

THE W. CLEMENT & JESSIE V. STONE FOUNDATION



# Conversations with Leaders

*Grantee insights about their work, the field and philanthropy*



SPRING 2007

Since the late 1990s, the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation has supported organizations in the fields of Youth Development (with a focus on programs that help young people influence and impact the issues and conditions that shape their lives, and on organizations that develop tools, processes and resources that build the capacity of other YD organizations) and Education

(with an emphasis on teacher quality and principal leadership).<sup>1</sup> In 2006, the Foundation initiated a unique and thoughtful effort to talk honestly with current grantees in order to “learn from the field.” The innovative angle of this effort is the intentional design of a safe environment to dialogue openly and to share frank insights that are usually inhibited by the grant-seeking process – capturing the important thoughts and ideas that are not usually presented in grant applications, site visits, and grant reports. This endeavor debuted in Fall 2006 with a day-long convening of fourteen

Youth Development grantees to explore common themes and recommendations.

Building on this initial step, the Foundation designed a series of one-to-one conversations with nine leaders of Youth Development and Education organizations that have received significant support over the years. The purpose of this series was not to evaluate each grantee’s current project, but rather to gain an insider’s

perspective that could deepen the Foundation’s understanding of how these organizations think and operate. These conversations provided an opportunity to explore in-depth with long-time leaders and to capture their informal and candid thoughts about their overall work, the field, and philanthropy. For many leaders, these conversations provided a rare chance to look up and reflect on years of working in the trenches for positive reform.

All the grantees remarked upon the Stone Foundation’s thoughtful approach to supporting organizations and investing in social change. Specifically, they spoke about the Foundation’s strong commitment to understanding the work in terms of theory, practice, and the sustained support necessary for positive outcomes. This endeavor to speak candidly with leaders is another piece in the puzzle of strategic investment – searching for the real thoughts about practice, field, and funding to get to the heart of what really works for children and youth.



This report is organized into four sections to summarize the key themes and insights that can help funders and colleagues to gain practical field knowledge and to inform future grantmaking practices.

- I: Stone Foundation Grantees – Brief overview of organizations
- II: Effective Practices – Specific observations from grantees regarding successful strategies
- III: Reflections on the Field – Broad reflections on the history and trends in Youth Development, Educational Reform, and the Nonprofit Sector
- IV: Thoughts for Philanthropy – Ideas for enhancing funder-grantee relationships

### Goals of Conversations

1. *To capture the honest insights and stories from longtime leaders, outside of the grant-seeking process.*
2. *To identify common effective practices and strategies across leading organizations.*
3. *To deepen practical knowledge of the history and trends in the fields of Youth Development and Education, and in the Nonprofit Sector.*
4. *To use the observations and reflections of longtime leaders to enhance grantmaking practices.*

<sup>1</sup>The Foundation also supports organizations in Early Childhood Development; however, they were not included in this report.

## I: STONE FOUNDATION GRANTEES

### Youth Development

#### CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION (CYC)

Established: 1995

Annual Budget: \$1.3M      Stone Investment: \$100,000 over 3 years

CYC promotes the participation of foster youth in policy development and legislative change to improve the foster care system, and strives to improve social work practice and child welfare policy. CYC Chapters in counties throughout the state identify local issues and use grassroots and community organizing to create change.

#### COMMUNITY NETWORK FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (CNYD)

Established: 1994

Annual Budget: \$1.05M      Stone Investment: \$180,000 over 7 years

CNYD serves youth workers and youth-serving organizations in the Bay Area as an intermediary organization. CNYD aims to improve the quality of programs for youth by supporting and strengthening the people and agencies who work with them. CNYD does this by strengthening the youth development field through capacity building and policy alignment.

#### PACIFIC NEWS SERVICE – CALIFORNIA COUNCIL ON YOUTH RELATIONS (CCYR)

Established: 1969

Annual Budget: \$6.8M<sup>2</sup>      Stone Investment: \$120,000 over 4 years

Pacific News Service's CCYR facilitates roundtables to engage young people in dialogue with policymakers about public services, particularly foster care, juvenile justice and mental health, and to design recommendations for improving systems and programs. The ultimate goal is to include young people in deciding how to make sure they become successful, self-sufficient adults who contribute to society in California.

