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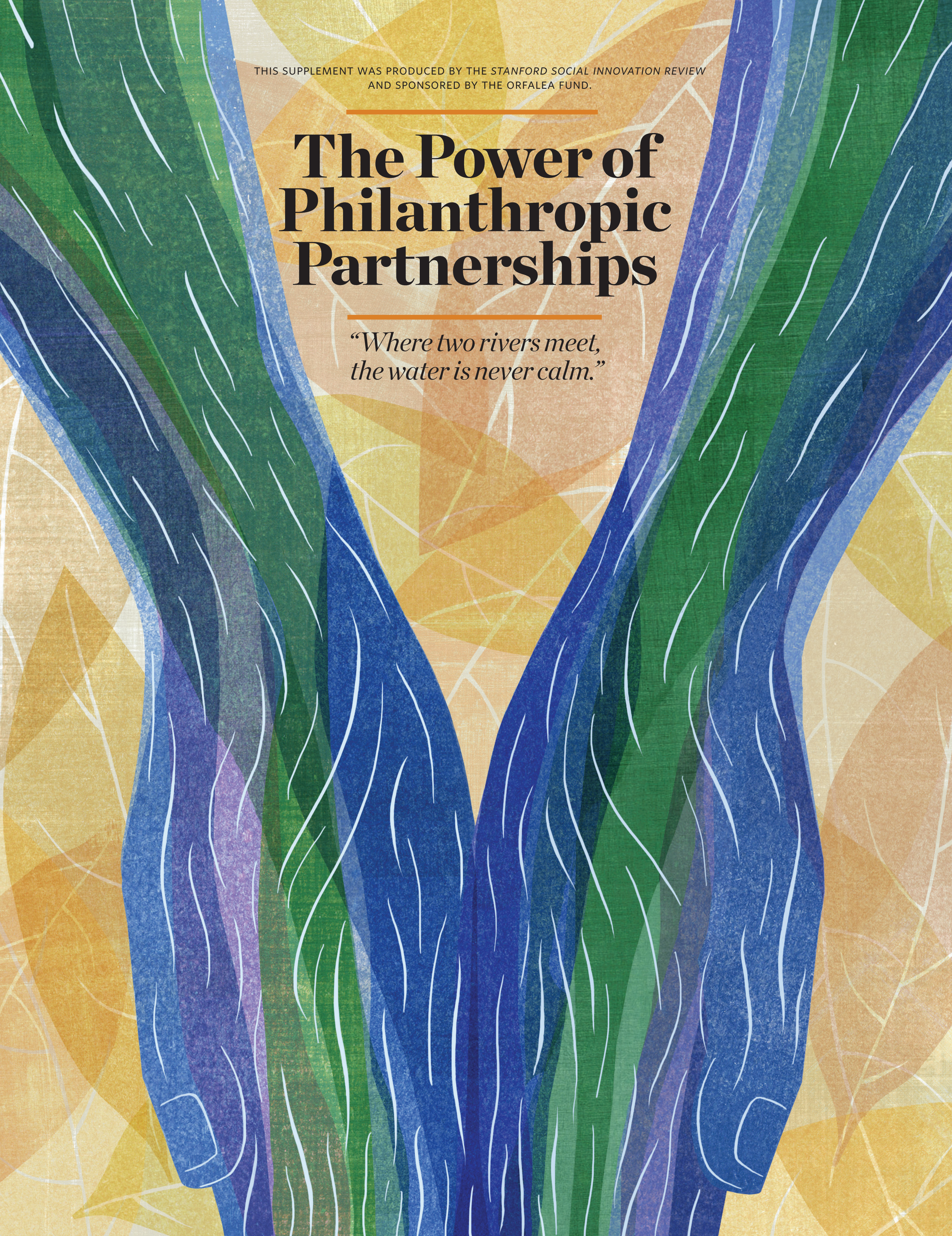
The Power of Philanthropic Partnerships

“Where two rivers meet, the water is never calm.”



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This sponsored supplement, "The Power of Philanthropic Partnerships," was produced by *Stanford Social Innovation Review* for The Orfalea Fund. Established in 2003 and sunsetting at the end of 2015, The Orfalea Fund, administered by the Orfalea Foundation, has played a role in helping Santa Barbara County dramatically transform its approach to early childhood education, public school nutrition, and disaster readiness. As the fund sunsets, some of the most salient lessons it has learned are presented in the following pages.


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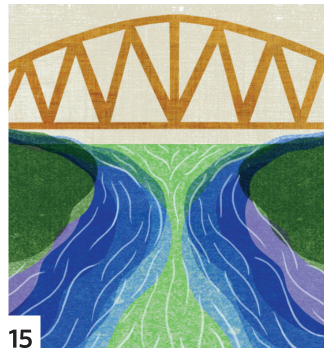
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Supplement illustrations by SANDRA DIONISI

“Where Two Rivers Meet, The Water Is Never Calm”

Partnerships are often difficult to navigate—but they are essential elements of effective philanthropy.

