THE COLORADO TRUST

ACHIEVING ACCESS TO HEALTH FOR ALL COLORADANS

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RESEARCH

Advocacy & Public Policy Grantmaking:

Matching Process to Purpose

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THE COLORADO TRUST

The Colorado Trust is a grantmaking foundation dedicated to achieving access to health for all Coloradans. www.coloradotrust.org

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PREFACE FROM THE COLORADO TRUST

When The Colorado Trust identified its vision of achieving access to health for all Coloradans in 2007, we believed that advocacy needed to be an essential component of our overall grantmaking. Being new to funding advocacy, staff created a theory of change for what we hoped advocacy funding would achieve. Our measures of success included:

- Increased capacity of organizations to communicate and promote health advocacy messages to diverse audiences
- Improved management and stability of health advocacy organizations
- Increased representation of consumer voices and of racial, ethnic and rural communities.

To achieve these benchmarks, nine grantees representing a spectrum of advocacy and organizational capacity received three years of general operating support. Grantees were purposefully selected to ensure that the funding strategy would provide support to some organizations to continue to do what they had been doing well, and for others to increase their emerging capacity to advocate. By selecting this variety of grantees, The Trust attempted to strengthen the field of advocates in Colorado. The evaluation of this effort, published earlier this year, *The Colorado Trust's Advocacy Funding Strategy: Lessons Learned for Funders of Advocacy Efforts & Evaluations*, provides The Trust and other funders with lessons learned about how to more effectively structure an advocacy funding strategy.

Following the investment in funding advocacy and advocacy evaluation, The Trust wanted to better understand how other foundations were addressing these issues – in particular, how they were evaluating their advocacy efforts. Were other funders more interested in a specific policy outcome? If so, how were they able to isolate the contributions of their foundation? Or, were funders more interested in increasing the capacity of advocacy organizations, thus focusing evaluation on measures of organizational development? To answer these questions, we contracted with the Center for Innovation in Evaluation, a Washington DC-based evaluation firm, to conduct interviews with foundation staff and others with a history of leading advocacy funding efforts.

As the team began exploring the advocacy evaluation strategies of interviewees, it became clear that there also was much to learn about how advocacy funding strategies in the sector have evolved in recent years. Key informants were eager to talk about their challenges and successes in advocacy funding, and were eager for more information on what others were doing and the results they were getting. What began as a relatively small effort to understand evaluation became a far larger exploration to uncover the nuances of advocacy funding. We wanted to understand the variety of strategies funders are using, the advantages and tradeoffs, the implications for funders, grantees and evaluation, and – perhaps most importantly – the implications for the outcomes the foundation hopes to achieve.

This report provides the results of these interviews, which we hope will be helpful to both funders who are new to advocacy funding, and those who have been at it for years. Using the information found within this report, funders can embark on an advocacy funding strategy understanding more clearly what to expect for all stakeholders. We realize that foundation staff are continually refining and creating new ways to fund advocacy, and we encourage funders who experiment with other ways to share their results. Successes and challenges widely shared allow others to pave new ground, rather than repeat mistakes, which will ultimately lead to more effective and strategic grantmaking.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, advocacy and public policy grantmaking has moved away from supporting individual grantees to achieve their particular policy goals toward a more targeted, proactive approach designed to achieve the funder's policy goals. More recently, some funders have begun to explore new ways of designing advocacy and public policy grantmaking to achieve longer-term and more substantial changes in the policy landscape at large. As foundations consider how to approach their advocacy and public policy grantmaking in the future, a better understanding of this variety of approaches, and pros and cons of each among foundations with a long history of policy work, may provide options for framing and focusing such efforts.

Building on research conducted in 2007 by Coffman and Campbell, this brief summarizes advocacy and public policy grantmaking approaches and their implications for grant portfolio composition and management, auxiliary supports and evaluation. "Advocacy and public policy grantmaking" refers to grantmaking in support of a wide range of advocacy activities that are intend to trigger, block, maintain, support and/or monitor changes in public policy at any level of government. The findings below emerged from an extensive literature review, as well as interviews with staff at 14 foundations and three independent consultants with in-depth policy experience. Interviewees were selected to represent an array of foundation sizes, content areas and structures, all with mature policy portfolios.

Foundation staff were asked to describe their foundation's approach to advocacy and public policy grantmaking, including:

- The foundation's goals for its advocacy and policy grants
- What the foundation has learned about how best to structure grantmaking and construct a portfolio to achieve its goals
- What auxiliary supports (e.g., convenings, technical assistance, etc.) the foundation provides that have proven indispensable to its work
- How the foundation defines the role of its policy staff, and how these staff interact with other staff
- How the foundation designs reporting and conducts (or would like to conduct) evaluation
- How the foundation thinks about its role in the larger field of "actors" in the advocacy field and in relation to other funders.

The assessment revealed two approaches to advocacy and public policy grantmaking for which foundation practices and processes are fairly well established: a policy target approach to achieve the passage, successful implementation and maintenance of a funder's specific policy goal; and an advocacy niche approach to strengthen the presence or influence of a particular strategic function (i.e., policy analysis and research or grassroots mobilization) within the policymaking process. In addition, the assessment identified an emerging approach to advocacy and public policy grantmaking that has yet to be well defined: a field-building approach to develop the stability and long-term adaptive capacity of a group – or field – of advocacy organizations.

Many funders choose a combination of these approaches, and some prefer to be more strongly positioned within a single approach. Approaches are not mutually exclusive, and may even be mutually supportive; but each approach has unique implications for grantee selection, organizational processes, program officer roles and evaluation. **This report frames a series of options for advocacy and public policy grantmaking and explores implications for foundation practices by drawing on the best experiences from the field.** It presents a particular focus on what it means for foundations to design their grantmaking to build the capacity and influence of a field of advocates to tackle a wide range of policy challenges over time. As such, this brief can help foundation staff and leadership establish a common language and understand trade-offs among the different advocacy strategy paths.

POLICY TARGET APPROACH

Grantmaking and auxiliary activities are designed to advance a specific policy goal.[i]

The policy target approach positions the foundation as a leader that marshals and shapes the efforts of particular actors in the sector to advance a specific policy agenda. The policy target approach to advocacy grantmaking requires clear thinking about the specific policy goals a foundation wants to achieve, the political barriers to achieving those goals, and the advocacy strategies most likely to overcome those barriers. It is a proactive approach that is well suited to funders who have:

- A board of trustees and executive leadership who are comfortable setting and publicly articulating a clear policy goal(s)
- An organizational identity, culture and decisionmaking process driven by commitment to a particular issue (e.g., health or education) more than by commitment to a particular value frame (e.g., social justice or community-driven change)
- Program or policy staff with an in-depth understanding of the policy content area, the policy process, and the political dynamics and influential voices specific to the policy content area
- Internal processes and grant requirements that are nimble and flexible enough to respond to (or allow grantees to respond to) windows of opportunity or unexpected setbacks.

Sample Policy Target Goals

- Expand children's health insurance coverage (The David and Lucile Packard Foundation)
- Increase the number of states with freedom to marry for all (Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund)
- Eliminate the use of congregate (i.e., institutional) foster care for young children (The Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- Reduce suspensions and expulsions of boys of color (Liberty Hill Foundation)
- Ensure health equity within health reform legislation in Oregon (Northwest Health Foundation)

Advantages

- Focusing resources on a specific policy may "move the needle" on the foundation's larger goal more quickly (e.g., the number of children covered, or the number of states with marriage equality policies).
- Proactive foundation championing of a policy issue can keep it on the radar when it might otherwise disappear.
- Progress and outcomes may be easier to detect, track and explain than they are for other advocacy grantmaking approaches.
- Policy and advocacy grantmaking can accelerate progress in programmatic grantmaking goals.
- The funder can exert greater control over grantees' advocacy strategies and tactics.
- The funder can accelerate progress by focusing its influence, leverage and non-grantmaking resources on the same policy goal.