#### SAN FRANCISCO BEACON INITIATIVE (SF BEACONS)

Established 1994

Annual Budget: \$7M<sup>3</sup>      Stone Investment: \$190,000 over 7 years

The SF Beacons is a public-private partnership that transforms public schools into youth and family centers that become a beacon of activity for the surrounding neighborhood. The Centers offer young people a vibrant array of programs focused on Education, Career Development, Arts and Recreation, Leadership, and Health.

#### YOUTH COMMUNICATION (YC)

Established: 1980

Annual Budget: \$1.1M      Stone Investment: \$140,000 over 5 years

YC helps teenagers develop their skills in reading, writing, thinking, and reflection, so they can acquire the information they need to make thoughtful choices about their lives. YC does this by: training teens in journalism and related skills; publishing magazines, books and other materials written and illustrated by young people; and encouraging teens and the adults who work with them to use YC publications to stimulate reading, writing, discussion, and reflection.

### Education

#### BOSTON PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE (BPE)

Established: 1984

Annual Budget: \$9M

Stone Investment: \$230,000 over 6 years

BPE is the primary partner of the Boston Public Schools in designing, piloting, refining, implementing, and institutionalizing elements of the district's reform initiative. That partnership focuses on the following two areas: work with schools to support principals and teachers in their efforts to improve instructional practice and student performance; work with central offices to amend policies and practices that impede schools from doing their expected work.

#### NEW VISIONS (NV)

Established: 1989

Annual Budget: \$18.7M

Stone Investment: \$195,000 over 5 years

New Visions for Public Schools is the largest education reform organization dedicated to improving the quality of education children receive in New York City's public schools. Working with the public and private sectors, New Visions develops programs and policies to energize teaching and learning and to raise the level of student achievement.

#### STRATEGIC LITERACY INITIATIVE (SLI)

Established: 1995

Annual Budget: \$3.4M

Stone Investment: \$215,000 over 7 years

WestEd's Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI) helps students become more motivated and successful readers and writers. Using the research-based instructional framework, Reading Apprenticeship,<sup>®</sup> SLI offers intensive hands-on training to improve the teaching effectiveness of middle and high school teachers, literacy coaches, and teacher educators nationwide.

<sup>2</sup> The budget for PNS youth programs is approximately \$2M.

<sup>3</sup> Approximately \$418K for central administration functions such as fundraising, technical assistance, evaluation, and coordination.

### Common Themes About Strategies that Work

#### Giving Youth A Voice To Impact Others

Several leaders who work with youth and communications described a two-part strategy that provides youth development opportunities for two target populations: the youth who are direct participants and engage in transformational work, and the population that receives that work. In this model, the role of the organization is to: (1) train young people to develop communication and media skills that will capture authentic youth voices; and (2) create opportunities to leverage those youth voices to impact other youth through policy change or media consumption.

#### *Capturing Youth Voices: Training as Youth Development*

These grantees identify young people whose voices have been traditionally excluded from the mainstream (e.g., foster youth, youth in the juvenile justice system). The practice of capturing these voices requires a truly youth-focused organization with sophisticated staff trained in substantive teaching methods, media literacy skills, and youth development. As leader Keith Hefner relates, Youth Communication (YC) recruits staff who exhibit graduate school-level writing and editing skills and exceptional youth development capabilities, a rare blend that is difficult to find. California Youth Connection (CYC) notes that working effectively with their youth requires thoughtful designs that may include flipping the traditional hierarchy of adult-youth relationships (not just equal, but with youth at the top) and empowering the youth as the “experts” in their own experiences. It is critical that these youth find authenticity and expertise in their own voices. The CYC training then enables them to communicate their stories to peers and adults through public speaking and writing. The California Council on Youth Relations (CCYR) project attracts youth from other in-house programs that specialize in creating peer-to-peer multi-media (e.g., YO!, The Beat Within), and then trains them to expand their reach to public speaking with adults. At YC, the focus is on teaching youth to reflect deeply on their developmental experiences through the process of writing, editing, and re-writing. For this population, the communications training develops youth by affirming their voices and encouraging self-examination through writing stories.

#### *Leveraging Youth Voices: The “Medium” Matters*

After training youth to communicate their own voices, leaders spoke about intentionally creating vehicles to bring those voices to a larger audience. It is this “leveraging” that will impact another population of young people. Leaders talked specifically about “the role of the medium” in their best practices.

