

SCALING SOLUTIONS TOWARD SHIFTING SYSTEMS



ROCKEFELLER
Philanthropy
Advisors

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SCALING SOLUTIONS TOWARD SHIFTING SYSTEMS

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Executive Summary

Many funders are on a constant quest to have more impact—to be sure that the funds they deploy are making a meaningful difference. Over the last few years funders have begun to focus more on their own practices, not just those of grantees, in creating impact. Practitioners and researchers are exploring **1)** how funders must work with grantees and investees as true partners, not just recipients of funds and ideas, **2)** how to collaborate more and better with other funders in order to achieve greater impact, and **3)** how funders can gain a deeper understanding

of the complex context in which their funds are used, and use that understanding to support grantees better.¹ Related to this is a focus on shifting from funding individual projects to supporting more sustained, deeper-level transformations in society.

In this spirit, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) was engaged by the Skoll Foundation, working together with a Steering Group composed of the Porticus, Ford and Draper Richards Kaplan Foundations, to encourage funders to work in more collaborative ways

¹ In this report we use the term grantees for those who receive funds, even though many funders refer to them as partners. We also used “grantees and investees” in the Executive Summary to indicate that the report’s analysis and interviews include the impact investing support to social enterprises and revenue-earning nonprofits, but in the rest of the report use the general term “grantees” for ease of reading.

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We began by interviewing nonprofits and social enterprises that have had learning and success in scaling solutions about *their experiences with funder behavior*.

to place longer-term, adaptive and responsive resources to accelerate scalable solutions to the world’s most pressing problems. The Scaling Solutions Steering Group examined when, how, and why some organizations’ solutions have been able to grow at significant scale, and achieve the system-level shifts that they and their funders had anticipated. We wanted to know more about what internal and external factors have mattered most, and what roles funders and funding played in such cases.

As the Skoll Foundation notes, some organizations are creating innovation models to drive *equilibrium change*—the disruption of social, economic, and political forces that enable inequality, injustice, and other thorny social and environmental problems to persist.² By disrupting the status quo, these organizations open up the space for solutions to take root, scale, and become the foundation of profound social transformation and a more peaceful and prosperous world. Many organizations today are helping to solve seemingly intractable problems, and demonstrating the possibility of moving beyond incremental change to real transformation. But their success rests in their ability to shift the complex systems

in which those problems exist—and that is influenced partly by how they are funded. Such ambition requires funders to operate and support grantees differently. The organizations featured in this report who demonstrate the ability to scale toward shifting systems needed time, trust, and flexibility from their funders. As the Ford Foundation puts it, to make lasting progress in addressing issues like inequality, organizations need robust, sustainable, predictable support, giving them the capacity to seize opportunities and create greater impact, and the stability it takes to drive change over the long term.³

We began by interviewing nonprofits and social enterprises that have had learning and success in scaling solutions *about their experiences with funder behavior*. We drew on a focused set of respondents, but their perspectives are backed up by what we see as both recent and historical successes in scaling solutions that shift systems. To explore the role of funders in supporting grantees to scale solutions toward shifting systems, our team examined **a)** paths taken by organizations to scale and shift systems, and how funders have supported or constrained them; **b)** non-monetary inputs from funders; **c)** power dynamics; **d)** collaboration on the side of funders; and **e)** bridging to influential “system actors,” including governments and state authorities, large private sector actors, and industry associations.

² <http://skoll.org/about/approach>

³ For more information see the Ford Foundation’s BUILD program. <https://www.fordfoundation.org/work/our-grants/building-institutions-and-networks/>

There were powerful intersections between what we heard from grantees and how funders want to respond to these imperatives. Of the 100+ funders who responded to the invitation to explore these issues over the past year, there were significant areas of consensus. Clear recommendations for action emerged which we are now exploring with a larger group of funders. They can be summarized as:

Empower:

Consciously shift power dynamics with grantees.

Accelerate:

Hold active and honest discussions with grantees about strategic non-monetary support.

Learn:

Develop more knowledge on shifting systems, and when and how to support grantees in that effort.

Collaborate:

Share intel with other funders.

Streamline:

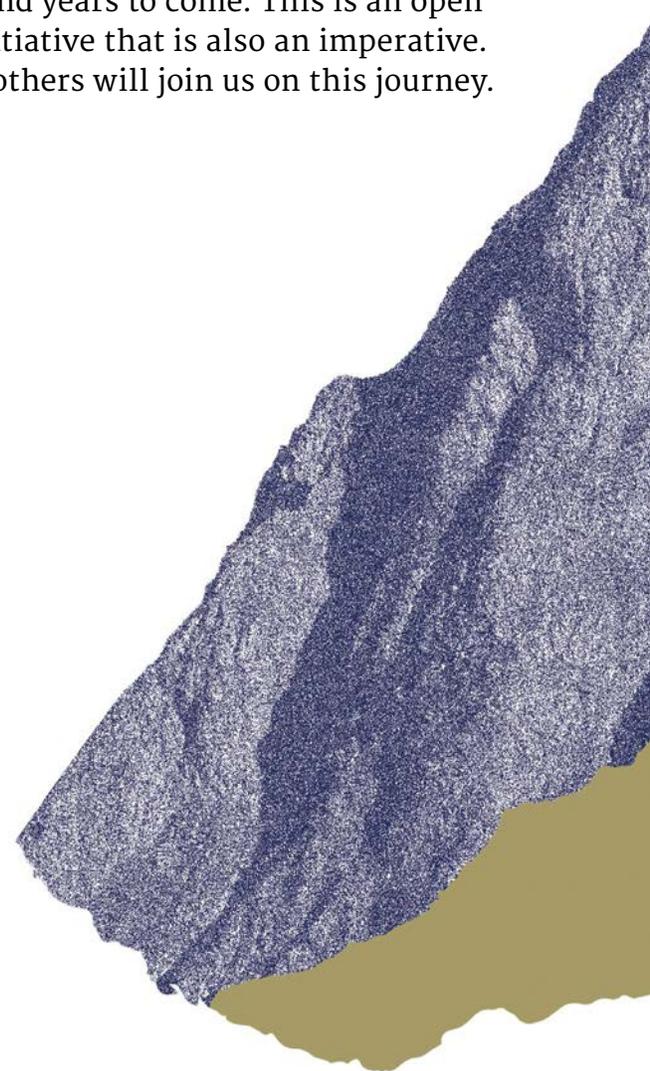
Redesign grantmaking processes.

These findings and recommendations are highly consistent with the work of leading thinkers in large-scale system transformation. As Michael Quinn Patton, a program evaluation expert, recently said

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“Actionable knowledge already exists. The problem is not what we don’t know - it’s what we know and don’t use.”

“Actionable knowledge already exists. The problem is not what we don’t know – it’s what we know and don’t use. We must move away from our traditional project orientation toward a transformation orientation that places a high value on relationships, real-time flexibility, and developmental evaluation.”⁴

This report summarizes the learning of our first year. The real work starts now, as we delve more deeply into how we can reach a wider circle of funders who are committed to both shifting their own behavior, and serving as examples for the broader community in the months and years to come. This is an open source initiative that is also an imperative. We hope others will join us on this journey.



⁴ Michael Quinn Patton, Transformations 2017 Conference. Developmental Evaluation is an evaluation approach that can assist social innovators develop social change initiatives in complex or uncertain environments. http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/developmental_evaluationDescribe

PARTNER FOUNDATIONS' PRESENCE



WHO WE ARE

While small in number, collectively our five institutions have offices in 25 cities, and a funding footprint that covers most countries of the world. We represent decades of grantmaking experience, and two of the organizations represent family giving over more than a century. Even more important, our aggregate portfolios have supported many organizations whose innovative

solutions have demonstrated the ability to shift large-scale, complex systems. The Skoll Foundation portfolio alone represents roughly \$500 million in total funding to date, largely to 100 organizations in 177 countries globally. The work of our grantees has informed our approaches and perspectives as funders.

