



The Imperative to Transform Ourselves, In Order to Transform the Futures



FORESIGHT & INNOVATION BEEHIVE
WORKSHOP SUMMARY REPORT

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ROCKEFELLER
Philanthropy
Advisors



Change is already here. Action cannot be delayed. Current challenges facing humanity are unprecedented in scale, speed and magnitude. Philanthropy must be bolder and better equipped to effectively address these existential threats. To do so, philanthropy must adopt and institutionalize best practices offered by the disciplines of foresight and futurism to become not just forward-looking but futures-focused.

Guided by this imperative, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) launched a Foresight & Futures Community of Practice comprised of thoughtful foundations and nonprofit partners to collectively engage in applied learning and explore ways to help philanthropy better understand what's coming next and design adaptable, innovative and equitable strategies.

The overarching objectives of this working session were to:

- Gain deep knowledge of strategic foresight methodologies.
- Process and understand signals of change impacting the trajectories and operating context of our work.
- Practice making key decisions, develop scenarios and set imperatives for the upcoming decade in the context of turbulence and uncertainty.

These out-of-the-comfort-zone activities provided the Foresight & Futures Community of Practice with a unique opportunity to imagine different futures for the planet, for society, for specific priority issue areas and for grantee partners. Moreover, this enabled participants to think how or whether their current organizational capacities and design align with these futures and to imagine new and fruitful ways to begin future proofing their interventions and operations.



CREATING FUTURE-FOCUSED IMPERATIVES FOR PHILANTHROPY

As a crucial activity—and the culmination of the Beehive's applied learning journey—participants worked in groups to formulate a set of imperatives to be achieved by 2030 using the skills, new thinking and practical knowledge gained during the workshop. The analysis that informed this exercise lifted up pressing topics, including sharing information, transforming philanthropic practices, climate, equity and democracy, among other important themes. As a result, participants developed imperatives that not only require understanding these issues today, but also anticipating their future trajectory and that of foundations' work generally. Everyone acknowledged that acting on these imperatives will require deep internal transformation work as well as uprooting external interventions to achieve long-term change, shift power and create positive futures for everyone.

Select examples of imperatives that emerged include:

FUNDING PRACTICE

Imperative

BY 2030, WE WILL IMPLEMENT THE IMPERATIVE TO ENGAGE IN FLEXIBLE FUNDING PRACTICES.

This imperative tackled the need to upend the way in which philanthropies leverage or distribute funds. In the future, as they adapt alongside our changing world, philanthropies must embrace the complexity and flexibility of multiple funding models. This includes piloting flexible forms of long-term funding and analyzing underlying dynamics that apply across social issues. Crucially, group members stressed the importance of engaging their respective boards of directors on this topic. Without buy-in from the board, this type of fundamental change is unlikely.

VULNERABILITY AND MODELING

Imperative

BY 2030, WE WILL MODEL NARRATIVE CHANGE AND MINDSET SHIFT AROUND POSITIVE, OPTIMISTIC FUTURES; VULNERABILITY, AGILITY AND SITTING IN THE MESSY MIDDLE.

Vulnerability is difficult and uncomfortable. But uniting in embracing those feelings (and their discomfort) and in vulnerability, organizations can emerge more nimble, more resilient, more empathetic and better prepared for challenges. Key components of this work include being generous in sharing learnings, building relationships and acknowledging failures. When organizations share with one another rather than remaining in silos, society as a whole benefits. Sharing transparently provides more information for boards of directors, as well as internal and external partners, making them more likely to engage in change.





TOOLS AND PRACTICE

Imperative

BY 2030, OUR COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE WILL IMPLEMENT THE IMPERATIVE TO SUPPORT ADAPTIVE, COLLECTIVE LEARNING AND SCENARIO PLANNING THAT INFORMS THE AREAS WE WORK IN TOGETHER WITH THE NECESSARY TOOLS AND PRACTICES.