Policy organizations emphasized the medium of “face-to-face” communication with adults as the most effective method of ensuring that decision-makers hear and digest the authentic voices and experiences of young people. Groups such as CYC and CCYR take these voices directly to the adults who make decisions on relevant policies that impact young people. For example, CYC may place their youth in strategic positions such as local commissions where foster youth policies are refined and implemented. CCYR creates key intergenerational opportunities such as speakers’ bureaus with local legislators, giving actual stories to adult decision-makers that can support and shape upcoming bills. In these examples, the grantees impact another population of youth by influencing policies with real stories.

YC focuses on impacting another population of youth through reading. Although YC chooses the “written word” as its medium, leader Keith Hefner raises similar concerns about “control” over the target audience: who and how? In an increasingly digital MTV world, how can the written word still reach young people? The written word

#### Methodology & Design

*This project was designed specifically to provide grantee leaders with a safe environment to present their honest insights and observations. All conversations were conducted by an external consultant and in the middle of a grant cycle (thereby avoiding the periods of grant application and grant reporting). Interviewees were provided with an initial questionnaire to guide the conversation, but were encouraged to talk informally and to reflect upon larger questions about their work and fields. The data for this report were gathered from the following resources: (i) ongoing conversations with Foundation Staff; (ii) in-depth interviews with leaders from grantee organizations (by telephone and in-person); (iii) review of grantee proposals, reports, websites, organizational materials, and external program evaluations.*

works at YC because of the “depth” that it requires from the author (to write and edit) and from the audience (to read a full-length story, as opposed to watching quick videos).

However, it is critical to YC’s model that its distribution channels involve “required reading” in school classrooms. One of YC’s greatest strengths is its established network of distribution channels where many young people will read YC stories as part of the required curriculum. What is unique is that YC stories present honest voices about developmental issues such as teenage pregnancy, aging out of the foster youth system, and experiences with juvenile justice – stories that students do not usually get in a classroom setting. Thus, YC provides a highly leveraged system to bring their youth authors to another population of youth who may identify with the voices through reading. In this twist, YC is able to provide an opportunity for effective youth development (deep comprehension of developmental experiences) in an environment that appears mandatory such as school.

### ***Building Concentric Circles: Impacting Youth to Impact Youth***

Several leaders commented on the important practice of teaching young people to “think about other youth.” As one leader stated, it is a series of “concentric circles” where developing one set of youth can involve impacting the development of other youth (who are not direct clients). For example, the foster youth at CYC recognize that they work on policy issues that may not resolve before they age out of the system; thus, their work is setting the stage for those youth coming up after them. In another example, recent CYC participants have chosen to focus on improving conditions for foster youth

in the juvenile justice system, even though the majority of them have not had such experiences directly. At YC, young authors develop through their self-examination in writing, but also impact other youth in the audience who may identify with similar experiences. In all of these cases, effective youth development results in youth impacting other youth.

### **Creating “Wins” to Engage Youth**

One of the unique challenges with youth development in a policy context is that the specific battles can be long and uncertain. Participating youth may age out of the program before any significant change occurs. Grantee leaders spoke to the important practice of “creating wins” to keep youth motivated and engaged. For example, while CYC cannot predict when legislation will pass, they can ensure that their youth experience a “win” each year by participating in a significant policy conference with the opportunity to dialogue with local and state decision-makers. At CCYR, project director Patricia Johnson noted that there are critical junctures where adults can provide input that guides youth toward more likely wins. Recently, CCYR youth identified “lowering the driver’s license age” as a potential policy topic; however, discussions with adult leaders revealed that this topic had a low probability of any changes or wins in the near future. Consequently, the youth shifted their focus to reforming the California Youth Authority and improving mental health services for foster youth – topics with more potential intermediate “wins,” based on legislation currently in the pipeline.

### **Career Ladders That Inspire Youth**

At the Youth Development convening, several grantees described the challenges with hiring staffers out of the same program that served them as youth. While the complexities of this workforce require special care, several

leaders also noted that this unique “career ladder” can provide another layer of effective youth development for their current participants. By hiring former youth onto the staff, the organization can inspire youth with potential pathways to transition into professional adult roles.