Introduction

Why This Effort and Why Now?

In the quest for impact, for many years the focus was almost solely on detailed measurement of the work of grantees. The philanthropy sector's discourse was dominated by how to more rigorously or extensively measure the success of individual projects, and whether that served the funders' aims and needs. More recently the discourse has changed to emphasize the funders' role as well, specifically **1)** how funders must work with grantees and investees as true partners, not just recipients of funds and ideas, **2)** how to collaborate more and better with other funders in order to

achieve greater impact, and **3)** how funders can gain a deeper understanding of the complex context in which their funds are used, and use that understanding to support grantees better.

A growing number of funders are looking at how to shift from funding individual projects to supporting more sustained, deeper-level transformations in society. This is illustrated by a number of approaches, from funding social change—a long-standing practice of a small but committed proportion of funders—

to newer approaches variously called funding systems change, collective impact strategies, transformative finance, and philanthropy that supports “public agendas” like the Sustainable Development Goals and the Social Progress Imperative.

In this spirit, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) was engaged by the Skoll Foundation, working together with a Steering Group composed of the Porticus, Ford and Draper Richards Kaplan Foundations, to encourage funders to work in more collaborative ways to place longer-term, adaptive and responsive resources to accelerate scalable solutions to the world’s most pressing problems.

The Scaling Solutions Steering Group delved into these questions:

- When, how, and why have some solutions been able to grow at significant scale, and therefore are positioned to help achieve the system-level shifts that both foundations and grantees had anticipated?
- What internal and external factors have mattered most?
- What roles did funders and their funding play in such cases?

As the Skoll Foundation puts it, social entrepreneurs and their organizations are creating innovative models to drive *equilibrium change*—the disruption of social, economic, and political forces that enable inequality, injustice, and other thorny social and environmental problems to persist.

By disrupting the status quo, social entrepreneurs open up the space for solutions to take root, scale, and become the foundation of profound social transformation and a more peaceful and prosperous world. Many organizations today are helping to solve seemingly intractable problems, and demonstrating the possibility of moving beyond incremental change to real transformation. But their success rests in their ability to shift the complex systems in which those problems exist – and that is influenced partly by how they are funded.

Such ambition requires funders to operate and support grantees differently. The organizations featured in this report who demonstrate the ability to scale toward shifting systems needed time, trust, and flexibility from their funders. As the Ford Foundation puts it, to make lasting progress in addressing issues like inequality, organizations need robust, sustainable, predictable support, giving them the capacity to seize opportunities and create greater impact, and the stability it takes to drive change over the long term. As a recent article in the *Harvard Business Review* posited, “success never results from a single grant or silver bullet; it takes collaboration, government engagement, and persistence over decades, among other things.”⁵

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Many organizations today are helping to solve seemingly intractable problems, and demonstrating the possibility of moving beyond incremental change to real transformation.

⁵ “Audacious Philanthropy,” *Harvard Business Review*, September–October 2017 Issue, by Susan Wolf Ditkoff and Abe Brindle.

THE PROCESS

To explore the role of funders in supporting grantees to scale solutions toward shifting systems, our team examined **a)** pathways to organizations scaling and shifting systems, and how funders have supported or constrained them; **b)** non-monetary inputs from funders; **c)** power dynamics; **d)** collaboration on the side of funders; and **e)** bridging to influential “system actors,” including governments and state authorities, large private sector actors, and industry associations.

We began by interviewing nonprofits and social enterprises that have had learning and success in scaling solutions *about their experiences with funder behavior*. We drew on a focused set of respondents, but their perspectives are backed up by what we see as both recent and historical successes in scaling solutions that shift systems. Our findings are supported by data from the Skoll Foundation drawn from one hundred mezzanine-stage solutions from social entrepreneurs who have been funded through the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship—awardees the foundation carefully tracks and seeks to further engage after receiving the award.⁶

Our Steering Group selected over two dozen organizations, represented in in the table on the following page, that have deep knowledge of the opportunities and challenges involved in scaling their impact as organizations. We interviewed them assuring confidentiality in their individual responses. Although their work spans many sectors, issues, and geographies, all of those interviewed have

had experience growing organizations to have significant impact on beneficiaries, industries, and/or sectors. We believe those we interviewed are among many organizations demonstrating strong potential and progress toward shifting systems.

Simultaneously, RPA began interviewing funders using a separate but related interview protocol, and RPA and Steering Group members held guided conversations at a series of philanthropy sector convenings in a few countries, targeting funders who were likely to be interested in these issues.⁷ Their input was helpful in ascertaining funder receptivity to the themes emerging from the interviews.

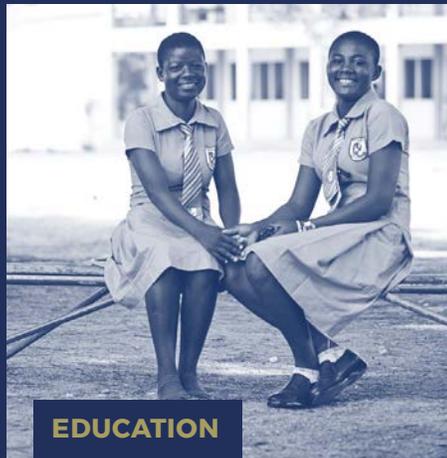
We believe this initiative is distinctive in two ways: first, because it focuses on shifting the behavior of funders, and second, because it focuses on organizations that have the intent and ability to scale their impact significantly in ways that could contribute to solving system-level challenges.

Our Steering Group assumes that some funders will understand and care about shifting the complex, adaptive systems that can promote or constrain the goals of our grantees. We also recognize that not everyone agrees with, or is interested in, this approach. We believe philanthropy can be a very positive and strong force in this respect, but with that intention comes responsibility and accountability for the power we wield as funders in partnership with those we fund. Scaling Solutions is an exploration of this.

⁶ The Skoll Foundation refers to mezzanine-stage organizations as those with proven innovations and models on a pathway to equilibrium change.

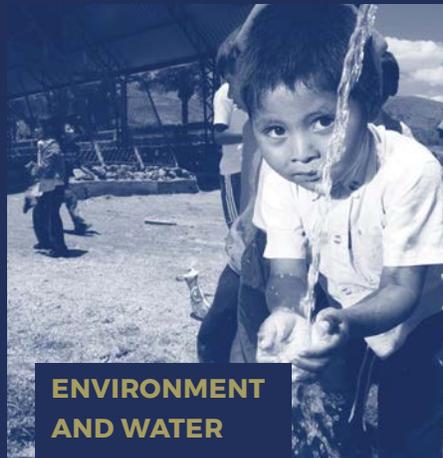
⁷ These conversations, all in 2017, took place at the following events: National Summit on Family Philanthropy, San Francisco, February; WINGS (Worldwide Initiative for Grantmaker Support) Conference, Mexico City, February; Skoll World Forum, Oxford, April; Global Philanthropy Forum, Washington DC, April; Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Chicago, May; and the Asian Venture Philanthropy Network Annual Meeting, Bangkok, June.

ISSUE AREAS OF GRANTEES INTERVIEWED



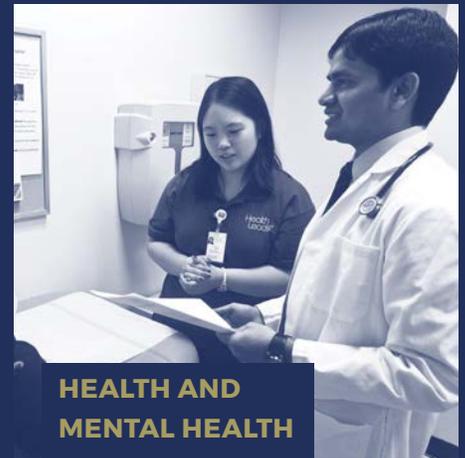
EDUCATION

- CAMFED
- Education Super Highway
- Fe y Alegría
- New Teacher Center



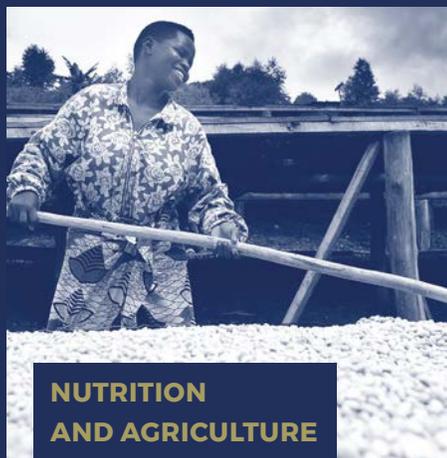
ENVIRONMENT AND WATER

- CERES
- Imazon
- Water for People



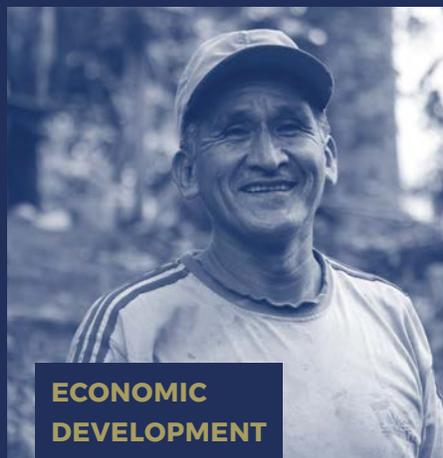
HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Crisis Action
- Crisis Text Line
- Health Leads
- Last Mile Health
- Partners in Health
- Watsi



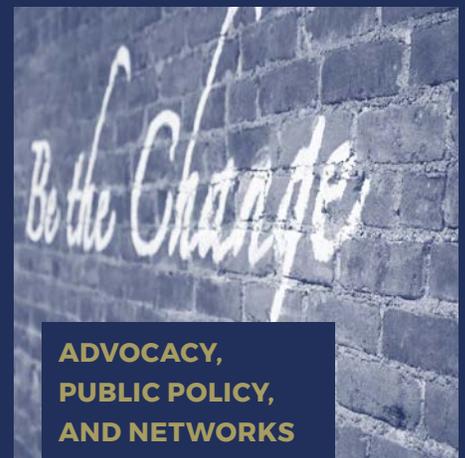
NUTRITION AND AGRICULTURE

- Initiative for Smallholder Finance
- Marine Stewardship Council
- One Acre Fund



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Kiva
- Root Capital
- Proximity Designs



ADVOCACY, PUBLIC POLICY, AND NETWORKS

- Civicus
- Tax Justice Network
- B Lab

Findings and Recommendations

There were powerful intersections between what we heard from grantees and how funders want to respond to these imperatives. Of the 100+ funders who responded to the invitation to explore these issues over the past year, there were significant areas of consensus, with only a few areas of disagreement. Crucially, in this first year of the project, clear recommendations for action emerged which we are now exploring with a larger group of funders.

The rest of this report includes more detailed descriptions of the recommendations and the findings behind them, as well as short case studies that illustrate the positive benefits of adaptive approaches by funders. Our intention in the year ahead is to continue the learning and to go deeper into how more funders might apply the recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION #1:

EMPOWER:

CONSCIOUSLY SHIFT POWER DYNAMICS WITH GRANTEES.

Power dynamics between grantees and funders can create a relationship that is open, honest, forthright, and supportive—or not. What we heard again and again throughout the interviews was that the relationships that were not hindered by an imbalance of power were those based on mutual respect, not compliance. In those cases, despite holding the purse strings, funders seemed to recognize and appreciate that grantees are the ones out in the field, closest to the work, and valued their opinions and ideas. In addition, funders approached those relationships from a place of trust, giving grantees space to make decisions, make mistakes, and determine solutions. In such instances, grantees have the freedom to focus on the work of scaling. Grantees often characterized those relationships as ones of partnership, in which funders acted as thought partners, and offered guidance rather than directives. Grantees identified partnerships driven by “listening and intelligent responsiveness” as necessary to drive long-term systems change. Other interviewees bemoaned power dynamics, and felt that funders could be too controlling and interfering, with constraints that directly hindered a systems-oriented approach.

Another divergence that commonly surfaced in the interviews was between funder and grantee goals. Many funders have their own objectives, theories of change, and goals. But rather than selecting grantees that help them achieve those goals, then allowing them to do their work in ways grantees believe will be most effective, funders often pressure grantees

to change their programs and activities to align with their own priorities and needs. Interviewees were clear about how much more effective they are when the alignment happens at the strategic goal level, and the more detailed planning is left with the grantee.

A noticeable trend emerged as we conducted the interviews. Grantees who had a large proportion of unrestricted, multi-year grant support and/or a significant proportion of earned revenue were much less affected by typical funder-grantee power dynamics. Instead they behaved as if there were an equal balance of power. Being less desperate for funding emboldened them to say no to funding that would divert them from their path, and made them more able to select funders who shared their mission and deferred more to the grantees’ judgement.

Our research indicated that the four dimensions of funder behavior and practice listed below can enable strong grantees to scale more effectively:

- Instituting values and practices to enable grantees to pursue pivots in strategy based on their own learning and experiences.
- Ensuring grant term decision-making power is with those closest to the grantees, generally program officers.
- Discussing and debating power dynamics and decision-making with founders, boards, and executive teams.
- Providing “extras” for funded partners only when they readily agree it is strategic and timely for them, including hosting visits, participating in conferences, and giving funders board seats.

CAMFED

The background image shows two young girls in pink school uniforms sitting on a metal bench. They are smiling and looking towards the camera. The uniforms consist of a pink short-sleeved shirt with a blue and white striped tie and a pink skirt. They are sitting in front of a two-story school building with blue and white walls. The scene is outdoors with trees and a clear sky.

The UK's Ann Cotton founded Camfed (the Campaign for Female Education) in 1993 after she traveled to Zimbabwe and felt compelled to tackle the extremely low enrollment of girls in school. From her onsite research, Cotton discovered that poverty prevented their attendance, challenging the commonly-held assumption that low rates of matriculation stemmed from a cultural bias against girls attending school. Thus motivated, Cotton launched Camfed, starting with a first pilot group of 32 girls and now tackling poverty and inequality in five African countries. Currently, under the leadership of CEO Lucy Lake, Camfed supports almost 80,000 girls annually at secondary school, enabling them to attend and graduate and empowering young women to step up as leaders of change. Hundreds of thousands more have been supported through community and alumnae philanthropy galvanized by Camfed's programs.

Camfed recognizes that its "client" is the rural girl and that Camfed is accountable first and foremost to rural girls as clients. Camfed created an "accounting to the client" model that views all of Camfed's work through the lens of rural girls and their opportunities

and challenges. As a consequence, rather than seeing itself as a mediator between its donors and the clients, Camfed frames all conversations by articulating its focus on its clients. This approach has helped embolden Camfed's team in their dealings with funders. At the same time, Camfed declines resources from funders when their organizational cultures do not align with Camfed's values.

