-depth case studies. The book presents a novel and thought-provoking framework for categorizing and implementing performance management strategies based on the causal relationship between an organization's activities and outcomes and on its control over those outcomes.

As background for discussing Ebrahim's thesis, let me define the key elements of a program strategy: *Activities* are what an organization does; *outputs* are what it delivers to its beneficiaries; and *outcomes* are what happen as a result of its activities and outputs. There are two categories of outcomes: *ultimate outcomes*, which are improvements in the beneficiaries' well-being; and *intermediate outcomes*, which are typically changes in the behavior of beneficiaries or other people that lead to the ultimate outcomes. An organization's *theory of change* describes the path from activities and outputs to intermediate and ultimate outcomes. An intervention has *impact* to the extent that it caused or contributed to the intended outcome.

For example, consider a program with the *ultimate outcome* of reducing recidivism among ex-offenders released from prison. One of its major activities is to identify suitable jobs for its clients. The program's finding an appropriate job for a particular client is an output. The client's obtaining and staying in the job is an *intermediate outcome*, which hopefully leads to the ultimate outcome.

The central question Ebrahim addresses is what a nonprofit organization should measure to achieve its intended outcomes. Using the familiar two-by-two contingency framework divided into four quadrants, he identifies four conditions that should shape an organization's performance management system. The framework's two dimensions are uncertainty about the causal relationship between an organization's activities and its outcomes, and the organization's control "over all of the activities and conditions necessary for delivering long-term outcomes."

Ebrahim observes that "high uncertainty about cause-effect relationships makes it difficult to specify which [of the organization's] behaviors are necessary for achieving desired outcomes." Although this is true, it is worth noting that virtually all social interventions have fairly high uncertainties because of the role of exogenous factors, ranging from social influences on the beneficiaries' behaviors to the weather and the economy.



MEASURING SOCIAL CHANGE: Performance and Accountability in a Complex World
By Alnoor Ebrahim
320 pages, Stanford University Press, 2019

Regarding control, Ebrahim explains that "under conditions of low control, an organization focuses on delivering a highly specific task or output that, on its own, is insufficient for ... delivering an outcome." An organization can attempt to increase control, he continues, "by combining multiple interventions—such as job training, in combination with counseling, job placement, and post-placement coaching—that together are more likely to address the social problem."

Depending on the quadrant an organization finds itself in, Ebrahim recommends one of four strategic management approaches: niche, emergent, integrated, and ecosystem.

A *niche* management strategy is appropriate in conditions of *low uncertainty/low control*. Typically, the organization has a single strategy and there is a clear causal relationship between its activities and intended outcomes, but the organization lacks control over those outcomes. His main example is Ziqitza Health Care Limited (ZHL), an emergency medical response service for the very poor in India. ZHL's mission is to improve the health of its clients by rapidly transporting them to hospitals, but it has no control over the medical care they receive once they are delivered. Ebrahim suggests that ZHL can most effectively measure and manage its performance through key performance indicators focused on its own outputs.

An *emergent* strategy is appropriate in conditions of *high uncertainty/low control*—where the causal chains are complex and obscure and the organization has little control over the outcome. As his main case study, Ebrahim uses Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), a global research network that aims to influence the International Labor Organization to adopt standards for workers in informal sectors. WIEGO "scan[ned] the environment for opportunities to engage with key influencers, gain entry to key decision forums ..., secure a long-term seat at the table, and continue to

push for research and evidence to change policies and mindsets." WIEGO's performance system calls for the constant monitoring of intermediate outcomes—mainly related to advocacy—in order to adapt its activities to a complex and protean ecosystem of actors.

An *integrated* strategy is suggested in conditions of *low uncertainty/high control*. Ebrahim offers a case study of the nonprofit Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), which manages interventions within the organization to improve the incomes of smallholder farmers in India. While the causal relationship between its activities and outcomes is clear, the organization must combine different activities to gain control and have impact. In addition to measuring outputs, AKRSP must assess outcomes in order to improve its various interventions and interactions among them.

Measuring Social Change *provides practitioners with a valuable framework for measuring and managing social change and sets a research agenda.*

An *ecosystem* strategy is appropriate in conditions of *high uncertainty/high control*—where causal chains are uncertain and the organization achieves control by orchestrating the activities of external actors. Ebrahim's example is permanent supportive housing to address homelessness, where one organization provides housing and others provide wrap-around services addressing problems of physical and mental health, drug addiction, and the like. The Washington, DC, nonprofit Miriam's Kitchen "orchestrates" coordination among the various organizations.

AKRSP and Miriam's Kitchen employ different strategies to gain control—coordinating activities within the organization in one case, and orchestrating the activities of external organizations in the other. But I don't see a difference between the cases in terms of uncertainty. In both cases, the relationship between any single activity and the ultimate outcome is quite uncertain, but the aggregate activities resulting from coordination or orchestration significantly increases the correlation. Granting the uncertainties that attend virtually all social interventions, the offer of permanent housing plus a cluster of wraparound services seems to be as effective a strategy for reducing homelessness as AKRSP's strategy is for improving the lives of smallholder farmers.

This quibble hardly undercuts the book's valuable contribution in flagging certainty and control as key variables in managing nonprofit strategies. All things considered, Ebrahim's argument culminates in three persuasive points: First, if, even in combination with other interventions, a service delivery program's interventions are not likely to lead to its intended ultimate outcome (high uncertainty), the program should be abandoned. (Pilot and experimental programs, advocacy, and other emergent strategies are different, because their high uncertainty may be outweighed by important learning or extraordinary outcomes.)

Second, if interventions are likely to lead to the outcome (low uncertainty) and the program has reasonable control over the outcome, then the organization should measure and manage to the outcome (including getting feedback from beneficiaries), activities, and outputs.

Third, if the interventions are likely to lead to the ultimate outcome (again, low uncertainty) but the program does not exert reasonable control over the outcome, then the organization should measure and manage primarily to its own activities and outputs, rather than the outcome—while also seeking feedback from beneficiaries.

An organization shouldn't be too quick to assume that it doesn't have control over outcomes. For example, the ZHL ambulance company might decide to hold itself accountable not just for the output of delivering clients to *some* hospital, but for health outcomes by delivering them to hospitals with good performance records. As Ebrahim notes, even if an organization lacks the capacity, it may be able to coordinate with other organizations to exert more control over outcomes.

In addition to expounding the contingency framework, *Measuring Social Change* addresses an issue that has been a matter of great confusion in the nonprofit sector: the distinction between causal analysis based on "attribution" and "contribution."

In principle, most service delivery interventions, such as ZHL's and core components of AKRSP's and Miriam's Kitchen's, can be evaluated through experimental, quasi-experimental, and econometric techniques—sometimes termed "attribution" analyses. Given a sufficiently large sample, one can isolate the effect of the interventions from other possible causes. These techniques only require examining the activities and outcomes of an intervention, and treat the intervening theory of change as a black box.

Attribution analysis simply is not possible for the sort of advocacy work exemplified by WIEGO, where each activity and outcome is unique. Advocacy strategies instead call for contribution analysis, which begins with the theory of change and asks whether its implicit story of causes and effects is persuasive given the observed results, plausible exogenous factors, the views of knowledgeable stakeholders, and possible alternative stories.

Ebrahim correctly notes that "attribution and contribution are both about establishing a causal relationship between interventions and an outcome." Unfortunately, he muddies the waters when he distinguishes the two approaches to evaluation in terms of credit-claiming by an organization.

"Measurement focused primarily on attribution runs the risk of undermining the collective effort of actors in an ecosystem when it incentivizes them to seek credit and funding for individual behavior (a zero-sum

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game) rather than to produce interdependent results (a mutual-gain game)," he writes. "In such contexts, managers and funders alike are better off identifying a constellation of factors that jointly affect a social problem (contribution) rather than obsessing about how to isolate the causal role of each factor or assigning weights to those factors based on statistical correlation (attribution)."

But nothing in the nature of attribution analysis particularly conduces to claiming credit, and organizations can just as easily overclaim by telling self-serving stories of their contributions—as advocacy groups often do in the aftermath of legislative or judicial victories.

These qualifications notwithstanding, *Measuring Social Change* is a major contribution to the field. It provides practitioners with a valuable framework for measuring and managing social change and sets a research agenda for future research in the field.

Beyond Privatization

In their new book, Ganesh Sitaraman and Anne Alstott explore the ubiquity and value of the public option, and why Americans need to reconsider its appeal.