### **Ensuring Authentic Environments**

Leaders spoke about their practice of looking beyond the titular to build authentic youth-friendly environments. While many organizations and committees claim to be youth-friendly, it is much more than the practice of “asking youth to participate or provide input.” For effective youth development, it is key to go deeper. CCYR leader Patricia Johnson describes their host environment (Pacific News Service) as one of the few national newswire organizations that actually practices youth development – through its numerous media programs where young people are employed for their voices. It is that authentic environment that attracts youth to participate in CCYR. “It wouldn’t necessarily work if we were just a news organization that wanted young people to discuss policy issues. Youth will say, ‘Oh, they do YO! and The Beat Within. That’s cool. Sure, I’ll try CCYR.’” At the other end, CYC leader Janet Knipe presents an example where inauthentic space inhibits youth development. CYC youth are invited to participate on local decision-making commissions. While these legislative bodies provide titular space for young people, they can undermine real youth participation with practices such as scheduling late meetings and using locations inaccessible by public transportation. Thus, it is critical that CYC practice re-shaping these environments to be authentic and to allow real youth input.

## **Blending Choice with K-12 Requirements**

As pioneers in bringing youth development into public school settings, leaders from both the SF Beacons and Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD) highlighted the continual struggle of creating true developmental opportunities and balancing mandatory K-12 elements in out-of-school time programs. The California Department of Education oversees the largest after-school investments in national history (e.g., Prop 49) and its grant programs are heavily influenced by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policies that focus on closing the achievement gap—e.g., more academics in after-school. To protect youth development in these settings, it is an effective practice: (i) to design classes and workshops that address K-12 academic learning in a different way from the school day (e.g., using cheerleading to teach math concepts), and (ii) to give youth a chance to “choose and decide” their own schedules for out-of-school time.

## **The Spectrum of “Institutionalizing Educational Change”**

Each Education grantee utilizes a model of improving training and support for teachers/principals to make a positive difference for students. These efforts are usually piloted with philanthropic support. In these conversations, each leader described the quest of “institutionalizing change” and determining how foundation-funded initiatives are actually adapted by the school district through policy changes and financial ownership. These leaders present a spectrum of unique effective practices for transforming districts.

## ***Game Theory Orientation***

The leaders of New Visions have been long-time partners with the New York City schools and with the unions. One key to New Visions’ continued success is its “game theory” approach – i.e., recognizing that if they stay in the business long enough, then they will be “repeat players” with district officials and union leaders, which requires a savvy pragmatism in order to implement real change. As leader Lili Brown notes, there is a history of trust and give/take that the organization engages in to transform its pilot initiatives into district-adopted policies. This pragmatism ranges from “being ego-less” and sharing credit for organization projects to understanding the necessary differences in public/private stances to seeing yesterday’s principals become tomorrow’s district decision-makers.

## ***Focus on Financial Analyses***

In collaboration with the district, Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE) uses foundation support to pose possible ways of solving some of the issues schools face. It designs the initiative, finds schools willing to work with BPE on implementation, supports the schools’ work, and hires outsiders to evaluate it. Each effort engages schools in new work and simultaneous dropping of old work so that teachers and school leaders don’t layer one reform on top of another. If the effort improves teacher or student learning, BPE works with BPS to redirect existing public dollars to more widespread adoption of the more effective practices. The approach is experimental and cost-oriented, but the BPE always works closely with the academic deputy’s office and the budget office to make sure both the rationale for change and the financial arguments are made.

## ***Going to the Market for Earned Revenue***

The history of Strategic Literacy Initiative (SLI) is different, resulting in a unique take on district adoption. SLI’s early experiences with the ways in which district politics can sometimes undermine successful school reform caused a series of shifts in focus and strategy. SLI developed and described an instructional approach, “Reading Apprenticeship,” which made the theoretical basis of their professional development accessible to and usable by teachers. SLI published a book based on this approach in which they also described an “Academic Literacy” course they had developed based on this model. Student gains on standardized reading comprehension tests, and the underlying pedagogy described in the book, brought requests for professional development from across the United States and beyond. Over the years, SLI has developed a Leadership Institute and materials for use in professional development as well as a Consultant in Training program which has more than fifty consultants able to facilitate SLI professional development in response to the growing number of requests. The fees from professional development and Leadership Institutes have increased the project’s sustainability and autonomy. This re-direction resulted in a unique two-prong strategy of earned revenue for services, and philanthropic and federal support for research. This applies in some blended contexts – for example, SLI may be doing work with a district’s first-year teachers for “fees”; and then may be using foundation support to pay 2nd and 3rd year teachers to continue participating. The philanthropic support

