

Facilitating Equitable Systems Change:

September 2023

INTRODUCTION

**WHAT IS SYSTEMS CHANGE AND
WHY SHOULD IT BE EQUITABLE?**

WHY EMBRACE SYSTEMS CHANGE?

**THE ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY LEADERS IN
ADVANCING SYSTEMS CHANGE**

**WHY SOME FUNDERS DON'T PRIORITIZE
SYSTEMS CHANGE**

Introduction

Why Embrace Systems Change?



Key Questions for Foundation Leaders

- What systems are implicated in our work?
- Do we consider ourselves or want to be a systems change funder?
- What benefits do, or might, we see as a result of prioritizing systems change?

- Investing in narrative change, which has been cited as arguably the most powerful lever in systems change, by changing mental models, hearts and minds.

Key Questions for Foundation Leaders

- How might we change our funding models and choices to better reflect system change needs?
- How can I engage staff and partners in better analyzing how the different parts of a problem, including root causes, are all interrelated?
- Are there additional ways we can better leverage our position to drive policy or otherwise advocate for systems change beyond our spending targets?

Leading on Systems Change: Internal Lens

- **Articulating a clear vision:** Foundation leadership can explicitly detail a clear vision for their organization's role in driving systems change, and communicate this vision effectively to stakeholders both inside and outside the organization.
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- **Engaging deeply with stakeholders:** For systems change, the range of necessary stakeholders can be quite large, and philanthropy leaders will have to engage with this broadened set of stakeholders to build strong relationships and foster collaboration.
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- **Aligning resources with the articulated vision:** Philanthropic CEOs and board members are critical in setting the tone for aligning a fuller spectrum of their organization's resources (funding, staff time, endowment, expertise, for example) with their vision for driving systems change.
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- **Creating a framework for intersectional programs and grantmaking:** Reducing internal silos can be pivotal for foundations engaged in systems change initiatives because it allows them to address the complex interplay of multiple social and environmental factors.

Key Questions for Foundation Leaders

- How can we, as leaders, more effectively set visionary yet realistic goals for systems change?
- As we look at our internal operations, what messages might we as leaders be sending inadvertently about the value of learning, experimentation, and risk-taking that could hinder innovation?
- What would we need to change about our measurement and assessment approaches to get better insight while recognizing the need for patient assessment of systems work?

Why Some Funders Don't Prioritize Systems Change



Ways Non-Systems Funders Can Better Enable Systems Change

Ensuring Multi-Year Support

**Providing General Operating Support to
Turbo Boost Stability and Innovation**

Simplifying Grants Management Processes

Key Questions for Foundation Leaders

- How can our organization change our application, funding, and reporting practices to deepen our relationships and increase alignment with our grantees and other partners?
- What do we have in place to collect honest feedback about our processes, that acknowledges the power dynamic?
- What more can we do to support our grantees who are deeply involved in systems change?

Conclusion

About Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors