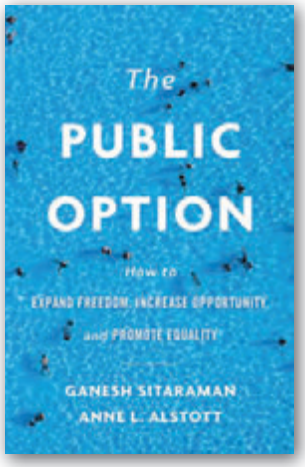
BY MARK SCHMITT

In one of those coincidences that reveal the spirit of the moment, two books appeared last year within weeks of each other celebrating public libraries. Sociologist Eric Klinenberg expanded on the idea of public libraries as an instance of "social infrastructure"—"a powerful way to promote civic engagement and social interaction"—while *New Yorker* writer Susan Orlean used the story of a 1986 fire that destroyed the Los Angeles Public Library to riff on the history of libraries and heroic librarians. Together, the books marked a rediscovery of a public resource with a long history.

Where Klinenberg and Orlean delved into a particular model of public institution, legal scholars Ganesh Sitaraman and Anne Alstott take a wider lens in their new book, *The Public Option*. They treat libraries as just one model of a public institution that can thrive alongside market-based options (like bookstores) and provide desirable benefits to society more broadly and equitably than the private sector can do alone.

"Public options are everywhere, and they are some of the most beloved, celebrated, important, and effective parts of our society," the authors write. After describing the theory behind public options as "a very American institution [that] leverages public resources without preempting private provision," they survey examples in existing programs and suggest areas such as childcare where a public option might work.

Because politics since 1980 has set up such a sharp contrast between the zones of free enterprise and government, we often neglect the public gems that coexist happily in an ecosystem that includes private and nonprofit options for similar goods. Like libraries and public schools, these are not "public-private partnerships," in which the private sector's profit motive is supposedly harnessed to a public good. Nor are they "coupon programs," to borrow a phrase from Mike Konczal, a fellow at the Roosevelt Institute, in which government gives citizens some form of voucher or tax benefit to purchase goods in the private sector. These are clearly defined, publicly funded entities, available for the most part to all without the means testing that typically limits eligibility for direct-spending programs, nor the regressive effects and complexity of benefits delivered in the form of tax deductions or credits.



THE PUBLIC OPTION: How to Expand Freedom, Increase Opportunity, and Promote Equality
By Ganesh Sitaraman and Anne L. Alstott
296 pages, Harvard University Press, 2019

No one refers to the library as a "public option," though. The term has been associated for the last decade with health reform, and specifically the idea of a publicly administered plan that would offer basic benefits comparable to Medicare or better. In this context, the public option is often regarded as either an incremental step toward a fully public, single-payer health system, or a dubious compromise. In the early years, of the Obama Administration many hoped that a public option would be so appealing that it would draw people away from private insurance, leading to a single-payer system. But the public option didn't have enough support to make it into the final version of the Affordable Care Act.

Today, though, critics on the left who favor Medicare for all see the public option as an overly cautious middle ground, supported by those unwilling to go all the way to the ideal. In neither case has it been treated as a desirable end in itself.

Sitaraman and Alstott leave the intimidatingly complex issue of health care aside until a brief section at the end, where they speculate about whether regulating health insurance as a monopolistic utility might be a good alternative to a public option. But for those who can see the health-care public option only as a step toward, or away from, something bigger, Sitaraman and Alstott

make a vital contribution by showing how all kinds of public options have played a key role in complex systems with private, nonprofit, and public elements, and that those configurations have been stable, popular, and successful over the course of decades.

Some provide a cheap, basic option: The postal service, for example, sits alongside UPS and other private carriers that offer more customized services, just as postal banking would not replace private banks. In higher education, public options do include some elite institutions, but the base is composed of reasonably affordable two- and four-year institutions, where more than 80 percent of students are enrolled.

In other cases, the public option provides a kind of framework for private activity, as the authors would do—and the Obama administration attempted to do—for retirement, simply setting up the structure of a simple, cost-free account for saving. (The Trump administration moved quickly to eliminate that public option.) In other cases, a public option can provide a benchmark, using efficiencies of scale and lower costs to ensure competition where it wouldn't otherwise exist. In certain markets, this will be a more effective means of ensuring competition than regulatory enforcement.