for the more experienced teachers enables SLI to not only support teachers' improved practice and therefore indirectly, improved student outcomes, but also serves as a way for SLI program and research staff to continue to improve the knowledge base of the project. This improved knowledge base then becomes integrated into new materials and professional development refinements. SLI's approach is unique because of the earned revenue strategies – both in product sales and in fee-for-service; this approach would not be as effective in one district alone – thus, the broader reach is key (multiple districts, nationally, internationally).

#### Highlights: Effective Practices

- Capturing and leveraging youth voices through a medium that impacts other youth
- Hiring former youth participants onto the staff can inspire current youth
- Ensuring that youth-friendly environments are more than “in name only”
- Blending K-12 educational requirements with Youth Development requires “giving youth choices”
- Institutionalizing change in school districts may involve techniques such as give and take pragmatism, rigorous financial analysis of current expenditures, and going to the market for earned revenue



#### Reflections on Youth Development, Educational Change, and Nonprofit Organizations



#### O Pioneers!

Several of the grantees are regarded as pioneers in their respective fields. With the opportunity to reflect on the past 10-15 years, the leaders offered some perspectives on their unique roles in evolving and changing fields – both encouraging and challenging.

*Pioneers are often asked to replicate success – and they must analyze the question carefully.*

California Youth Connection (CYC) leader Janet Knipe describes the rare position of her organization at the intersection of many Venn Diagram circles - circles of policy and advocacy, foster youth, communications, youth development – “CYC really occupies a unique space between all these efforts.” This uniqueness has led to a constant demand over the years for CYC to expand to other areas that need similar services. Although CYC has always had some type of national work in its vision, there are many risks and challenges for a nonprofit organization. Janet has taken care to delay a rapid leap until the organization is strong enough internally, and until the external needs of the field are clear. On the internal end, CYC needed to strengthen as a nonprofit corporation with the range of operations, administration, human resources, programming, and development in order to answer the question of whether the agency has the capacity to withstand the institutional change required to provide services outside of the state. On the external end, Janet believes it is critical to understand the different levels that affect foster youth policies (federal, state, county, local) and the variety of implementation paths across different geographies. In its pilot tests to other states, CYC has already seen the challenges and the strengths of applying a California model to other communities that have different rules and needs. Both internal and external factors beg the key question of what type of model would be most effective. Currently, CYC is completing a strategic plan that will lay out the risks and benefits associated with different blueprints of national work – and the fundamental changing roles of the original organization and leader in that roll-out.

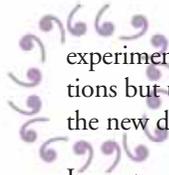
*Pioneers need to re-fresh and re-boot to stay relevant and viable in a constantly changing environment.*

Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD) presents another example of pioneer dilemmas in its navigation of current shifting grounds – both a case of field transition and a case of saturation. The youth development movement of the 1990s succeeded in helping policymakers and leaders understand what was really necessary to develop young people in non-academic ways. However, today's socio-political climate provides far less support than before – especially in terms of public policies and financial resources. As leader Sue Eldredge notes regarding this downturn, “today, the well is dry in terms of substantive investment in field advancement.” At the same

time, because basic understanding and support for youth development has evolved rapidly in urban centers such as San Francisco, New York, and Washington, DC, other groups are able to provide basic youth development training (even if they are not intermediaries and this is not their core work). Thus, CNYD is no longer the sole provider of youth development training – a consequence of its enormous success. Currently, CNYD is also conducting strategic planning to consider a range of options to re-fresh the organization from new staffing structures (e.g., consulting model with CNYD materials used to provide training to new regions) to providing its intellectual property and training in a widely-accessible format (e.g., creating an open-source environment for youth development tools called Moodle). CNYD faces the challenge of going deeper and broader in changing times.

### **The Big Bang Versus Adaptation**

Education leaders reflected on the recent trend of large-scale philanthropic efforts to revamp school districts with a sustained high-level investment – often with the new wave of injecting business and corporate strategies into public education. These are high-profile, whole-scale overhauls similar to a Big Bang model where all previous operations are erased and there is a primordial soup of widespread pilots and



experiments – supported by foundations but usually in arrangements with the new district leadership.