Disadvantages

- Foundation ownership of a policy goal can invite public scrutiny and criticism from opponents.
- This approach does not necessarily build the long-term capacity of the field of advocates to tackle other policy opportunities or challenges.
- An exclusive focus on high-capacity, experienced advocates who are best positioned to advance the goal can further marginalize advocacy organizations representing disenfranchised communities.
- The funders' requirements for grantees to prioritize the funder's policy target can reinforce silos and prevent collaboration between advocates working on entwined issues.
- The funder's control over advocacy strategies and tactics can lead to mission drift for grantees or limit their adaptation to on-the-ground realities.

i It is important to distinguish between a policy goal and specific legislation. Most foundations are prohibited from lobbying on behalf of specific legislation, and do not take positions on bills or ballot initiatives. However, foundations can engage in a vast array of other advocacy tactics that contribute to changes in public policy, including education campaigns, research, public will building, grassroots organizing, coalition building, media advocacy, litigation and regulatory advocacy.

Grant Portfolio Selection

Assembling a grant portfolio for the policy target approach first requires an assessment of where the policy is in the policymaking process (e.g., problem or solution identification, raising its salience, policy adoption or blocking, policy implementation and maintenance, and policy monitoring) and an identification of barriers to progress. Primary criteria for grantee selection is whether advocates have the strategic capacities and influence that can best address these barriers. Interviewees using this approach listed several questions that guide their portfolio selection:

- Where is the policy in the policy process?
- Which advocates are working on this issue and have a track record of advocacy success?
- Which advocates have access to audiences that are key to moving this policy issue?
- Which advocates' or interest groups' input into the policy solution is important to making it a high-quality solution, or to ensuring successful implementation?
- What advocacy skills or strategies will be needed to move this issue that current players do not possess?

Literature on foundations' influence on the policy process, as well as many of the policy/program officers interviewed for this report, note that the composition of a foundation's advocacy portfolio affects how an advocacy effort will unfold and the form a policy solution is likely to take. (A detailed overview of this approach is available in a 2008 publication from the James Irvine Foundation, *Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking* by Julia Coffman.) For example, foundation support of more moderate nonprofit advocates with highly professionalized staff – those with more specialized skill sets and high levels of training and expertise – can steer policy solutions toward options that are more palatable to the private sector. Supporting nonprofits engaged in grassroots organizing, protest or media "exposure" tactics that publicly criticize or expose questionable behavior of policymakers or opposing advocates might lead to solutions that appeal to communities that traditionally have less power in the policy process. Funding both professionalized and grassroots advocacy organizations could create conditions under which policy solutions serve a wider range of interests, but may slow the negotiation process as groups with more varied perspectives try to reach agreement. Many interviewees recommend that the foundation clearly articulate (at least internally) the theory behind the composition of its advocacy portfolio, and the inherent trade-offs and possible tensions that may arise as a result.

One example of such a clearly articulated portfolio theory is The David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Children, Families and Communities program, which has a policy goal of expanded eligibility for Medicaid and CHP+. They selected highly skilled advocates with a proven track record of successful legislative advocacy who could make significant progress in states where success is likely because of a favorable political environment. The foundation theorizes that success breeds success: quick policy wins could help advocates in other states learn about effective strategies and set an example for supportive policymakers in other states to use as leverage. However, if these high-capacity grantees are not perceived as representative of (or familiar with) the interests of the communities where eligible children are concentrated, the policy win may not translate into effective implementation.

Grantmaking Process and Structure

Of the three approaches described in this report, the policy target approach lends itself most to restricted project grants, shorter-term grants and smaller grant amounts. While all interviewees agreed that unrestricted general operating support over several years is the best option for any approach to advocacy grantmaking, restricted grants can be used to shape the advocacy tactics of grantees and encourage alignment between them. However, research shows that advocacy grantees associate multi-year grants with capacity-building, and one-year grants with foundations co-opting their agenda.[1] In other words, grantees that receive restricted one-year grants can feel that they are forced to replace their own strategic plans and tactical decisionmaking with the strategies and tactics designed by their funders, so that they can continue to qualify for funding year after year. This is a particular challenge for

grantees that have multiple funders, each prescribing or requiring a different set of policy priorities and strategies. Several interviewees suggested that if multi-year, unrestricted grants are not an option, the funder can mitigate this sense of co-optation by involving grantees as partners in planning advocacy strategies and tactics.

Several foundations using the policy target approach issue shorter-term advocacy grants of one to two years. These funders feel that a shorter grant period allows the foundation and grantee(s) to reassess their fit and direction more regularly, and to more effectively shape the direction and goals of the next grant period. This approach also limits the risk foundations face of committing funds for several years and discovering later that a grantee is a poor fit for the policy goal. However, foundations with a shorter grant period recommended a straightforward renewal process to minimize the burden and cost to the nonprofits. The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund generally provides 12 additional months of support to non-renewed grantees to ease the transition process and hopefully allow them to find replacement funds. Additionally, restricted project grants for advocacy can be supplemented with flex funds that enable grantees to respond rapidly to unexpected setbacks or windows of opportunity in the short cycles of political decisionmaking.

The policy target approach can benefit from a balance between open requests for proposals and invited grants. For example, the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund solicits grant applications from the organizations well-positioned to make progress on its policy goals, but also occasionally issues open Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to broaden its reach in the community and identify new partners. One interviewee explained, "If you don't include some open RFPs, your grantmaking can become a closed circle of people you know and trust, but you might not know what new is happening or which new partners are emerging."

Program/Policy Officer Role

According to the interviewees, this approach requires program or policy staff with content expertise in the specific policy area and an in-depth understanding of the political environment and relevant paths of influence for that policy area. This allows the officer to work in depth with the grantees to develop cohesive strategies, identify other players who should be at the table and deploy the foundation's other resources (e.g., influence, communications, convening power, etc.) at the right moments. The most important functions of a program or policy officer in the policy target approach cited by interviewees include:

- Supporting the development of grantee capacities that are lacking but are necessary to advance the policy (e.g., skills in media advocacy, messaging, policymaker communication, grassroots organizing)
- Creating opportunities and incentives for advocates to coordinate strategies and tactics
- Connecting advocates to key resources (e.g., research and data) to move the issue
- Clearly and regularly communicating and consulting with grantees about the policy goal, the strategies and tactics that can best advance the goal, and lessons learned that can inform future decisions
- Continually monitoring the policy environment for windows of opportunity to take action quickly when grantees are unprepared or unaware.

Considerations for Evaluation

No clear pattern of reporting or evaluation practices emerged from our interviews; practices ranged from conventional grantee activity and output reporting, to learning-oriented evaluation capacity-building, to a comprehensive retrospective evaluation of policy efforts. In general, a policy target approach is well suited to a learning-oriented evaluation that gives real-time data about how target audiences are moving along a spectrum of awareness, will and action in relation to the policy issue; how grantees are growing in credibility or influence in relation to the policy issue; and how the policy has progressed through the policy process. Meaningful intelligence on these questions can be useful for

tactical and strategic decisionmaking; additionally, retrospective impact evaluation has proven valuable to some of the foundations that have a policy target approach, such as The Annie E. Casey Foundation and The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Interim outcomes that can capture whether policy progress is occurring include:

- Changes in the awareness, will or action of advocates' target audiences in relation to the issue
  Example
  Policy target: Establish legal protection for the right for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals to marry.
  Interim outcomes:
  - Increased number of clergy in support of marriage equality
  - Increased use of "freedom to marry" framing by media outlets
  - Increased alignment of messaging and advocacy strategies among LGBT advocacy organizations.
- Changes in grantees' and/or the foundation's credibility or influence on the policy issue
  Example
  Policy target: Eliminate the use of congregate care for children in the foster care system.
  Interim outcomes:
  - Improved reputation of a particular grantee as a source for high-quality research on foster care
  - Increased recognition among policymakers of the power of grantees to mobilize key constituents in support of child protection issues.
- Changes at the stage in which the issue is in the policy process
  Example
  Policy target: Reduce suspensions and expulsions of boys of color.
  Interim outcomes:
  - Increased agreement among education officials, advocates and public policymakers about the roots causes of disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of boys of color
  - Increased agreement among advocates on an appropriate policy solution to reduction of suspensions and expulsions
  - Improvement in the positioning or relative prioritization of reducing suspensions and expulsions of boys of color on the policy agenda.

The policy target approach offers funders a focused frame for marshaling resources to achieve a clear policy win. Nonetheless, funders using this approach should be cautious of unrealistic expectations for success. Even with a clear policy goal, the highest-capacity advocates on board and a wide array of partners, policy success can be elusive in the unpredictable policy environment. Some funders use this approach for policy issues they suspect are nearing the finish line, while others enter early and commit to the policy issue for years, or even decades.

For most funders, using the policy target approach is a strategy to achieve a larger social change goal. For example, as described above, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Getting to the Finish Line project supported advocates in eight states to expand Medicaid and CHP+ eligibility for children. This policy target, and the selection of participating states that were well-positioned to achieve policy victories, was a strategy for building momentum for policy change at the federal level so that that all of America's children have health insurance that provides the care they need (which is the foundation's larger goal). The policy target approach can also be paired with an approach to advocacy grantmaking that aims to build the long-term capacity of the field, giving a group of advocates a focused issue around which to rally and improve their collaboration skills.

ADVOCACY NICHE APPROACH

Grantmaking and auxiliary activities are designed to strengthen the presence or influence of a particular strategic function (i.e., policy analysis and research, or grassroots mobilization) within the policymaking process.

A funder who adopts the advocacy niche approach is positioned as a supporter of, or leader within, a particular niche of the advocacy infrastructure (e.g., policy analysis and research, leadership, coalition building, etc.). This approach requires funders to assess the strategic strengths and gaps in the field of advocates, and then zoom in on one gap that the foundation is well suited to support over the long-term. For example, a funder may choose the niche of research and policy analysis, with the goal of building the presence and influence of research and policy analysis on a wide variety of policy debates. Another may choose to focus on leadership development, with the hopes that better, more connected leaders will impact the ability of the field of advocates to coalesce around a shared agenda. This approach works well for funders who have:

- A board and executive leadership who are interested in, and comfortable with, an organizational identity that is closely tied to one approach rather than distributed among many (this is sometimes difficult for state-level funders who feel obligated to support multiple players in many parts of the state)
- Staff with expertise in a particular advocacy strategy, but who also understand how this niche relates to the functioning of the larger field
- A relatively small grantmaking budget that leadership wishes to target more narrowly to increase impact.

Sample Advocacy Niche Goals

- Develop the advocacy leadership capacity of women in California (The Women's Foundation of California)
- Increase the use of quality data and research by advocates and policymakers working to improve the lives of low-income children (The Annie E. Casey Foundation)
- Increase the size and base of grassroots leaders in low income communities of color (Liberty Hill Foundation)
- Increase civic leadership that focuses on improving the health of Kansas communities (Kansas Health Foundation)

Advantages

- Advocacy niche funding can trigger a significant shift in the power dynamics of a field, so that the field as a whole aligns more with a funder's core values (e.g., building the grassroots organizing niche can create greater citizen influence on the policy process over the long-term).
- Funders can build a clearer identity and reputation as an influencer as they gain expertise and credibility within a niche.
- Progress and outcomes may be easier to detect than they are for a full field building approach (described in the next section).
- Focusing funds may result in more visible success in the short term than spending across a variety of gaps in the field.
- Clearly naming one's niche can support better coordination of advocacy funders working in the same field.

Disadvantages

- Niche strategies or perspectives can only move specific policies so far (e.g., grassroots
- organizing and citizen engagement rarely have the power by themselves to see a policy change through passage and quality implementation).
- This approach requires foundation staff to have both in-depth expertise in a niche and a broad view of how that niche relates to the rest of the field.
- If the larger field is poorly networked, funding may increase silos among niches.
- Support of a particular niche can elicit criticism that the funder is too inaccessible to other types of advocates.
- Focus on one dimension may leave others anemic, if other funders do not support them.
- Organizations in a niche that is strongly linked to one funder may have sustainability challenges, as other funders consider the area covered or owned by the niche funder.

Grant Portfolio Selection

When building a portfolio for an advocacy niche approach, funders need to consider building the capacity of individual organizations within the niche and increasing the connectivity of those organizations to the rest of the field. Special attention to the connectivity between the niche organizations and the broader field can result in field-wide benefits, as grantees become a resource to other advocates.

In some cases, grantees will land squarely within the niche while in others, the niche will be one part of grantees' advocacy work that the foundation can help build. Alternately, funders may find they need to create new organizations. Consider, for example, the creation of the Colorado Health Institute to fill a data and information gap in Colorado, or the Kansas Health Foundation's creation of the Kansas Leadership Center to serve in the advocacy leadership niche.

A strong example of the advocacy niche approach is The Annie E. Casey Foundation's well-known KIDS COUNT initiative. Although KIDS COUNT recently has evolved into an advocacy field building approach (described in the next section), it was originally created to support organizations to collect and report credible data on the condition of children. The foundation has helped link this research and data niche to the rest of the advocacy field by training grantees how to interface with other advocates to promote the use of data-based advocacy and communication strategies. While many of the KIDS COUNT grantees also engage in other advocacy strategies, such as grassroots organizing or model policy development, the first several years of the KIDS COUNT funding supported the data and communications portion of grantees' work. In some states, KIDS COUNT grants seeded new organizations or centers within universities dedicated exclusively to the data and research niche. The foundation's original selection of grantees was based as much on grantees' connectivity to the rest of their state's field of advocates as it was on their existing capacity to collect and analyze data.

The Women's Foundation of California selected leadership development as a high-leverage niche approach. It offers a policy leadership institute for women leaders in any policy content area, during which women are trained in political and policy analysis, advocacy strategy and network building through a gender lens. The foundation reports that, over time, it has seen graduates of the institute increasingly call on one another across issue areas (e.g., health, education and economic policy) to join forces or to promote upstream policy changes that affect all of their issues (e.g., the California budget crisis, and the initiative and referendum process). So while participants' individual organizations benefited from their leaders' participation in the leadership training, so too did the field as a whole.

Some interviewees insisted that foundations remember that a contest for power exists between advocates who share similar long-term goals – not just between advocates who usually fall on opposing sides of an issue. As a result, an important consideration in portfolio composition is how the ownership of a particular niche by one or more organizations will affect the power dynamics within the field. For example, if a funder supports high-capacity, mainstream advocacy organizations located in the capital city or an urban center to fill the media advocacy niche in the advocacy ecosystem, their influence and power in the advocacy arena may grow, while advocates from outlying areas or traditionally underrepresented communities have even less influence or visibility in the policy process.