But these public options operate in very different ways that matter. For example, as Princeton University sociologist Paul Starr, an expert on health reform, has noted, a public option could have many different effects depending on design: For a cheaper, less desirable basic option, people in relatively poor health might be steered to the public option, pulling them out of the private sector (but government-organized) health insurance exchanges. This outcome would mean government bearing more risk and expense while private insurers profited, leaving the public option a last resort for those people priced out of the private market. Alternatively, a public option that offered the same benefits as private sector competitors but more efficiently (free of the costs of advertising, the impulse to profit, and the multimillion-dollar CEO salaries) might make the private sector options undesirable and unprofitable.

The authors touch on these distinctions but pass over them quickly in order to reach their main point, which is to amass as many different kinds of programs as can plausibly fit under the "public option." This act of classification reveals an important truth about American policy history and also about possibilities for the future: Public options, and public provision of services within otherwise market-based structures, have been central to every wave of progressive reform since the Civil War. They are mostly uncontroversial and often unnoticed, and they can play a role in addressing virtually every policy challenge we will face in the coming decades.

Why does their insight feel like news? How did our public conversation so fully lose sight of the role played by these public institutions?

The authors make that point so persuasively, in fact, that it quickly becomes repetitive. Like many policy books, this could be an op-ed (and it is). The expansion adds some heft, legitimacy, and footnotes—but not much more insight, texture, or tension. The authors' tone is chatty and accessible, but their frequent use of the pronoun "we" suggests that they are working more from personal intuition than from a clear definition of public options. "We're cool with that," they declare at one point, of a particular variation on a public option, as if that settled it.

The more intriguing question is, why does their insight feel like news? How did our public conversation so fully lose sight of the role played by these public institutions thriving within market-driven systems? It seems that for decades, politicians and constituents across the ideological spectrum alike have drawn a sharp line between the public and private spheres. Where this idea has been challenged has mostly been from the private side: Social innovation has been defined as harnessing private motives for public good. That's the premise behind most public-private partnerships, social impact bonds, and "double bottom-line" enterprises, as well as the proliferation of tax incentives, culminating in the debacle of "Opportunity Zones"—a provision in the 2017 tax bill that has done little beyond creating a shelter for capital gains income from lucrative projects in gentrifying or wealthy communities.

The historic success of public options should encourage us to look at the public-private relationship in another way. Rather than trying to induce private motives to serve public ends, we should acknowledge that public initiatives, and particularly public structures, can strengthen market-based systems by ensuring equity, creating market-based accountability, and expanding their reach.

In thinking about these issues, I recalled a provocative and admirable earlier book by one of these authors. In 1999, Alstott published *The Stakeholder Society* with a colleague, the prolific legal theorist Bruce Ackerman. In that book, Alstott and Ackerman proposed giving every young adult a stake of $80,000, funded mostly by a tax on wealth. Offering the most expansive version of the "assets movement" that had some momentum and bipartisan support in the 1990s and 2000s, Alstott and Ackerman emphasized that by simply bringing everyone to the same starting gate, their plan wouldn't challenge the workings of neoliberal capitalism in the slightest: "Our plan seeks justice by rooting it in capitalism's pre-eminent value: the importance of private property," they wrote.

There's nothing really incompatible between the ideas in *The Stakeholder Society* and those in *The Public Option*. In some respects, the earlier book was more progressive, at least as measured by the scale of its redistributive ambitions. But the underlying theory—that if everyone were just

equipped with a modest stake of capital, they could figure out their way through all the challenges of education, family, work, retirement, and unpredictable life events—now sounds deeply redolent of that high moment of Clintonian neoliberal confidence.

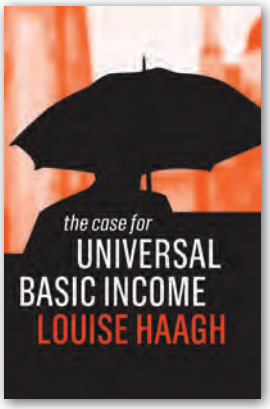
Where *The Stakeholder Society* was about giving everyone a secure little boat to venture out into the rough waters of the capitalist economy, *The Public Option* is about building the lighthouses and harbors that can keep them safe along the way. (This is not a casually chosen metaphor: A longstanding debate among economic historians involves the question of whether early lighthouses were "public options" or were operated by private entities charging fees to users.)