In contrast, the Stone education grantees are involved in reforms that look more like Evolutionary Adaptation than a Big Bang environment. These leaders work with districts that change incrementally – usually through adaptation of a new method. As leader Ellen Guiney states, “Sometimes the district needs evidence presented that will help them rethink an initiative and redirect public spending to where the evidence directs them. Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE) has at certain times been able to design, test, and evaluate a piece that provides them new information and leads to a better answer.” Notably, the effective practices described earlier (such as Game Theory, Financial Analysis, or Earned Revenue) are strategies better-suited to this long-term model of evolution than to the rapid Big Bang form. Additionally, funders may want to consider the size and scale of their investments, and whether they are better suited for Big Bang or Adaptation models.

### **Governing The Collaboration Cooks**

In reflections on the nonprofit sector, leaders note that organizations are often encouraged to collaborate for higher efficiency and impact. However, the decision to collaborate should always involve rigorous analyses that go beyond “perfect on paper partnerships” and examine how the individual organizations and leaders will fit together. What will the collaboration’s organizational chart look like? Is it set up for success or potentially paralyzing?

Some leaders describe their involvement in complex collaborations of public, private, and community-based organizations. These structures involved unusually high numbers of decision-makers at all levels in the organizational chart – ranging from Site Directors, CBO Executive Directors, Principals, and district management to School Board

Members, Collaboration Executive Director, city department heads, and the Collaboration Steering Committee. Within this structure, there were numerous positions that had some authority over decisions about funding, curriculum, human resources, and policy.

One of the key challenges in such a complex endeavor is establishing clear governance structures from the beginning, including full buy-in from all parties regarding decision-making. Without this clarity, the collaboration could break down over issues of vision, practice, and most of all, power. In such large-scale and cross-sector collaborations, it may be effective to have two management positions such as an Executive Director (focused on fund-raising, networking, and strategy) and a Deputy Director (focused on internal coordination).

### **Highlights: Reflections On The Field**

- Pioneer organizations are often asked to expand, reframe, and reboot – all requiring careful decisions
- Current educational reform for school districts can range between a Big Bang model (whole-scale dismantling and rebuilding efforts) and an Adaptation model (evolving pieces of the reform)
- Calls for collaboration in the nonprofit sector need to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of cross-organization governance structures, which can make or break the endeavor

## IV: THOUGHTS FOR PHILANTHROPY

### Observations for Philanthropic Supporters and Funder

#### The New “New” Thing

Both funders and grantees express concern about a trope of grantmaking: the need to continually re-invent work as “new” or “innovative” for each grant cycle. At both sides of the funding table, leaders talk about the challenges of re-packaging or adding components for the sake of obtaining on-going support. Grantee leaders praise the Stone Foundation for its considered and thoughtful approach that contrasts this trope, especially in the fields of Education and Policy where the nature of the work requires a long-term and sustained investment. The Education leaders describe projects that require test and control groups of students over a number of years, to trace quantitative outcomes and to understand the cause-and-effect. Policy leaders observe that advocacy work such as passing a bill or amending legislation may or may not happen during the life of the grant – while they may control the advocacy efforts, they do not control the pipeline of legislation and political activity. In both examples, the project work does not necessarily fit neatly with a short, finite grant cycle and is not suited for constant renovation or additions. Effective funders understand that these projects cannot continually change themselves year-to-year.

#### Foundation Changes and Easing Transitions

Grantee leaders spoke about the reality of “changing priorities” at foundations. The combination of trends in politics, economics, and philanthropic leveraging opportunities encourages shifts in direction from time to time. For some organizations that have received long-term support from a foundation, the shift can have a sudden and dramatic effect. Recognizing that the foundation has a vested interest in the health of these organizations due to their long-term investment, grantee leaders suggest that these changes in direction and priorities could be accompanied by a smaller planning fund that eases and transitions long-term grantees out. This special fund could be earmarked specifically for capacity-building or stability purposes (rather than direct program work), while the majority of funds is directed toward the new topic area.