Camfed's model encourages open conversations between Camfed and its funders. When funders make requests outside of the scope of its work, Camfed explains that it will cost more to do the additional work if not covered by an existing grant - because doing extra work with no additional funds only takes away resources from the rural girl. Camfed's guiding principle helps all those in their ecosystem, including funders, be viewed as partners working together to deliver quality work for the client - and this has enabled them to scale more effectively.



HEALTH LEADS

There is a noticeable shift in the power dynamics when funders are supportive of grantees who are enabled to evolve with changes in their “ecosystem.” Health Leads is an organization that works in an ever-changing ecosystem – the U.S. healthcare system. Co-founded in 1996 by Rebecca Onie, Health Leads envisions that all healthcare providers will be able to prescribe solutions that improve health, not just manage disease. Per Health Leads’ data, “social and environmental factors account for 70% of what it takes to stay healthy –while only 10% are attributable to direct medical care.” Health Leads provides social interventions to impoverished and vulnerable patients to help connect them with community services for basic needs and provide follow-up with the patients.

Initially, Health Leads provided its services within clinics at “Health Leads Desks” and doctors would help identify which social or environmental service a patient needed, after which Desks followed up. Through this model, Onie revealed, “We realized we could grow infinitely, but it would still be irrelevant [because the approach to health would not change]. So, we changed our strategic plan to be about systems change instead of replication.” With this new approach, Health Leads was able to shift its emphasis from service delivery to enabling health systems to build their own social needs practices through the dissemination of tools and services. This also opened up other opportunities to work with the health system at bigger levels of scale, such as direct support provided to government

pilot programs organized around social needs integration. The potential levels of scale provide a unique opportunity for outsized impact, one metric being the shift from direct service to adoption of a model for change.

When the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the U.S. was introduced, the incentive structure of the healthcare industry shifted from volume to value-based payments. This motivated healthcare facilities to focus on positive health outcomes. And millions more people were entering the healthcare system, many of whom were more vulnerable patients. Health Leads began to receive strong signals from its partners that they wanted more comprehensive help in adopting social needs strategies at scale. Health Leads went back to its funders and all of them agreed to redeploy their capital to meet these shifting needs and take advantage of the unprecedented opportunities.

Now when raising funds, Health Leads seeks investors who agree with their vision and who understand the value of flexible, unrestricted funds. This enables Health Leads to perform its work within an ecosystem that is in constant flux. According to Onie, “If we are not changing, the sector is not changing. If the sector is not changing, then we are failing at our mission.” Responsive funders enable Health Leads to pivot their strategy to ultimately shift the healthcare system to embody a far more equitable and effective approach to health.

MARINE STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL



The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is an international nonprofit organization formally established in 1997. Its vision is for the world's oceans to be teeming with life, and seafood supplies safeguarded for this and future generations. Widely recognized as the world's most robust and credible program for sustainable fishing, the MSC Standard is founded on three principles: healthy fish stocks, minimizing impact on the wider marine environment, and effective fishery management. The blue MSC label and certification program recognizes and rewards sustainable fishing practices and is helping create a more sustainable seafood market. The blue MSC label on a seafood product means that: 1) It comes from a wild-catch fishery which has been independently certified to the MSC's science-based standard for environmentally sustainable fishing, and 2) it is fully traceable to a sustainable source.

The use of the blue MSC label demonstrates to consumers that the fish they are purchasing comes from a fully sustainable source and is traceable along the supply chain from "ocean to plate."

More than 300 fisheries in over 35 countries are certified to the MSC's Fishery Standard. These fisheries have a combined annual seafood production of almost 10 million metric tons, representing 12% of annual global marine catch. More than 25,000 seafood products worldwide

carry the MSC label. The MSC's Strategic Plan 2017-2020 sets an aspiration for more than a third of global marine catch to be certified or engaged in the MSC program by 2030.

When CEO Rupert Howes joined MSC in 2004, 99% of its funding was from charitable foundations, and he saw how an independent revenue stream could complement grants from funders. Now, 75% of MSC's revenue is from businesses licensed to use the blue MSC label. This additional revenue stream has helped the organization achieve scale. It has also enabled MSC to evolve its relationships with its funders. Howes views the MSC's funders as having a collaborative relationship with the organization, adding that for the MSC, foundation support and funding remains vital, "to maintain diversity of the organization's income sources, to underpin the independence of the organization, and fundamentally, to ensure its continued ability to work towards achievement of its vision." The MSC team's confidence to adopt and adapt new practices to meet the ambitious vision of shifting the world's seafood procurement systems appears to stem, in part, from this mix of both earned income and funder support.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

ACCELERATE:

HOLD ACTIVE AND HONEST DISCUSSIONS WITH GRANTEES TO PROVIDE STRATEGIC NON-MONETARY SUPPORT.

Funding is necessary but not always sufficient in supporting grantees in scaling and shifting systems. Many funders recognize that they can do more than just award grants, and are eager to add value in other ways. They look to leverage their networks, connections, and expertise to further benefit their grantees. They can use their own profile to increase those of grantees.

We also heard that not all non-monetary support is helpful. It can at times be a distraction or a hindrance, even if it was intended to have the opposite effect. As one interviewee described, “Funders push advice and opportunities rather than pull advice and opportunities.” Sometimes it is accepted only because grantees feel it could be problematic to refuse the offer from funders. Grantees do not want to seem ungrateful, offend their funders, or risk future support. An additional challenge is that the same offer of non-monetary support can be a help or an encumbrance depending on who is offering it, what is being offered, and when it is being offered.

To ensure that “unhelpful help” doesn’t get in the way of scaling solutions, funders need to be cognizant of grantees’ real needs. They need to be aware of whether or not grantees are asking for the help. When offering additional support, ask questions to be certain grantees will benefit from what is being offered in the longer term. Reassuring grantees that polite refusal of non-monetary support will not harm their chances of

continued funding can be a good starting place for an honest discussion on this topic. Examples of particularly useful, non-monetary support include:

- Introducing grantees to strategically-aligned and interested funders and invitations to co-present at funder conferences.
- Providing specialized expertise support at no or discounted cost, in areas like communications, marketing, human resources, finance, and technology.
- Taking board seats, when the grantees agree the process and individual is a good fit.
- Giving awards, creating social media attention, and finding other ways to boost grantees’ profiles, including online and other published pieces on grantees’ scaling capacity.



FE Y ALEGRÍA

Fe y Alegría International Federation, a global movement that envisions a world in which all people have the opportunity to receive an education, fully develop their abilities, live with dignity, and contribute to society, began over 60 years ago in Venezuela. It now operates in 21 countries, including expansion in Africa, through 1,287 school sites and 1,941 centers of non-formal education, radio education, and social promotion. There are over 43,000 people working to help provide quality education to over one and a half million poor and marginalized students who participate in the program. In most countries governments cover the running costs of the schools which has helped them to scale, and this is complemented by strong support from local communities, from national and international philanthropic donors, and private sector actors, all of whom have helped *Fe y Alegría* expand from a focus on access to include a focus on the quality of education.

Funders have contributed to help *Fe y Alegría* thrive and growth over the years in ways that go far beyond money. Several offer their own staff time and skills to build capacities of the organization. With support from Accenture, a firm whose expertise includes technology, it developed a website platform for its vocational training courses, so that six teachers design courses that now reach about 40,000 students per year. The same company also helped *Fe y Alegría* develop

processes and tools for measuring impact, data that was both necessary and challenging to collect. Director Luis Arancibia Tapia is appreciative of this non-monetary support, describing that they are, “a social institution, a network of grassroots initiatives, so to work with a highly developed technological company has been great.” Arancibia acknowledged that the corporate funder has helped *Fe y Alegría* measure its impact and explain the importance behind it.

Amongst many supporters over the years, Porticus has supported the development of *Fe y Alegría* by funding staff training, inviting *Fe y Alegría* personnel to attend trainings organized by them, and offering university scholarships to staff. Recognizing the importance of building staff capacity, *Fe y Alegría* changed their approach to improve the capacity of its teachers through training and development. It entered into agreements with local universities that would provide teachers with official recognition for their training. In five years, over 15,000 teachers were recognized. Because of the capacity building support, both *Fe y Alegría*'s staff and its teachers have benefited. Arancibia notes how important all of these inputs are to create a stronger, smarter, more experienced team, crucial to bolster the organization's capacity to implement and scale its programs.



B LAB

B Lab is a US-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to build a global movement of people using business as a force for good, and to ultimately create a more shared and durable prosperity. This means an inclusive economy where workers, communities, and the natural environment are integral to – and even the purpose of – business decisions. Since its founding in 2006, B Lab has become a recognized leader in the field of responsible business, driving companies towards high standards of performance, accountability, and transparency. Over 50,000 companies in more than 80 countries are using B Lab’s standards to manage their impact. Nearly 2,000 of these are recognized as Certified B Corporations—companies verified as meeting the highest levels of performance and making a legal commitment to all stakeholders. Thirty-two U.S. jurisdictions, as well as the country of Italy, have adopted B Lab’s new corporate statute, with the G7 governments recommending that countries around the globe follow suit. B Lab’s

early success was spurred significantly due to support from the Rockefeller Foundation, who organized convenings that introduced B Lab to potential funders, many of whom ultimately became partners. The Rockefeller Foundation also went a step beyond, engaging other funders to join their support of B Lab through matching funds. This approach fully funded B Lab projects in development in its early years.

In addition to financial support, co-founder Andrew Kassoy notes how much B Lab has benefited from the public notice that accompanies prestigious philanthropy awards. Receiving the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship, and the Aspen Institute’s McNulty Prize, exposed a broader, global audience to B Lab’s work, bestowing real credibility on the organization. Such awards open doors and networks to organizations.

LAST MILE HEALTH

A woman in colorful scrubs and boots stands on a red motorcycle in a dugout canoe on a river. A man in a grey shirt stands behind her. The background is a lush green forest.

Last Mile Health was founded in 2007 by Raj Panjabi, a Liberian who survived his country's civil war, and American health workers who shared his commitment to health equity and social justice. The organization is committed to saving lives in the world's most remote communities. Last Mile Health supports the Government of Liberia in implementing a nationwide community health worker program, and participates in a coalition working across a dozen countries that are looking to ensure high quality community health practices.

Representatives of several funders serve on the board of Last Mile Health. Their guidance and thought partnership has provided critical support to the organization. At the same time, when sensitive issues arise, the board members have to weigh their obligations to Last Mile Health with their responsibilities as funders. It can be a fine balance. But overall, Last Mile Health has found the service of their funder board members to be extremely helpful.

Other funders have provided testimonials and referred the organization to larger government funding sources, vouching for Last Mile Health's ability to administer sophisticated grants, and enabling Last Mile Health to secure significant funding. Last Mile Health has also benefited from public recognition garnered by receiving awards, including a Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship, the TED Prize, and the 2017 Schwab Foundation Social Entrepreneur of the Year award.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

LEARN:

DEVELOP MORE KNOWLEDGE ON SHIFTING SYSTEMS, AND WHEN AND HOW TO SUPPORT GRANTEES IN THAT EFFORT.

Complex, adaptive systems consist of many constituent elements, including individuals, institutions, social norms, attitudes and beliefs, and natural and built environments. Many organizations implicitly or explicitly understand that there are ways to shift systems to help them reach their own goals. They map these systems and which elements they aim to influence to drive toward those outcomes.

Funders themselves sometimes use systems thinking when developing theories of change or planning programs. Funders that share their theories of change with grantees help to generate better understanding and alignment between the grantee and their funders: they can each see where their systems overlap and how their work can reinforce each other's goals.

In some cases, grantees need support connecting to constituents of these systems, especially powerful and influential system actors. Such actors include governments, multilateral organizations, businesses, and large donors. Those actors that grantees must influence vary depending on the issue and context in which the grantees work. However, across the board, all of the grantees we interviewed understood that working with powerful and influential system actors enable their solutions to scale well beyond the reach of their individual organizations, and that working in partnership with others enabled their scaled solutions to shift systems.

Despite this recognition, our interviews indicated that nonprofits and social entrepreneurs rarely receive support from funders to reach or help influence such system actors. This is a missed opportunity. Powerful and influential system actors typically regard funders differently than grantees. Funders often have more access to influential actors through events, organizational processes, and peer networks. Funders can take advantage of their proximity to them to support the work of grantees.

While this facet of our work is in its early stages of analysis, our hypothesis is that funders can and should play a greater role in this in the future by:

- Working with grantees to map relevant systems for their work.
- Identifying and taking action vis-à-vis any system actors they are well-placed to engage.
- Coordinating efforts with other funders and their grantees in the same field, in the planning as well as the implementation stage.
- Exploring greater support for organizations enabling systems change who may be doing less direct service work, and therefore aiming for longer-term, less metric-friendly outcomes and impact.



There are an estimated 50 million smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa. One Acre Fund's co-founder Andrew Youn traveled to Africa and saw how a lack of training and access to markets can lead to low crop yields which, in turn, contribute to hunger and poverty. In 2006, One Acre Fund was founded to provide a comprehensive bundle of services that enable farmers to improve their productivity and income potential. Since then, One Acre Fund has worked through key partnerships across sectors, providing financing for farm inputs and distribution of seeds and fertilizer. Seed and fertilizer companies, in turn, discovered a commercial base in smallholders as both customers and suppliers. One Acre Fund also provides training on agriculture techniques and works closely on this and other activities with local government agencies.

In Rwanda, the agricultural sector accounts for 80% of the labor force and 33% of the gross domestic product. One Acre Fund's bundle of services has proven to increase crop yields by an average 50 percent. Given these results, the organization signed a multiyear Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Rwanda to incorporate its farmer-training model into the government's pre-existing Farmer Promoter program. In 2015, One Acre Fund became a government partner as part of the *Twigire Muhinzi* program, which brings together One Acre Fund's field officer model with local government infrastructure to provide farmers across the country with crucial training and extension services.

This example reflects One Acre Fund's approach in which government is the primary partner. Change is made through training at the top level of the system, and action and implementation is taken in partnership with governments. Funding and expenditures are divided between *direct service work* and *systems change and policy work*, and One Acre Fund in fact has a unit called Systems Change. But Matt Forti, managing director of One Acre Fund USA, noted that only one out of ten funders will contribute towards systems change and policy work, so they must look for those who can support their commitment to conducting and measuring policy work and ability to change systems. Over the past year, Forti has received strategic advice from the Skoll Foundation and MDRC specifically towards creating measurements for this, since policy and systems change work, especially the policy work, is long-term. Because of the nature of this work, it requires long-term funding (currently One Acre Fund's median grant term is three years), and it benefits particularly from funders that have relationships with host country governments. Recently they received a \$15 million grant from the Global Innovation Fund, a collaborative that includes Omidyar Network, which requires a tie to public funders (e.g., the U.S. Agency for International Development), which Forti believes will allow significantly greater scaling. There will be much to learn from their experiences in the coming years.