Sharp tools and enabling practices are crucial for institutionalizing innovative approaches, creating effective interventions, and anticipating and managing challenges. This requires efficient collaboration and establishing shared practices, while at the same time safeguarding creativity. To keep this balance, it's important to make sure the right people are in the room and that organizations don't fall victim to tunnel vision or to falling in love with their own ideas. Philanthropies must avoid becoming attached to old ideas or methods and remain open to collective, community-focused goals and missions, embracing new ways of thinking and doing. One key component of this work is to hold annual reflections around shared learnings that lead to scenario planning. As in other imperatives, engaging with boards of directors is vital to success.

POWER ANALYSIS / POSITIONING

Imperative

BY 2030, WE WILL CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR POWER SHARING, WORKING ON MAPPING THE ECOSYSTEM, BUILDING A SPACE FOR RECEIVING FEEDBACK FROM GRANTEEES, AND PERFORMING THE ESSENTIAL TASK OF SHARING THIS FEEDBACK WITH BOARD MEMBERS.

Authentic, honest analysis of an organization's power with the intent to shift and, eventually, relinquish it is difficult, particularly for a self-accountable sector that often holds (and holds onto) a lot of money and power. This entails the hard work of overcoming barriers, facilitating mind shifts, creating avenues of external accountability and bringing everyone into the conversation. The inner work required to bring to life this imperative includes intentionality about funders' place in the ecosystem and working on internalized biases.





BOARD AND DONORS

Imperative

BY 2030, WE WILL ENGAGE IN JOINT BOARD AND STAFF SCENARIO PLANNING.

Convening and convincing boards across organizations isn't easy, and the differences in hierarchy can inhibit conversation. Some people might refrain from speaking out and censor themselves in the presence of senior leadership because of poor trust and proximity. Inclusive, collective scenario planning exercises might help to break down the board-staff hierarchy. Plus, this shared analysis and co-developed strategy have greater buy-in and thus more effective, aligned implementation.

ADDITIONAL FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND INSIGHTS

Throughout their two days together, the participants' collective learning and informal discussions surfaced a lot of questions and observations. Insights from the Foresight & Innovation Beehive include:

- Change is exponential and the future difficult to process, but philanthropies can develop an informed sense of the best and worst outcomes and plan for both.
- Philanthropy's greatest challenges don't exist in silos; they're interconnected. Climate change affects global economics, which in turn affects human migration patterns, which affects government policies, etc. Funders need to think and structure interventions that takes this complexity into account.
- Engaging and receiving buy-in from boards of directors and staff is paramount to the success of any change and innovation.
- Transforming mindsets, adapting new practices, and thinking outside of established parameters is difficult work that requires dedicated space, practice and resourcing.



NEXT STEPS OF THE FORESIGHT & FUTURES JOURNEY

During the next two years the Foresight & Futures Community of Practice will continue its applied learning journey with experts from diverse geographies, sectors and futures practices. Future Foresight & Innovation Beehives will experiment with different approaches to foresight and futures, particularly non-Western ones that center communities. Learning with and from each other, Community of Practice members will build foresight and futures capabilities, incorporate scenario planning into strategic processes and co-create innovative foresight frameworks for decision-making.

ABOUT THE FORESIGHT & FUTURE INITIATIVE

In December 2023, RPA launched the Foresight & Futures Initiative to help philanthropy institutionalize best practices offered by the disciplines of foresight and futurism. The initiative's work includes convenings, research, thought leadership production and participation of historically marginalized communities and nonprofit partners. The overarching goal of the initiative is to help philanthropic organizations build capacity for themselves and the broader ecosystem to anticipate the challenges of tomorrow, hone organizational innovation and create more robust, equitable and adaptive strategies.

For more information, please visit <https://www.rockpa.org/project/foresight-and-futures-initiative/> or email Olga Tarasov at otarasov@rockpa.org.