During the grantee selection phase, the program or policy officers interviewed consider:

- What organizations have the capacity or are positioned to excel in this niche?
- How do these organizations interact with, or serve as a resource to, the broader field?
- How does the selection of this grantee(s) to fill this niche affect the power dynamics of the field?
- Who needs to build capacity and credibility to participate in this niche because their perspective is important to shape the policy agenda and process?

- Is the niche best filled by creating a new organization(s) and, if so, why?
- What auxiliary supports should the funder provide, and what auxiliary supports could an existing organization be funded to provide?

Grantmaking Process and Structure

Foundations can offer restricted grants to organizations whose mission and activities are much broader than the niche to ensure that funds are used exclusively for activities associated with the niche, such as a policy research and analysis grantee that is a program within a university. Or, when an organization fits squarely and exclusively within a niche – such as the Kansas Leadership Center, whose mission is leadership development – unrestricted general operating support will give the organization the flexibility to grow its capacity to support the larger field. Finally, grantees can be identified either through an open RFP or by closed invitations, depending on the funder's familiarity with the niche and the dynamics in the larger field.

One approach to building connectivity between the niche and the larger field is to ensure that grantees have outreach and networking strategies in place. Another approach is to maintain a pool of funds to support non-grantees to take advantage of training or networking opportunities that connect them with the niche. For example, one funder offers mini-grants to organizations to participate in the data and policy analysis workshops its primary grantees provide.

Program/Policy Officer Role

This approach requires program or policy staff to have a broad perspective of the field and an in-depth understanding of the niche. For example, a program officer in a foundation whose niche is grassroots organizing and civic engagement reported that he added the most value to his grantees' work when he trained the grantees to interface better with organizations in other niches – such as advocates who specialize in policy analysis, political will building or direct lobbying – so that grantees' policy issues could be carried forward by advocates with the skills and influence that best fit the political context at the moment. So, while the program officer has expertise in the particular niche of grassroots organizing, he also remains attentive to sentiments in the larger field to understand how other advocates perceive the grantees; when the larger field could benefit from deeper relationships with organizers; and when organizers could assist other types of advocates with grassroots strategies to move their own issues.

Some of the primary functions of a program or policy officer in the advocacy niche approach include:

- Identifying needs and building capacity within the niche
- Helping grantees see how their niche relates to the broader array of strategies deployed by advocates, and how they fit in to a larger landscape of players
- Creating opportunities for the niche to interface with the broader field and connect to other efforts and players
- Monitoring how the growing strength of the niche is affecting power dynamics in the larger field.

Considerations for Evaluation

Interviewees using this approach, like the other approaches, have no clear pattern of evaluation practice. Because funding is more targeted for this approach than for a field building approach, grantees are often able to report on their own increased capacity and the engagement of the larger field with their work. Collecting meaningful data on how the dynamics of the broader field are shifting as a result of the stronger presence of the niche, however, is likely to require an external evaluator who is well versed in advocacy evaluation methods associated with the niche strategy.

Signals of progress for an advocacy niche approach appear on three levels:

- Changes in the capacity of individual grantees to engage in niche strategies
- Changes in grantees' ability to connect their work to the larger field
- Changes in the way the policy environment shifts in response to the presence of a stronger niche.

For example, for a funder that supports the data and research niche, such as the KIDS COUNT initiative, evaluation questions focus on whether grantees' ability to do quality data collection and research is increasing; the extent to which policymakers, the media and other advocates are using or referencing the grantees' data and research; and, in the long-term, whether a stronger data and research niche in the children's advocacy field is contributing to a children's policy agenda and policy solutions based on data and evidence.

Funders using the advocacy niche approach can align many foundation resources and services in support of the niche. Importantly, the niche can also support the foundation's other grantmaking. A well-developed research and policy analysis niche, for example, can provide data and knowledge to service provider organizations; and a robust grassroots or community organizing niche can provide service providers with insight into community needs and inroads to establish programming in new areas.

FIELD BUILDING APPROACH

Grantmaking and auxiliary activities, such as technical assistance, convenings and communications support, are designed to build the stability and long-term adaptive capacity of a field of advocacy and policy organizations that can shape and respond to a shifting policy environment.

The field building approach positions the funder as a long-term resource base, capacity-builder and connector for a field of advocacy organizations that regularly work on similar policy issues. Rather than shaping their grantmaking to achieve a specific policy goal, field builders aim to change the capacity and patterns of interaction among a field of advocacy organizations over the long-term. While some funders – particularly those that identify as social justice funders – have taken this approach for many years, a common language and understanding of strategies for field building are only recently beginning to take root and spread to other kinds of funders.

A funder that adopts this approach must be diligent about:

- Defining the parameters of the field of advocates it seeks to build
- Articulating a vision for a high-functioning field in the particular political context within which the field operates
- Diagnosing the strengths, weaknesses and patterns of interaction in the field
- Determining how funding and auxiliary resources can best be deployed and sequenced to address gaps, build connectivity and shape underlying patterns of power and interaction.

This approach works well for funders who have:

- A board of trustees and leadership who are comfortable with more qualitative, systems-oriented outcomes, and with a long-term commitment to the grantmaking approach
- An organizational identity, culture and decisionmaking process driven by commitment to a particular value frame (e.g., social justice or community-driven change) more than by commitment to a particular issue (e.g., health or education)
- A mission and goals that require progress on a variety of policies
- Program or policy staff with trusting relationships with a range of advocacy leaders and organizations, and who know enough about how advocates interact with one another to be able to detect and support organic opportunities for collaboration and network-building.

Defining the Field

There are a variety of definitions of a "field" in academic and foundation literature. In the broadest sense, an organizational field is commonly defined as "a set of organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life,"[2] and an arena in which "participants take one another into account as they carry out interrelated activities."[3] But a field also is defined by an area of practice (a set of common approaches) and a body of knowledge or evidence.[4] For purposes of this report, an advocacy field consists of:

- The **individuals and organizations** working to influence a particular policy domain
- The **relationships and patterns of interaction** between these individuals and organizations
- The **array of approaches and common practices** these individuals and organizations use to influence a particular policy domain
- The **body of knowledge, evidence and experience** on which these organizations and individuals draw.

(continued on page 14)

Sample Field Building Goals

- Increase the capacity of advocates in New Hampshire to promote, secure and sustain policies that have a positive impact on low-income and disenfranchised communities (New Hampshire Charitable Foundation)
- Build the capacity of the field of health consumer advocates in Missouri (Missouri Foundation for Health)
- Increase the power and capacity of progressive organizations of color to engage in effective advocacy (Solidago Foundation)
- Create stronger statewide immigrants rights networks in California (Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund)
- Improve skills and infrastructure of community organizations to build power and win systemic change (Liberty Hill Foundation)
- Increase the capacity of organizations and enhance the health reform advocacy field in Oregon through a health reform advocacy learning cohort (Northwest Health Foundation)

Advantages

- Supporting field capacity increases advocates' influence over the shape of the policy agenda and their ability to move a variety of specific policy issues over time.
- A focus on the field encourages efficiencies, maximizes resources and reduces silos between advocates working on interrelated issues.
- The influence of new voices can potentially grow, shifting power dynamics and improving policy outcomes for underrepresented populations.
- Those most directly engaged in advocacy make the strategic and tactical decisions about how to focus their efforts.
- Funders' consortia can use a field-building approach to align and coordinate the flow of resources.
- By building the field, a foundation's investments benefit organizations beyond those they are able to directly fund.