CERES



Ceres was founded in 1989 in the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez disaster. Mindy Lubber, a founding board member and later president of Ceres, joined with like-minded colleagues and a network of institutional investors to create an environmental code of conduct. Together, they have worked for over 25 years to make, and strengthen, the business case for sustainability. Ceres leverages the world's largest companies and investment firms to accelerate the adoption of sustainable business practices, with a focus on climate change and water. It is working towards a new equilibrium where business gains a competitive advantage through implementing sustainable business practices, such as ethical labor practices and avoiding resource depletion. For Ceres, the target audience is large companies and investors, with whom they have regular engagements. Ceres has 90 fee-paying corporate members. Through Ceres' work, sustainability has become a critical conversation within companies, investors, stock exchange, financial analysts, and rating agencies.

Ceres' model for change depends on key market actors recognizing that sustainability is essential to their long-term success. To do this work, Ceres receives funding from foundations, like Skoll, Moore, MacArthur, and McKnight, all of whom provide large and long-term grants, given their understanding that funding systems change is a long-term project. Ceres

also receives support from specific climate funders as well as climate funder collaborators, such as the Energy Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Biodiversity Funder Collaborative, which recognize the scale and timeline of this work.

The work of Ceres in Ohio illustrates how such funding has helped them to incorporate a systems approach. In 2014, Ohio State lawmakers passed a Senate Bill to freeze energy efficiency and renewable energy standards. Supporters of the freeze argued that Ohio needed a chance to reevaluate whether existing standards were working. In the years since the freeze was passed, utility companies reduced services to customers, clean energy jobs moved out of the state, and the state's wind industry lost jobs. Ceres activated their membership, and mobilized nine businesses to urge state lawmakers to not only reinstate, but strengthen, Ohio's standards on energy efficiency and renewables. They include Campbell Soup Company, Clif Bar & Company, Nestle, and Whirlpool Corporation, which together employ more than 25,000 people in Ohio. Ceres policy staffers argued that "these standards are good for business, and failing to reinstate them will send the wrong signal to companies and investors throughout the state." Relying on such a coalition is crucial in achieving their aims.

RECOMMENDATION #4:

COLLABORATE:

SHARE INTEL WITH OTHER FUNDERS.

The grantees we interviewed are devoted to implementing their missions, yet they spend a significant portion of staff time and resources on the fundraising process. They bemoaned how repetitious, duplicative, and time consuming it is, and advocated for funders to consider efficiencies in this area.

The grantee due diligence process frequently arose as an opportunity to put this into practice. Many grantees interviewed undergo extensive vetting processes with funders. Rather than repeat that process over and over again to share similar information, grantees suggested that more funders proactively share due diligence. But to allay concerns that grantmakers are sharing information without the knowledge of grantees, funders should discuss this practice with grantees first.

Equally important was the plea for funders to agree to common application and reporting templates. Grantees need to reduce the extraordinary amounts of time spent re-organizing similar information to fit the templates and questions asked by each funder. One organization offered a preferred option that all their funders accepted: a regularly updated online reporting mechanism that any funder can view at any time, eliminating the need for individualized reporting altogether.

Interestingly, almost all funders who provide impact investments to these grantees are satisfied with common financial and narrative

impact reports when it comes to market-related dimensions of their work. This still leaves room for follow-up, and requests for additional information, but aims at using human resources more efficiently, illustrating an advantage of this investment mindset.

While this is not the first initiative to suggest donors collaborate more on applications and reporting, our research uncovered a link: to scale and shift systems, organizations have no choice but to put more effort into building relationships, mobilizing, and facilitating change—and less into feeding funders information.⁸ Information that can be shared, and ways to synchronize with other donors, include:

- Sharing due diligence, financial checks, program audits, and site visit insights and notes.
- Participating in, leading, or creating donor collaboratives.
- Coordinating efforts with other funders, and meeting grantee needs by maximizing on respective strengths.
- Connecting impact metrics with other widely accepted external frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Social Progress Imperative and its Index.

⁸ There are many important initiatives on this including the work of Big Bang Philanthropy, Blue Meridian.

OCEANS 5



Oceans 5 is an international funders collaborative founded in early 2011 by four Partners who shared a commitment to protecting the world's five oceans. It focuses on globally significant, collaborative projects to constrain overfishing and establish marine reserves. Partners commit to providing at least \$3 million over three years to support collaborative grantmaking. Between its founding and mid-2017, the group supported over 40 projects with a total investment of about \$40 million. Oceans 5 has added six additional Partners, as well as three new Members who provide smaller contributions.

The Partners and Members of Oceans 5 direct its work along with Executive Director Chuck Fox, and it is hosted by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, which conducts the grantmaking. The Oceans 5 team makes grants, leverages matching grants, provides in-kind services, and shares strategic guidance – all to support its grantees. It is a trusted platform for both new and experienced philanthropists, providing substantial leveraging opportunities. Rather than negotiating separately with the funders, grantees only need to interface with one organization, though they are receiving support

from a collaborative of many donors. This streamlined effort has enabled an efficient use of resources and supported several important successes, not least securing global trade restrictions for endangered sharks through support of a coalition of seven organizations; securing a U.S. Presidential directive and new regulations on illegal fishing and seafood traceability; securing the world's largest marine reserve in the Ross Sea of Antarctica; and improving illegal fishing controls in Europe. Each of these efforts is possible only by supporting a range of grantee organizations and coalitions, illustrating that strategic collaboration at Oceans 5 is important for both funders and grantees.

The strategic collaboration at Oceans 5 is visible on both the grantee and the funder sides. Oceans 5 Partners and Members include the Oak Foundation, Planet Heritage Foundation, Waitt Foundation, Marisla Foundation, Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation, Angell Family Foundation, The Tiffany & Co. Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Wyss Foundation, Packard Foundation, Moore Charitable Foundation, Bill and Shannon Joy, and Michael Light.

PROXIMITY DESIGNS

A photograph of a woman with dark hair, smiling broadly, looking towards the right. She is wearing a patterned shirt. The background shows a rural landscape with a body of water, a dirt path, and mountains in the distance under a clear sky. The image is partially obscured by text boxes.

Jim Taylor and Debbie Aung Din founded Proximity Designs to help Myanmar by supporting rural development, particularly agriculture, in ways that promote equitable economic growth and reduce disparities between urban and rural areas. Their efforts with smallholder farming households have increased productivity and incomes significantly, and their work illustrates how funding support can allow organizations to grow, thrive and scale. In just over a dozen years they grew to 650 staff, and work with farmers in 180 townships that include about 75% of the population of the country. They expanded quickly, then deepened coverage in every locale they entered.

Taylor notes, “We have been fortunate that we have had some very supportive donors who helped us to scale. We didn’t engage with those who wanted to make that difficult.” Mulago Foundation, part of the Big Bang collaborative, has been this kind of responsive funder, as has the Skoll Foundation, from whom they received a Skoll Award. Taylor and Aung Din had the experience under their belt to negotiate with a range of donors to accept their terms. The timing helped too, because in their early years donors didn’t have many grantees to choose from. Aid programs didn’t have a fixed agenda and allowed experimentation, which Taylor observes is an approach that has become rarer. They never got into the “contracting game.” They have funding from USAID, and a Skoll-USAID partnership allows Skoll’s funding to

cover innovation and scaling costs while USAID covers core costs. This flexibility has allowed them to develop a model whereby 60% of their budget now comes from earned revenue.