#### Due Diligence – Follow the Money Trail

The dramatic changes that public funding has caused in the youth development field prompted leaders to discuss the potential impact on private foundations. With the growing influence of NCLB on out-of-school time programs, it becomes critical for private funders of youth development to: (a) re-think their role with out-of-school programs; and (b) perform due diligence on where the public funds are going.

At distribution levels near \$1 billion annually, the combined federal and state funds for school-based after-school services in California cannot be ignored. They occupy the same time and space, and more importantly, they enroll the target population of K-12 youth that need youth development. Some grantee leaders have remarked that private money can complement and monitor public spending. But where do private funders fit in the new climate and the overall puzzle of out-of-school services? How do philanthropies, both large and small, complement or counterpoint the NCLB-focused funding that will capture the majority of youth during out-of-school time? For foundations that have supported youth development and out-of-school programs as synchronous endeavors, this will require some re-thinking. Perhaps private funding will support the enrichment and developmental opportunities that are parts of a comprehensive Prop 49 after-school program operated on-site. Or perhaps foundations will more aggressively fund off-site youth development organizations that provide alternatives to Prop 49 programs.

Another important task for foundations is performing due diligence on what the public monies require and where they are going to. With respect to youth develop-

ment, leaders noted that “just because it looks, smells, and tastes the same, doesn’t mean it is the same.” Again, it is important to understand what the public money actually requires from direct services, and whether there is room for the youth development that foundations want to promote. Likewise, it is important to trace the public grant-making to its end. For example, private foundations may presume that pioneers such as Community Network for Youth Development will receive new streams of support from Prop 49 which has over \$8 million annually for technical assistance grantmaking. However, initial technical assistance grants from Prop 49 have been made primarily to county offices of education and professional educational laboratories. Due diligence can help foundations understand the actual risks and potential for their youth development grantees.

### Thinking About Evaluation

At the Stone Foundation Youth Development convening, grantees raised the need to have more open dialogue with funders concerning evaluation. In this report, in-depth discussions with leaders offered some specific ideas and thoughts:

*The Program Officer as Translator:* Leaders understand that evaluation is often shaped by Board concerns, and they perceive the Program Officer as their translator with foundation trustees. Program Officers can communicate the nuances, challenges, and appropriate measurements of the work to the trustees, and focus grantees on key types of outcomes that are important to the Board.

*Controllables vs. Uncontrollables:* In any project, there are components that can and cannot be controlled – evaluations should be designed with this distinction in mind. In the case of working with youth on policy and advocacy issues, consider that the outcome of passing a bill or amending

existing law is determined by external legislative forces and the policy pipeline; the grantee organization may control the number and type of opportunities they provide for youth to get involved, but they have less control over the actual policy outcome. Accordingly, evaluation of the project may weigh the quality of those opportunities more than the bill passage or defeat. In another example, one leader spoke about receiving credit for changing a young woman’s life when her school performance and social behavior improved dramatically in one semester; however, the leader attributed the change more to the sudden return of her father in her life, than to any specific piece in programming. Although the organization provided her with a stable base that helped in her survival (and perhaps in preventing her from negative behavior), the dramatic improvement may be attributed to external forces beyond control.

*The Scale of Evaluation:* Many grantee leaders spoke about the critical issue of “scale” in designing an evaluation for a specific grant. These are particularly useful thoughts for foundations that provide small but significant support to larger initiatives, especially in areas such as Education Reform and Policy, where work is often long-term and large-scale. Foundations should consider how their grant fits into the larger picture of the project.

Two important components of evaluation and scale are: (a) Time, and (b) Fraction. With Time, a grant’s cycle may only be a part of the longer term, and the evaluations should be considered an “interim” measurement. Accordingly, that evaluation will not necessarily capture the full effect of the theory of change (e.g., measuring the impact of Year 2 in a 5-Year Initiative).

With Fraction, a funder’s grant may be a small part of multiple resources supporting a large-scale project. In this case, the evaluation needs to be in an appropriate ratio to the project (e.g., only measuring the piece that is being supported, recognizing that the theory of change encompasses many other components). With both Time and Fraction, the key for foundations is designing realistic expectations concerning what can be measured within the scale of the grant and the overall project.