Disadvantages

- An issue-oriented funder may find this approach is too diffuse or upstream of its issue-specific goals.
- Progress and outcomes may be more difficult to detect, track and explain than they are for other advocacy funding approaches.
- Attention to a broader array of advocates and the big picture of the field can require significant resources over a long period of time.
- A complex portfolio of diverse grantees can be challenging and time-intensive to manage.
- The relationship-building that underpins this approach is vulnerable to changes in staffing in the foundation and in advocacy organizations.
- Grantees may find themselves on opposite sides of a policy issue.
- Field-building, unlike the policy target and advocacy niche approaches, is never complete.

Given this definition, building an advocacy field can involve changing the set of organizations and individuals working to influence a policy domain; changing how these players connect and interact; changing the approaches and practices in the field's strategic and tactical repertoire; and/or changing the body of knowledge and experience that players draw on to inform their practice. So, while funders taking a policy target approach may first seek organizations with a high capacity to deliver policy progress and then consider how they relate to the rest of the field of players, funders taking a field building approach look first at the larger field or network of organizations, examine potential grantees' function and fit within this field, and then consider how funding choices could affect the dynamics and ability of the field to influence the policy agenda and make progress on a variety of different policies over the long-term.

Setting the boundaries of the field it seeks to build is a critical step for funders taking a field building approach. The boundaries of a field are fuzzy and shifting – particularly within the advocacy and policy arena – with organizations moving in and out of the policy debate according to whether a policy issue applies to them. Further, fields of advocates can be nested by governance level (local, state, national or international) and can encompass sub-fields of advocates focused on niche policy issues. For example, a state-level field of consumer health advocates may include a sub-field of organizations that focus on mental and behavioral health care for children. A foundation should define its advocacy field of interest according to the governance level(s) it seeks to affect and the policy domains tied to the foundation's mission (e.g., access to health care, climate change, LGBT rights, economic justice, etc.). Clarifying the foundation's sense of the boundaries of its field, however porous and shifting, will set the stage for a quality assessment of the state of the field and the best opportunities to build it.

Dimensions of an Advocacy Field

Literature on advocacy capacity has focused to date on the capacity of individual organizations, which is a crucial consideration for funders. Current advocacy capacity assessment tools, such as those created by Alliance for Justice or the TCC Group, can help identify effective organizations and opportunities for organizational technical assistance. But advocacy is fundamentally relational, and policies advance because of the work of a multitude of independent but connected actors. As a result, an organizational view of advocacy capacity must be paired with a field-level view of the capacity of a set of players to shape the political landscape and the policy agenda.

The capacity of a field is more than the aggregated capacities of the individual organizations comprising it, because how individual organizations interact with one another and with opponents affects policy progress. When asked what field-level characteristics should be examined to determine the field's capacity, interviewees' identified five categories: a field frame, infrastructure, connectivity, composition and adaptive capacity.[ii]

1. **Field Frame.** Field frames are frames of reference "that provide order and meaning to fields of activity…[B]uilding an organizational field means creating an arena that brings a number of different actors (often with different interests, ideologies and organizational forms) into routine contact with one another, under a common frame of reference, in pursuit of an at least partially shared project."[3] Although philanthropic literature is currently paying much attention to the concept of networks and connectivity, networks of organizations operating without a "field frame" are not a field – they are just a set of relationships. The frame adds meaning, norms of practice and shared understanding of who is within or outside the field. Framing a group of advocates' work (whether grantees or not) in a particular way can shape how they see themselves and how they recognize others as part of a field. Too broad a frame of reference can fail to inspire advocates to see themselves as part of a shared field. Although frames, like networks, can't be imposed on key participants, foundations are well positioned to instigate routine contact and help uncover how existing field frames affect who is at the table, what pathways to progress are pursued and how policy solutions are shaped.

ii This list of dimensions appears in the academic literature in different ways, depending on the discipline from which scholars come. Rather than emerging from one of these academic perspectives, the elements described here are based on the experience and insights of our interviewees, supported by scholarly research where it helps to clarify ideas or adds an important dimension that our interviewees did not discuss.

For example, framing access to high quality health care as a social justice issue is likely to enlist a particular set of players in health policy efforts while excluding others. Conversely, symbolically pairing access to high quality health care and economic growth is likely to generate engagement from a different set of players who are interested in economic growth. This is more than message framing. Health policy solutions that emerge from a group of advocates who see themselves as promoting economic growth could be very different from those who see themselves as promoting social justice.

2. **Infrastructure.** A well-developed field requires a robust infrastructure composed of stable organizations and leaders that have skills and experience in a broad range of advocacy strategies and tactics (e.g., legal advocacy, grassroots organizing, research and analysis, media advocacy, etc.). A robust infrastructure also includes an assortment of advocacy and policy organizations that have access to, and influence on, a wide variety of key audiences (e.g., legislators, agency staff, voters, community activists, media outlets, etc.).

   Rather than every advocacy organization needing this broad array of skills and influence, they can be dispersed across the field as a whole. In other words, rather than developing large "powerhouse" advocacy organizations that can deploy whatever advocacy tactic is needed at the right time, a field perspective recognizes that individual organizations can specialize in particular skills or audiences as long as these individual organizations have the capacity, culture and opportunity to connect their efforts to those of allied advocates with different skills and with influence on different audiences.

3. **Connectivity.** The third dimension of a field's capacity is its connectivity, or the relationships and patterns of interaction between advocates. Connectivity between advocacy organizations ideally enables the array of skills that are dispersed throughout the infrastructure to be marshaled in increasingly productive and aligned ways over time. Connectivity is not synonymous with formal collaboration or coordination, but rather is the raw material that makes collaboration or coordination possible when necessary. This includes relationships between individuals and organizations, and the structures that support cross-organization communication, such as shared databases, information-sharing mechanisms and regular opportunities for interaction.

   Some policy consultant interviewees urged funders to support intermediary organizations to serve the explicit purpose of building connectivity among advocates (such organizations are referred to as "network weavers" in the networks literature). Others noted that foundation staff can play the role of network weaver, because they often have a macro-perspective of the field. Network weavers collect information about the field, connect actors, build relationships, facilitate collaboration and train field leaders. "Without an active leader who takes responsibility for building a network, spontaneous connections between groups emerge very slowly, or not at all."[5]

4. **Composition.** Composition is the array of voices that participate meaningfully in, and have influence on, the advocacy and policymaking process. This dimension highlights questions of power among advocates: how does the composition of the field and the differential power and influence among advocates affect which populations benefit from policy changes? For example, highly professionalized advocacy organizations based in a capital city or other centers of power may have significant influence over the policy process, but may do so in a way that fails (often unintentionally) to consider the insights and needs of rural areas, or of communities that are connected to the policy process primarily through traditionally underfunded and less professionalized organizations. Several interviewees also gave examples of advocacy fields that do not include organizations that are staffed or run by representatives of communities of color, or organizations that are viewed by traditionally marginalized communities as authentically representative of their interests.

   Regardless of a foundation's values related to the inclusivity of the field of advocates, paying attention to the many voices and perspectives of those who have a seat at the policy table is crucial to understanding the capacity and influence of the field as a whole. Funders influence the power dynamics in the field, as well as the shape of the policy agenda, through their selection of grantees, framing of the field and convening activities. By assessing the composition of the field intentionally – asking, for example who is missing from the table and how is that affecting the decisions being made – foundations can become more aware of how their decisions are shaping power within the field.