Taylor calls unrestricted funding “the holy grail” that relies on a strong history of having social impact and the ability to measure it, with fresh data to back up the organization’s work. Their funders also allow them to report on milestones rather than line items. Jasmine Social Investments, for example, has provided unrestricted funding, measures impact in a simpler way, is willing to use the same indicators as other donors, and introduces Proximity to other funders who think the same way. This doesn’t mean they are hands-off, but they invest as partners in a venture where success, or learning what doesn’t work, is shared – the accountability is through partnership, not compliance with rigid procedures.

Taylor concludes, “These kinds of funders have been very critical for our growth. You get other donors who are not that skillful. You must be in the position to push back because you have alternatives. My funders and our earned revenue—these kept us from being desperate and unable to negotiate. We have been fortunate to get momentum because we had a pool of donors who understand the opportunistic nature of this work, and the need to focus on our rural customers, not the needs of the in-house customers—the donors.”

RECOMMENDATION #5: **STREAMLINE:**

REDESIGN GRANTMAKING PROCESSES.

Complementary to funder-to-funder collaboration is funders individually streamlining procedures with grantees. While most foundations readily recognize their procedures are cumbersome, many may not realize how much the effort required on the grantee side is preventing them from scaling their impact. Without flexibility and funding security, grantees have to spend much of their time fulfilling administrative requirements and shoehorning work into funding parameters. Many interviewees described the cyclical trap of the very common one-year grant: just as the grant is secured and work is underway, the team must consider applying for the next one, leaving limited time and resources to focus on the work for which the organization has been funded.⁹ Others described the inability to fluidly shift tactics and approaches when constrained by project funding. One interviewee said, “We’ve had to offset some of our ambitions because most of the funding is restricted,” and another noted, “We have convinced our key donors to provide long-term, core funding, but it’s been pulling teeth to get them there.”

Dynamic social organizations, like dynamic enterprises, need “run room” to thrive, innovate, grow and scale. Five suggested improvements in grant processes are listed below. And while funders may not want to give this much leeway to new partners, shifting procedures for those already known and trusted could make an enormous difference. Our findings lead us to encourage donors in:

- Providing unrestricted funding, or allowing a significant portion of the grantee’s budget for overhead costs.
- Extending grant periods (perhaps doubling or tripling in length, saving time on both sides).
- Responding to grantee pitch decks, like those used for venture capital, and growth capital campaigns that grantees use with multiple funders.
- Accepting strategic plans or business plans from applicants rather than requiring a unique foundation proposal template to be used.
- Providing funding tranches by milestones achieved rather than by individual line items (that require grantee staff time to juggle between line items rather than working at the strategic level).

⁹ See an interesting take on this by Caroline Fiennes in calculating the “net value” of a grant.

CRISIS TEXT LINE

Crisis Text Line was launched in 2013 in the U.S. by Nancy Lublin, an experienced social entrepreneur. It provides free crisis intervention via SMS message with services available 24 hours a day, throughout the U.S., by texting 741741 and being connected to a trained Crisis Counselor. Lublin's intent was to improve the state of mental health of teens by supporting the entire sector to utilize tech and other process innovations. The opportunity for scaling was evident in both increasing the reach of direct service provision and making data open and available.

Crisis Text Line was born out of DoSomething.org, another organization encouraging young people to be active social change agents. Within four months of launching, Crisis Text Line was used in every area code in the U.S. Two years later, Crisis Text Line spun out into a separate entity and Lublin became its CEO. By early 2017 Crisis Text Line had over 65 staff, thousands of volunteers, and had processed over 40 million messages. Lublin points out that this growth pattern is "a lot more like a tech start-up than a nonprofit." Early on she realized that the opportunity for exponential growth needed to be matched with funding like that of a tech start-up: "Nonprofit funding processes are too cumbersome and slow." Start-up style funding enabled the organization to double in size every six months. By early 2015, she had

raised about \$5 million dollars through word-of-mouth from mostly tech entrepreneurs. To avoid the funding treadmill and using a venture capital approach, in early 2016 Lublin raised a "Series B"¹⁰ of \$20 million, using a short, clear document of what they would accomplish. They raised almost \$26M in big chunks, all in unrestricted funding. Donors who wanted restrictions were told no—"it's growth capital—we don't want it to be locked up for specific metrics funders want to see." Most of its funders have invested in for-profit ventures, so this wasn't a foreign concept to them.

Crisis Text Line has the backing and trust of enough donors that it could raise funds this way, including Omidyar Network and Melinda Gates. It didn't always work this way in the past with her other organizations, but Lublin now feels a real partnership with funders: "They're on the same team wanting the same thing. We can be totally open and vulnerable and collaborative, and it's wonderful." Lublin still has concerns though—there are almost no funders or individuals that do the equivalent of "Series C" funding for organizations that have already scaled—and the data shows there are many great organizations that plateau precisely because of a lack of next stage funders.

¹⁰ Lublin borrows terminology and practices from the venture capital world.

Many of our interviewees shared experiences they have had with funders that cut across a number of these five recommendations
Root Capital is one case in point.



ROOT CAPITAL

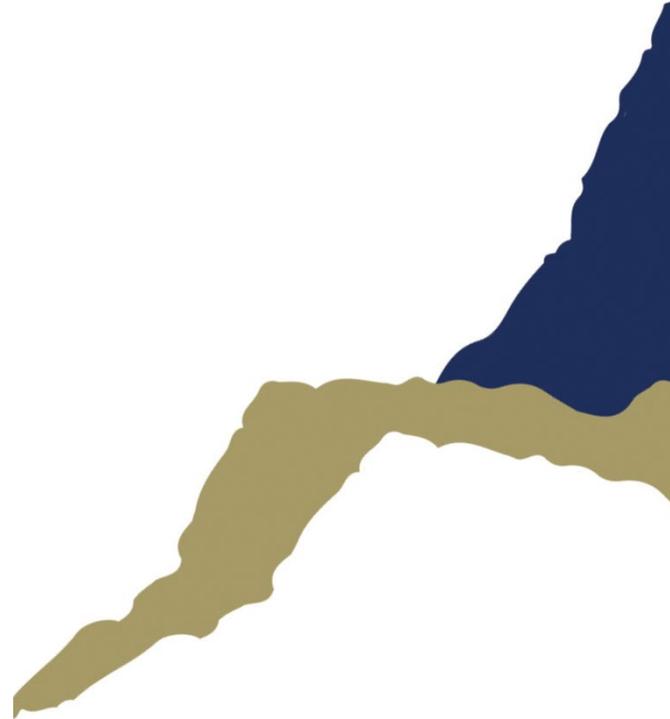
Root Capital is a social enterprise and impact investor that lends capital, delivers financial training, and strengthens market connections for agricultural businesses sourcing from smallholder farmers in Africa and Latin America. Willy Foote, who founded Root Capital in 1999, recognized that these businesses lacked access to capital because they were too large for microcredit loans but considered too small and risky for commercial lenders. Root Capital fills this gap through direct lending and financial training.

Root Capital is a hybrid: part financial institution, part traditional NGO. As a financial intermediary, it borrows money from 200+ impact investors and then lends that pooled capital to hundreds of businesses reaching 600,000 farm households each year. Investors earn a modest financial return (~2%) on top of the social and environmental impact generated by Root's loans. Root deliberately focuses on riskier segments of the market where commercial lenders fear to tread because that is where the greatest impact—and opportunities to demonstrate and build markets - can be found. For this work continued grant capital is needed, so Root can cover some cost from earned revenue and the rest from grants. Root Capital's experience with investors and donors is telling. Demand from investors exceeds Root's capacity to borrow and they have streamlined reporting via a quarterly report for all investors for pre-investment due

diligence and post-investment monitoring. The credibility of the reports is enhanced because Root has adopted a set of widely recognized metrics: the Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (IRIS) taxonomy housed within the Global Impact Investment Network (GIIN). By contrast, Root's grant donors require it to complete tailored grant applications and reports specific to each funding source. Compared to the market-oriented nature of Root Capital's impact investing activities that exemplify empowerment and streamlining, managing these grant processes is a time-consuming treadmill characterized by inefficiencies and power imbalances.