One interesting solution may be designing a scaled evaluation for the grant, and then leveraging the other evaluations that are conducted for the project. For example, if a large funder (e.g., public funding, large foundation) has commissioned an evaluation that covers the entire project’s scope (in time and size), then smaller funders may be able to access that evaluation for their trustees, even though the particular group of teachers being supported by the foundation is different from the group studied by the more extensive (large-scale, comprehensive, rigorous) evaluation.

*The Unique Case of Measuring Youth Development:* Youth Development leaders described the multiple challenges with appropriate measurements in their field. At a fundamental level, it is key to remember the field’s target population – i.e., young people who are experiencing the turbulence of growing up, and who often face additional challenges such as lack of family support, low-income backgrounds, immigrant status, limited English proficiency, cycles of violence and poverty, etc. A young person’s path is unpredictable and replete with obstacles, and their development may not fit the finite neatness of a grant cycle or a theory of change. Nonetheless, youth development organizations understand their critical role in providing a larger safety net for youth so that their development can happen when the opportunity arises – this net

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

*Longtime nonprofit leaders are rarely surprised. However, time and again in these conversations, they expressed genuine excitement at the opportunity to reflect candidly on the work, the field, and the sector that they have devoted themselves to. Doing so with a foundation is even more extraordinary, given the usual dialogue of grant-seeking and grant-reporting. While leaders are used to explaining their theory of change, project expenses, and quantitative outcomes, it is far more rare to ask for their honest reflections as colleagues. This unique endeavor presented a chance to look up from the rigors of working for positive social change, and think about the big picture. And, while the practices, observations, and advice will certainly enhance the work of both funders and grantees to be more efficient and effective, the most valuable result may be simply opening this space – to continue these conversations and to keep learning from the field.*

can range from offering a regular safe place to presenting new opportunities for engagement to simply preventing youth from sliding downward further. Sometimes, the measurement is about what new opportunities are offered or “what would have happened if we weren’t here.”

The question remains, what are the most appropriate types of measurements and outcomes for youth development? In this area, there are two related spectra that funders and grantees explore. The first is the Quantitative-Qualitative Spectrum – i.e., measuring results in quantitative statistics such as test scores or dropout rates vs. measuring qualitative results such as behavioral improvements and progress on self-identified goals. The second is the Cost-Depth Spectrum, where the most cost-effective evaluations (especially for large cohorts of youth) are quantitative-based and the most in-depth accurate evaluations (feasible with small groups of youth) are personalized, self-designed progress statements. One leader described a highly effective practice of writing college recommendations for each participant to produce a comprehensive assessment of their development; but is that feasible for a group of 200 students?

Considering these extremes as “Large-Scale Scantron Test-Score Evaluation” versus “Small-Scale Personalized Self-Designed Goal Reports” presents a clear dilemma. One extreme does not capture the realities of youth development and its effects; the other extreme is not feasible or cost-efficient in terms of collecting and reviewing data. Evaluators of youth development have spent much time and effort trying to design compromise solutions – e.g., focusing on quantitative measurements that youth development can actually affect (e.g.,

suspension rates); developing quantitative tools that address qualitative questions (“I believe that my self-confidence has improved during this program – Rate on Scale of 1 to 5”). For Youth Development leaders, the answer is not clear. Nevertheless, open and honest discussion with funders about evaluation communicates these assumptions, challenges, and efforts to develop appropriate solutions somewhere in the middle.

### Highlights: Thoughts for Philanthropy

- Continual re-framing or additions are especially challenging in fields such as Policy or Educational Reform, where projects and outcomes are long-term
- Foundations can couple changes in their giving priorities with transition funding to their long-term grantees that focuses on capacity-building and sustainability
- Private funding can monitor, complement, and leverage public funding; but private foundations must perform due diligence on what public funds support and where they end up

### Evaluation Thoughts

- Program Officers are translators between trustees and grantees
- Measurements should consider the controllables and uncontrollables within a project
- Consider the scale of the grant within the larger project, and plan evaluation expectations accordingly
- Youth Development presents a unique challenge for evaluation, navigating the debate between Quantitative Numbers Evaluation that cannot measure real development vs. Qualitative Individualized Evaluation that is too costly and time-consuming to administer

## ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS

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### BOSTON PLAN FOR EXCELLENCE

Ellen Guiney, Executive Director

[www.bpe.org](http://www.bpe.org)

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### COMMUNITY NETWORK FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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### SAN FRANCISCO BEACON INITIATIVE

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