5. **Adaptive Capacity.** Adaptive capacity is the ability to conduct sound political analysis and then "choose the tactic that best fits a particular conflict and adapt to the shifting moves of the opposition,"[6] as well as the moves of allies and potential allies. Sound political analysis, which is a necessary precursor to making good strategic decisions, is the process of understanding the distribution of power, the range of organizations involved in an issue and its interests, and the formal and informal rules that govern the interactions among different players. Adaptive capacity is important for every advocacy organization to have, regardless of its niche in the policy arena. Over time, a well-functioning field will get better at conducting shared analysis of the political landscape, which will help it adapt to the opposition – not just as individual organizations, but as a larger collective.

   Some interviewees cited a regular opportunity for shared political analysis as an alternative to the more common – and often less productive – foundation approach of trying to stimulate or even force formal collaboration where none is occurring organically. In many cases, formal collaboration is less important than advocates' ability to detect when the moment has come to hand off a policy change effort to advocates with a different set of strengths or paths of influence. Creating a habit and culture of shared political analysis helps opportunities for coordinated action bubble up where appropriate. Even when advocates implicitly or explicitly decide that independent action is a better course than coordinated action, their awareness of how other advocates read the political landscape will help them make more strategic decisions.

   Some funders, such as the Solidago Foundation, build the adaptive capacity of the field with technical assistance on political analysis and advocacy strategy. Alternately, certain organizations in a field may already possess this skill in abundance and, if properly supported and willing to do so, could serve as facilitator for shared political analysis with other organizations in the field.

Grant Portfolio Selection

In the field building approach, a portfolio should emerge from a view of the influence of the field as a whole on a variety of policy targets, rather than from an assessment of the capacity of individual grantees to achieve a specific policy target. Advocates' position and function within the field are as important as individual organizations' stability or advocacy skills. Attention to each of the five dimensions described above – and how these dimensions are being shaped by other funders' deployment of resources – is key to the grantee selection process and the design of auxiliary supports. For example, the Northwest Health Foundation reported that its primary selection criterion for advocacy grantees has expanded beyond the strength of the proposal to include the effectiveness of the organization, as well as whether the grantee serves the right function in relation to the rest of the cohort to affect the policy environment related to health disparities over time. How do potential grantees interact with and counter balance one another? How are the differences between them complementary?

Considerations for grantee selection include:

- **Field Frame.** Under what frame of reference do these players see themselves as part of a shared enterprise? Are their ideologies or perspectives too far apart to create a productive sense of a field? Or could the field benefit from negotiation over a meaningful frame among seemingly distant players? Who should fall within the shared frame of reference and who is less integral to it?
- **Infrastructure.** What advocacy capacities are lacking or underfunded in the field? What key audiences are not currently accessed or influenced by advocates in the field? In what elements of infrastructure are other funders investing? How does the way the advocacy capacities are dispersed through the field affect the power of different voices (e.g., are all of the organizations that conduct research and policy analysis staffed and led by individuals with similar perspectives or representing similar communities, and what is the effect of that on the nature or focus of the research)?
- **Connectivity.** How are advocates positioned in relation to one another, and how do they work together? What new or existing entities could help build connectivity? Where does connectivity seem to be blocked and why (e.g., among geographic areas, governance levels, types of organizations, types of advocacy approaches, etc.)? To what extent does a potential grantee already act as a resource or connector for other advocates?

- **Composition.** What populations or communities have limited power or voice in the policy arena, yet are affected by, or are pivotal to, the transformation of a policy change into meaningful social impact? What are the implications of a field where organizations representing particular interests or voices are underfunded or nonexistent?
- **Adaptive Capacity.** Which organizations need to improve their capacity for analysis and adaptation and why? How could organizations' political analysis and adaptation be improved by cross-fertilization with organizations looking at the political landscape through a different lens? What organizations are well positioned to help build this skill in other organizations, or facilitate shared political analysis across many organizations?

Understanding the state of the field in these five dimensions is the first step in grantee selection. But these dimensions are meaningful only in relation to the political landscape within which a funder operates. The nonprofit advocacy infrastructure may need to look very different in a state where private interests have little presence or power in the policymaking process compared to states where highly professionalized private sector lobbyists have significant power and direct access to legislators.

For example, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation funds in a state where connectivity among organizations is strong and access to legislators is relatively easy. New Hampshire has a small population (46th in the United States), but its bicameral state legislature is the largest in the country, with 424 members. Legislators receive only a small stipend, so individuals who can afford to work without pay are more likely to serve. The political culture in New Hampshire is historically libertarian, and much of the state is without its own television media market (much of the state's television is Boston-based). New Hampshire also has relatively few nonprofit advocacy organizations, which have few staff, deploy a narrow repertoire of tactics and are not particularly inclusive of disenfranchised communities. According to Senior Program Officer Deborah Schachter, the main field-level challenges in the New Hampshire context are infrastructure and adaptive capacity. As such, the foundation is exploring how to deepen the bench of effective advocates and sustainable advocacy organizations, and expand the variety of tactics that can effectively be brought to bear on a decisionmaking process.

Conversely, California-based policy consultants explained that their state's political landscape includes hundreds, if not thousands, of nonprofit advocacy organizations – many of which are highly professionalized – representing a spectrum of tactics and voices, frequently battling even more professionalized and well-funded private interests. Rather than New Hampshire's challenges of too few organizations that excel at advocacy tactics across the full spectrum and too few organizations representing a diversity of perspectives, California's primary challenge is a lack of connectivity across geographic regions, across organizations representing various sub-populations, and between state and local efforts. A field-building portfolio at the state level in California may begin with strategies that support connectivity.

Grantmaking Process and Structure

A central goal of this approach is the long-term sustainability of the infrastructure, which requires that individual grantees have sufficient basic organizational capacity to dedicate time and energy to the outward-facing work of building connectivity. As a result, interviewees using this approach recommend giving unrestricted general operating support over longer grant periods and at larger grant amounts, allowing space in grantee budgets (or providing extra earmarked money) for networking and shared analysis opportunities. For example, The Women's Foundation of California emphasized the importance of paying grantees for time to participate in convenings and meetings across the network to better understand the field, build capacity or build relationships. When they convene advocates across content areas, communities of color or geographic regions, they give groups stipends to ensure their participation and that their voices are heard.

A field building approach may result in a diverse portfolio of grantees with a wide range of capacities, representing a variety of perspectives. This can create unique management challenges, such as different capacity-building needs and different levels of demand for program officer feedback and

support, compared to portfolios composed of similar organizations. Additionally, grantee progress reports will be distinct, requiring greater effort on the part of the program officer to make sense of how the work is progressing.

Interviewees using this approach identified potential grantees through open RFPs and invited applications. The Northwest Health Foundation explained that when it started advocacy and policy grantmaking, it released an open RFP to familiarize its staff with the range of grantees working to address health disparities. In its second round of advocacy grantmaking, the foundation is seeking to build a more intentional cohort of grantees by soliciting applications from known grantees that serve as anchor organizations in the health disparities advocacy field, but will also release an open RFP to identify newcomers and ensure diverse perspectives.

Finally, it is important to highlight a common warning from field building funders and consultants: funders should not confuse their grantmaking portfolios with the field - the two are not synonymous. A single funder's grant portfolio is always only a sub-set of the field. Funders must consider building connectivity not only among their grantees, but also the connectivity among their grantees and the larger field of advocates and funders.