Beyond these two books, the big shift in thinking over the last 20 years is a newfound recognition of the need for structures that create the opportunities for people to lead the most fulfilling lives possible. In higher education, for example, the focus for decades had been on voucher programs such as Pell Grants and loans; the most innovative thinking on higher education challenges that premise from its very roots and proposes to expand support for the institutions themselves so that they can enroll and provide support to students from all socioeconomic levels.

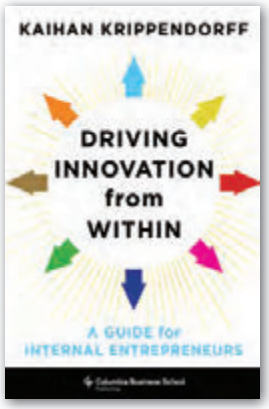
For the future of social and economic policy, the evolution from *The Shareholder Society* to *The Public Option* is more significant than either book on its own. The rediscovery of the role that public structures can play in improving even market-based systems, after decades of neglect, is likely to open a new era in US social and economic policy. ■

DIGITAL BOOKSHELF

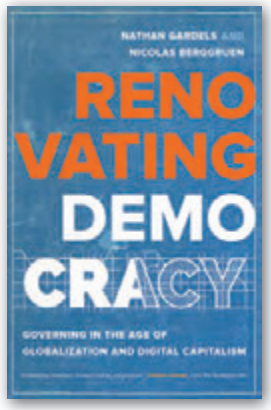
A trio of new books highlighted online discusses critical issues and cross-sector advancements that can inspire social change. One makes the case for universal basic income, another takes a closer look at employees as intrapreneurs, and a third explores how the digital revolution has changed democracy. Read excerpts of these books at ssir.org/book_excerpts.



In ***The Case for Universal Basic Income***, researcher and Chair of the Basic Income Earth Network Louise Haagh explains that the need for universal basic income (UBI) is not simply a form of economic redistribution but also an imperative step in the direction of more humane and humanist governance. An avowed former skeptic of basic income, Haagh uses her research to outline central issues in the design and implementation of UBI to contend that unanimous agreement on the reasons for UBI is less important than what having it can achieve in term of social and economic reforms. (Polity Books, 2019)



Business strategist and advisor Kaihan Krippendorff argues in ***Driving Innovation from Within: A Guide for Internal Entrepreneurs*** that, contrary to popular belief, innovations that happen from within organizations are largely produced by employees, not entrepreneurs. Through a collection of 150 interviews with intrapreneurs, Krippendorff celebrates these "employee-innovators" by offering tools for aspirational employees who seek to overcome the barriers that limit their ability to become innovators from within their companies. (Columbia University Press, 2019)



In ***Renovating Democracy: Governing in the Age of Globalization and Digital Capitalism***, Berggruen Institute founders Nathan Gardels and Nicolas Berggruen examine how the digital revolution has reshaped democracy as it is lived around the world—from how the participatory power of social media has changed how people are governed to how "digital capitalism" has affected work, employment, and labor standards. The authors then propose three different ways to renovate democracy in order to reimagine what an effective social contract looks like in the 21st century. (University of California Press, 2019)

LAST LOOK
IMAGES THAT INSPIRE

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF
RAICES TEXAS/BADGER & WINTERS

No Kids in Cages

Between February 2018 and March 2019, more than 3,100 children were ripped away from their parents by US Customs and Border Protection and placed in squalid conditions. After a sixth migrant child died in US custody in May 2019, the #NoKidsInCages guerrilla art campaign launched to highlight the Trump administration's policy of separating migrant families at the border and other ports of entry.

Twenty-four cages were placed near locations with heavy foot traffic in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Each cage contained a child mannequin wrapped in a foil blanket and was accompanied by an audio recording taken at a detention center that documents crying children and Border Patrol agents mocking those children.

The ad agency Badger & Winters conceived the idea in support of the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES), a nonprofit that provides low-cost legal services to immigrants, migrants, and refugees and that has taken the lead in providing services to asylum seekers who have been taken into custody by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

By the end of August, more than 800,000 individuals had been detained by US Border Patrol along the southwest border, including more than 70,000 unaccompanied children. **—MARCIE BIANCO**

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