In 2012, Skoll and Citi Foundation were interested in developing industry standards and effecting systemic change. In coordinating their due diligence, Citi and Skoll realized that there was a dearth of information about the broader financial market for the 500 million smallholder farmers globally. Citi and Skoll co-funded a grant to Dalberg Global Development Advisors to produce a seminal public report for the agricultural finance sector. From that initial report, Citi, Skoll, and several other donors seeded the Initiative on Smallholder Finance through co-funding, which has since generated a series of learning reports, and dialogue and collaboration between donors and practitioners in what was previously a highly fragmented sector.

The Way Forward



This report describes key findings and recommendations from the first phase of work. These findings and recommendations, in turn, are highlight consistent with the work of leading thinkers in large-scale systems transformation. Exploring how funders *can hold ourselves accountable* to shifting systems as much as we hold grantees accountable for it will be a key part of our work in future.

If this orientation, and our findings and recommendations, seem obvious or even intuitive, then you may be a potential collaborator in moving

forward. The real work starts now, as we delve more deeply into how we can reach a wider circle of funders who are committed to both adapting their own behavior, and serving as examples for the broader community in the months and years to come.

Next steps include:

- Identifying additional compelling examples and the learning they bring to the funding community.
- Developing an inventory of funders and funder

collaboratives aligned with the vision presented here.

- Connecting with funder collaboratives and philanthropy networks around the world, whose members may be seasoned grantmakers or relative newcomers, to identify colleagues committed to putting the recommendations into practice.
- Bringing together the two conversations on scaling impact, on the one hand, and shifting systems on the other.

This is an open source initiative that is also an imperative. We hope you will join us on this journey.



**FOR MORE
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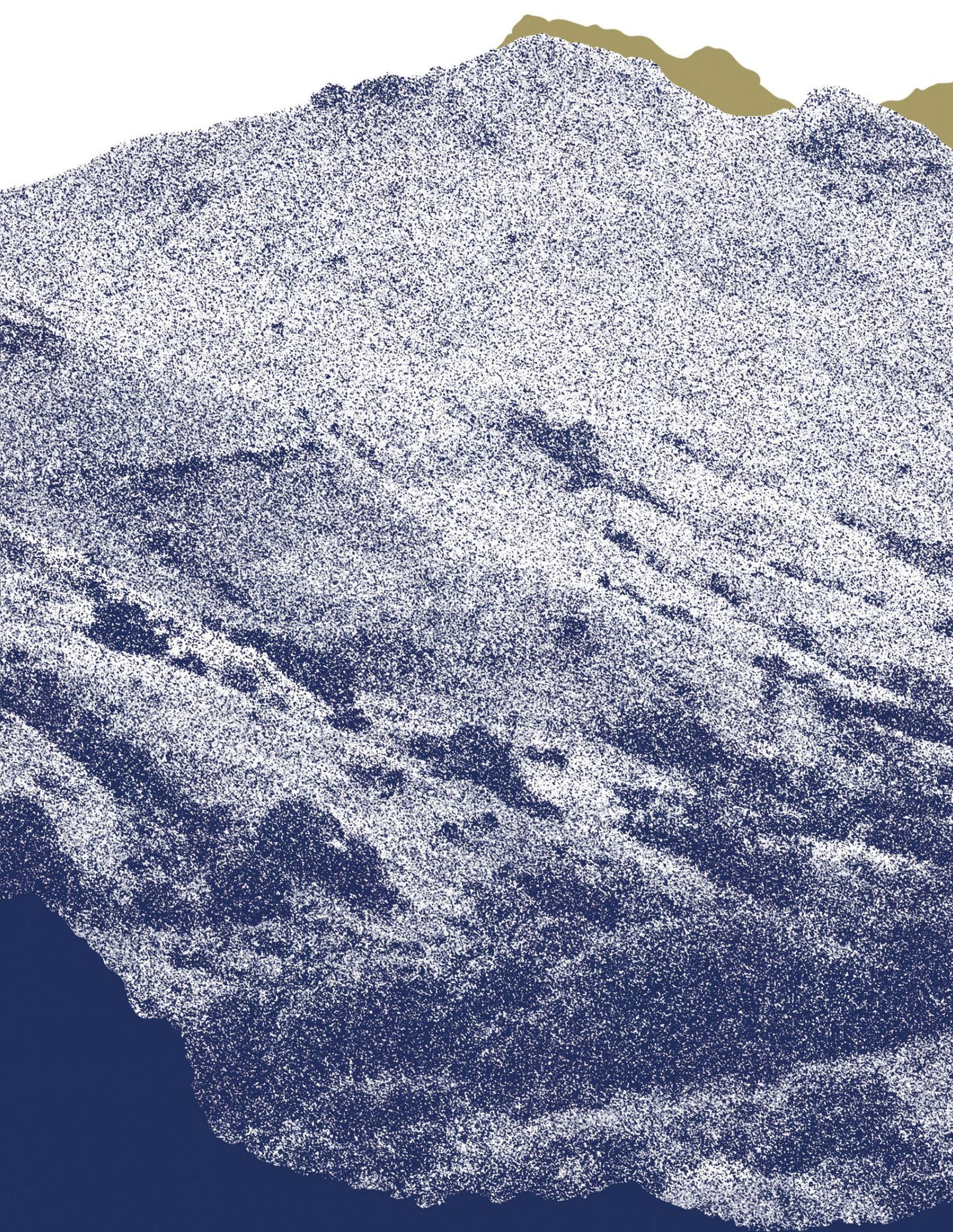
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WEBSITES

SCALING SOLUTIONS STEERING GROUP ORGANIZATIONS

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

Ford Foundation:
<https://www.fordfoundation.org>

Porticus Foundation:
<https://www.porticus.com/en/home>

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

Skoll Foundation:
<http://skoll.org>

GRANTEES INTERVIEWED

B Lab:
<https://www.bcorporation.net>

**Campaign for Female Education
(Camfed):**
<https://camfed.org>

Ceres:
<https://www.ceres.org>

Civicus:
<http://www.civicus.org>

Crisis Action:
<https://crisisation.org>

Crisis Text Line:
<https://www.crisistextline.org>

Education Super Highway:
<https://www.educationsuperhighway.org>

Fe y Alegría:
<http://www.feyalegria.org/en>

Health Leads:
<https://healthleadsusa.org>

Imazon:
<http://imazon.org.br>

Initiative for Smallholder Finance:
<http://www.initiativeforsmallholderfinance.org>

Kiva:
<https://www.kiva.org>

Last Mile Health:
<http://lastmilehealth.org>

Marine Stewardship Council:
<https://www.msc.org>

New Teacher Center:
<https://newteachercenter.org>

One Acre Fund:
<https://oneacrefund.org>

Partners in Health:
<https://www.pih.org>

Proximity Designs:
<http://www.proximitydesigns.org>

Root Capital:
<https://www.rootcapital.org>

Tax Justice Network:
<https://www.taxjustice.net>

Water for People:
<https://www.waterforpeople.org>

Watsi:
<https://watsi.org>