Program/Policy Officer Role

Compared to the policy target approach, the field building approach is less dependent on a program or policy officer with specific policy content expertise (e.g., the nuances of policy related to Child Health Plan Plus). Instead, interviewees believe that a program or policy officer using this approach needs a big-picture understanding of the political landscape, the players in the advocacy field (and those missing from it) and patterns of interaction and power. Rather than getting involved in tactics to advance a particular policy, they serve as the glue that connects advocates and enlists new voices to fill gaps in the field and shape the agenda. Gigi Barsoum, policy consultant and former policy officer at The California Endowment argues, "Foundation program officers have a unique vantage point. They see the field better than most of the advocates do, because they have a full picture and have the opportunity to connect the dots." In other words, they have the unique opportunity to create the context and space for people to connect. Finally, field-building program officers help advocates see themselves as a field, working under a common frame of reference, so that shared goals and coordinated action can begin to emerge.

Some of the primary functions of a program or policy officer in the field building approach include:

- Facilitating a shared vision for a stronger field and helping advocates see where they fit in the larger field
- Providing support to help advocates get better at political analysis and strategic adaptation
- Identifying missing or weak areas in the infrastructure or composition domains and supporting the capacity of organizations to fill those gaps
- Creating the context, space and mechanisms for advocates to build connectivity, and helping advocates think about how to interface with other parts of the field
- Keeping an ear to the ground for organically emerging collaborations to support
- Recruiting other funders to participate in a shared field assessment, identifying how funding patterns are affecting the shape and power of the field, and coordinating resource flows with an eye toward increased capacity and stability in the field.

Considerations for Evaluation

As noted earlier, we found little consistency in evaluation approaches among interviewees. Foundations using the field building approach said they struggle to evaluate changes in the field, in part because changes are difficult to detect and can take a long time to manifest. This work does not lend itself to the trend in philanthropy to track and present quantitative indicators in dashboard format. Instead, detecting field-level change requires gathering qualitative data from a variety of players in the field who

can reflect on these dimensions (field frame, infrastructure, connectivity, composition and adaptive capacity). Advocates themselves must report on the changes they witness in long-term patterns of interaction, the infrastructure and perspective of players at the table, and the degree to which advocates see themselves as part of a shared enterprise.

Making sense of these data is particularly challenging. A field is never fully built and always faces new needs as the landscape changes and the opposition adjusts to make successful tactics less successful over time. Outcomes are not predictable at the outset of a funding strategy, so developmental evaluation is a better fit for this kind of funding strategy than formative or summative evaluation.

Meaningful outcomes or signals of changes in the field may appear as:

- Changes in the strength of a field frame
  - Increases in the extent to which advocates identify themselves and reference one another (including the funder or funders) as part of a field
  - Increasingly similar framing language, sense of shared purpose or knowledge base
- Changes in the infrastructure of the advocacy field
  - Increased participation by new or existing advocacy organizations
  - Increased use of a wider array of advocacy tactics across the field
  - Increases in grantees' credibility and influence among a wider variety of audiences
- Changes in composition and relative power or "voice" of different perspectives in the field
  - Increased influence of advocates representing traditionally disenfranchised communities
  - Decreased influence of advocates or interests that traditionally have exercised significant influence in the policy process
- Changes in connectivity and alignment between actors in the field
  - Improved awareness among advocates of the approach, strengths and policy positions of a wider array of other advocates
  - More frequent coordinated action, common messaging or quid pro quo collaboration among advocates
  - More sustainable and robust channels of communication among advocates working at different levels of government, in different geographic or demographic communities, and/or using different strategies within the field
  - Increased sharing of resources among advocates
- Changes in adaptive capacity
  - Improved political analysis by individual grantees and more frequent shared analysis
  - Better sensing and adapting of advocacy tactics to those of the opposition and others in the field.

There is much yet to learn about advocacy field building. Additional research on the core dimensions or characteristics of field-level capacity could help clarify how nonprofit advocates and allies generate and sustain influence even when not working in formal coalitions or on coordinated campaigns. The concepts and measurement approaches offered by network theory can help describe and understand connectivity, but they must be paired with other evaluative methods to assess and make conclusions about the changing shape and influence of a field overall.

CONCLUSION

The primary lesson from this research is that a foundation's choice of which approach to advocacy and public policy grantmaking it wants to adopt usually comes down to the philosophy and personality of the board, leadership and even the policy or program officer. Interviewees recommend that a foundation working on the initial design of a new advocacy funding strategy begin with a candid look at its own strengths and preferences. Given this advice, a few key questions rise to the surface as foundations consider how to design advocacy and public policy grantmaking:

- With what kind of grantmaking and grantee interactions has the foundation been most successful in the past?
- How does the foundation want to be positioned and perceived in the larger advocacy field?
- What approach resonates most with the foundation's unique skills and values?
- What history, character, experience and expertise do the foundation and staff have that might make it better suited to one approach over another?
- What existing relationships and investments does the foundation have that could be a strong base for its advocacy and policy approach? For example:
  - Could a policy target approach complement the foundation's programmatic grant strategies?
  - Could the foundation build on current investments in data and research by taking an advocacy niche approach that deepens the influence of data and research on the larger policy environment?
  - Should the foundation work with traditionally disenfranchised communities by building grassroots advocacy capacity and improving the ability these advocates to interface with the larger field of related advocacy organizations in an advocacy niche approach?
  - Have grants been made in comprehensive community change initiatives that provide the foundation a good understanding of gaps and strengths to inform a field building approach?
  - How could a field building approach help build connectivity between the foundation's other funding strategies?
  - Does the foundation have a reputation as a trusted convener that positions it to adopt a field building approach? Could it focus first on the connectivity and adaptive capacity dimensions of the field, supporting shared political analysis and a regular assessment of the field with advocates and other funders?

The overarching questions guiding a funder's choice among approaches appear to be: What kind of foundation do we want to be? A lead strategist? A long-term capacity builder and connector? An expert and integral pillar from which others can build (i.e., providing general operating support, advocacy training and coaching, support for data systems)? Some foundations have the staffing and financial capacity – as well as the disposition – to play all three of these roles, or to change approaches over time. And it may be that a foundation can pursue a policy target approach or an advocacy niche approach in a way that contributes to the long-term capacity of the field overall. What is important is not which role the foundation chooses, but rather that it realizes the implications of and trade-offs among approaches and remains attentive to the way its choices affect the dynamics of the larger field. Finally, once it has chosen an approach, a foundation can thoughtfully and transparently structure its portfolio, its auxiliary supports and its evaluation in ways that best fit that approach and maximize impact.

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APPROACHES TO ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC POLICY GRANTMAKING

	POLICY TARGET APPROACH	ADVOCACY NICHE APPROACH	FIELD BUILDING APPROACH
Portfolio Goal	Achieve the passage, successful implementation, and/or maintenance of a specific policy goal, often set by the funder.	Strengthen the presence or influence of a particular strategic function (such as policy analysis and research, or grassroots mobilization) within the policymaking process.	Build the stability and long-term adaptive capacity of a field of advocacy and policy organizations that can shape and respond to a shifting policy environment.
Considerations for grantee selection and design of non-monetary support	■ Where is the policy in the policy process? ■ Which advocates are already working on this issue and have a track record of advocacy success? ■ Which advocates have access to audiences that are key to moving this policy issue? ■ Which advocates' or interest groups' input into the policy solution is important to making it a high-quality solution, or to ensuring its successful implementation? ■ What advocacy skills or strategies will be needed to move this issue that current players do not possess?	■ What organizations have the capacity or are positioned to excel in this niche? ■ How do these organizations interact with, or serve as a resource to, the broader field? ■ How does the selection of this grantee(s) to fill this niche affect the power dynamics of the field? ■ Who needs to build capacity and credibility to participate in this niche because their perspective is important to shape the policy agenda and process?	■ What advocacy capacities are lacking or underfunded across the field? ■ How does the way the advocacy capacities are dispersed across the field affect the power of different voices? ■ What populations or communities have limited influence in the policy arena, yet are affected by – or are pivotal to – the transformation of a policy win into meaningful social change? ■ What new or existing entities could help build connectivity? ■ How can advocates begin to conduct shared political analysis and adapt in more aligned ways?
Primary role of program/policy officer	■ Build capacities necessary to advance the policy ■ Coordinate advocates' strategies and tactics ■ Connect advocates to key resources to move the issue ■ Create feedback loops on policy progress ■ Identify windows of opportunity to take action quickly	■ Identify needs and building capacity within the niche ■ Build grantees' understanding of the niche function ■ Connect niche with the broader field, and connect to other efforts and players ■ Monitor how the growing strength of the niche is affecting power dynamics in the larger field	■ Set a shared vision of the field ■ Provide political analysis and strategic adaptation support ■ Fill gaps in infrastructure or perspective ■ Build connectivity ■ Support organically emerging collaborations ■ Facilitate shared field assessments
Portfolio-level outcomes	■ Changes in the awareness, will or action of advocates' target audiences in relation to the issue ■ Changes in grantees' and/or the foundation's credibility or influence on the policy issue ■ Changes in where the issue is in the policy process	■ Changes in the capacity of individual grantees to engage in niche strategies ■ Changes in the grantees' ability to connect their work to the larger field ■ Changes in the way the policy environment shifts in response to the presence of a stronger niche	■ Changes in the strength of a "field frame" ■ Changes in the infrastructure of the advocacy field ■ Changes in the relative power or "voice" of different perspectives in the field ■ Changes in connectivity and alignment among actors in the field ■ Changes in adaptive capacity

INSIGHTS ON FOUNDATION STRUCTURES & PRACTICES

There were several structural and process issues for which this assessment found no consistent pattern among the different approaches to advocacy grantmaking or across foundations of similar size and focus. Nonetheless, interviewees provided insights that may be useful to other funders in considering how to best structure their advocacy and public policy grantmaking. Following are lessons on staffing structures, preparing boards, using theories of change and evaluation.

Staffing

Although interviewees' foundations had tested a wide variety of staffing structures for the management of policy-related grants, many had lessons to share about a staffing structure that relies on distinct policy staff to manage advocacy grants versus program officers managing both programmatic and advocacy grants.

- **Foundations with separate policy and program staff.** In this structure, foundations employ distinct staff with deep policy and advocacy expertise to manage advocacy and public policy funding. A challenge in this model is ensuring that the work of program and policy staff, as well as communications staff, is mutually supportive. Until Spring 2012, the Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) had a matrix staffing structure to ensure connectivity among program, policy, evaluation and communications staff. MFH's three programmatic focus areas had dedicated program staff, and each received support from a policy officer, communications officer and evaluation officer.

  The policy officer worked with the program team to review grants (both program grants and advocacy grants), develop policy targets, and provide other support to ensure that programmatic content was tied to the policy agenda and vice versa. Evaluation staff were responsible for advising teams on appropriate data to collect from grantees, and on the management of external evaluations where appropriate. Staff also met within their own departments to share what's happening in each program focus area.[iii]

- **Foundations with program officers who manage both programmatic and advocacy grantmaking.** Foundations with combined policy and programmatic staff reported that they hired program staff who are both programmatic content experts and have experience in policy and advocacy. This ensures integration of programmatic and advocacy grants. Interviewees reported that it can be difficult to train program staff who don't have previous experience in policy how to interpret and adapt rapidly to the fast moving policy environment.

  The Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund intentionally hires of mix of backgrounds for its program staff, including those working on immigrant rights, gay rights and education. Some staff came to the Fund with no experience in philanthropy while others have deep foundation experience.

Board Preparation

Almost every interviewee expressed the importance of both educating the board about the unique principles and challenges of advocacy funding, and having difficult conversations with boards about their philosophy on the role of philanthropy, their level of risk aversion and their expectations for change. Interviewees most frequently mentioned:

- **Control.** It is important for boards to acknowledge that funders cannot engineer policy results or relationships between advocates. The nature of policy and advocacy grantmaking is messy, and many things that happen are beyond the control of the staff and grantees. For foundations that are accustomed to investing in impact evaluations to isolate the outcomes that can be attributed to their funding, or who have a "return on investment" mindset for

iii The staffing structure at the Missouri Foundation for Health is under revision at the time of this report's publication.

their grantmaking, staff must continually reiterate reasonable expectations for control and success.

- **Unintended consequences.** Boards need to be aware of, and ready to deal with, the unintended consequences and inherent power struggles of advocacy and policy grantmaking. Foundations who provide general operating support may find their grantees on different sides of an issue, as legislation may arise that pits advocates against each other. Because foundation's resources are never enough to cover the whole breadth of relevant voices in the field, they must be prepared for criticism that they are shaping the field in a way that excludes a particular population or approach.

Theory of Change

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of a Theory of Change (TOC) in advocacy and public policy grantmaking, regardless of which advocacy grantmaking approach they take. There was no consistency in whether foundations create their own advocacy TOC, or whether they share it publicly. Some of the considerations when dealing with a TOC for an advocacy approach include:

- **TOC balance.** The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund explained that – over time – their staff's growing expertise in their advocacy focus areas resulted in too much specificity and detail in their TOC. This made it nearly impossible to distinguish meaningful outcomes from inconsequential ones. They had to loosen up their theory so that they could stay flexible and pay attention to the most significant signals of progress. As well, the Solidago Foundation believes that TOCs for advocacy need to capture dynamic relationships rather than predictable causal chains.
- **Ownership and control of the TOC.** Several interviewees recommended that foundations be transparent about when and whether grantees can have input and influence on a foundation's TOC. Some warned that having a foundation-designed TOC for advocacy grantmaking can make the relationship between a foundation and grantee too "dictatorial," rather than allowing advocates with on-the-ground experience to guide the policy work. However, sharing the foundation's TOC for the design of its advocacy portfolio can help grantees understand how they fit into a larger strategy, see themselves as enrolled in a collective effort, and design their own TOC.

Evaluation

Advocacy and policy funding is not always a good fit for philanthropy's growing interest in dashboards and quantitative metrics. Several foundations offered useful recommendations for evaluation, regardless of the grantmaking approach.

- The Women's Foundation of California reflected that many funders say they value evaluation, or even require it, but then fail to fund grantees to do it. Explicitly paying grantees for their time in evaluation signals its importance, particularly if the foundation models the use of an evaluation approach that fits the unique characteristics of advocacy and public policy work.
- The James Irvine Foundation notes that policy and advocacy efforts are complex and nuanced, and that often there is neither a complete success nor complete failure in these areas. In its assessments, the foundation aims to understand the complex story of what grantees have accomplished, their changes in positioning and relationships, and the shifts in the policy environment to which their work contributed.
- The Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky emphasized the importance of building evaluation capacity in advocates as a way of improving their ability to adapt to a shifting environment. "Evaluation isn't something you do to grantees, evaluation is leaving the grantees with skill sets to internalize evaluation as a management tool."

MANY THANKS TO THE INTERVIEWEES

Alliance for Justice
Sue Hoechstetter, Senior Advisor for Foundation Advocacy Initiative and Advocacy Evaluation and Planning

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Michael Laracy, Director, Policy Reform and Advocacy

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Gigi Barsoum, Principal (former Policy Program Manager, The California Endowment)

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Matt Foreman, Director, Gay and Immigrants Rights Programs

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Laine Romero-Alston, Program Officer, Promoting the Next Generation Workforce Strategies

Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky
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The James Irvine Foundation
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Solidago Foundation and See Forward Fund
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