BY NATALIE ORFALEA

Recently I learned something about the difference between the old and new San Francisco-Oakland Bay bridges. The old bridge had fixed supports; it was built to stand firm. The new bridge, however, has flexible supports, and the *partnership* of strength and flexibility—as difficult as it may have been to achieve—makes this bridge far more likely to last than the old one because it is able to withstand more stress. It is more resilient.

Those of us in philanthropy take on complex problems that are hard to address and may be impossible to solve, and we do so in an ever-changing and stressful social, political, and technological landscape. To do well, we must be resilient. And we have to embrace the idea that partnership is an essential element of success.

Consider this: More than 80 percent of philanthropists today are entrepreneurs rather than heirs, and, understandably, in our philanthropic work we seek the familiar structures of business—the clear drivers and measures we have come to rely on, such as profits, market share, return on investment, and so on. In order to effect change over the long term, we must reconcile the business experience of our past with our long-term dreams for the community's future. We must recognize that the work of philanthropy is not a head-or-heart battle. It never has been. It's a head *and* heart partnership.

It is also clear that collaborative relationships are essential to our work. Only by partnering can we achieve positive, lasting change.

We chose a Ugandan proverb as the theme for this supplement—“Where two rivers meet, the water is never calm”—because partnership has been the theme of our philanthropic journey, and because partnership is not easy. We hope that our experience, captured in these pages, may help others navigate the often-turbulent waters of their own efforts to make a difference.

In “Migrating a Partnership Ethos,” Dean Zatkowsky describes how our family's business experience influenced our approach to philanthropic collaboration. In “The Pillars of Partnership,” Barbara Andersen explains how we learned from mistakes and developed rules of engagement to ensure that our collaborative relationships were goal-directed and effective for all parties. Lois Mitchell and Peter Karoff remind us that “Accepting the Challenges of Partnership” means having both clarity of purpose and a willingness to embrace conflict as an opportunity for learning and growth.

We are very proud of The Orfalea Fund's decade-plus of work in early childhood education, and the fact that our county's preschools achieve accreditation at eight times the California average.* Adrianna Foss explains in “Valuing Stakeholders in Early Childhood Education” how partnering with the teachers and directors at early childhood development centers created a culture of quality that will continue beyond the fund's involvement. We are honored to have Susie Buffett weighing in as well, on the Educare public-private partnership and what it represents to the future of both early childhood education and philanthropy.

Santa Barbara County's advances in disaster preparedness are also a great point of pride because of the numerous and diverse partnerships required to make everyone in the county safer. Our friends from the Center for Disaster Philanthropy provide a global overview of the opportunity in “Building Disaster-Ready Philanthropy,” and Barbara Andersen's accompanying article describes how such ideas were pioneered locally through the Aware & Prepare initiative.

Chef and School Food Initiative director Kathleen O'Hare de Chadenèdes set out to bring a private-sector mentality to a public-sector job, and offers two contrasting stories of how that worked out in “Choosing the Right Partners for School Food Reform.” Jessica Donze Black of the Pew Charitable Trusts, in her accompanying article, “A Changing Landscape for School Food,” provides powerful context for the rapidly growing school food reform movement. And “Lessons from a Sunsetting Fund,” by Catherine Brozowski and Tom Blabey, offers down-to-earth descriptions of the functional challenges that an organization reliant on partnerships faces when it winds down.

The mechanics of pulling back may be familiar to entrepreneurs in the business world, but feel unnatural in the nonprofit sector. That is why we chose to close the supplement with Lois Mitchell's reflections on “When to Lead, Follow, and Let Go.”

At first, when we were choosing a theme for this supplement, I wasn't sure that “Where two rivers meet, the water is never calm” would work. I thought it focused too much on the conflict inherent in partnerships. But today's philanthropists are learning to excel at flexibility, partnership, and exploration. They are learning to be resilient. And as new generations bring their heads and hearts to the work of giving, social change will accelerate, just as technological change did under their stewardship. There will be turbulence, and there will be powerful progress. There is a Malawian proverb that says, “A big river is enlarged by its tributaries.” That is an equally apt metaphor for philanthropists because whether we believe ourselves to be traveling apart or together, we are always connected, and we are always in motion.

Natalie Orfalea is cofounder and board chair of The Orfalea Fund and the Orfalea Family Foundation.

* The Orfalea Fund and Orfalea Family Foundation make up the Orfalea Foundation. The fund is sunsetting, but the Orfalea family's philanthropy will continue. The organizations are referred to throughout as the “fund.”

Migrating a Partnership Ethos

The Orfalea Fund's culture of collaboration stemmed from the Orfalea family's business experience prioritizing human relationships.

BY DEAN ZATKOWSKY

Kinko's founder Paul Orfalea was well into his career when he and his wife, Natalie, experienced the tragic loss of their first child in infancy. The loss traumatized both parents, but it also opened their eyes to the physical, emotional, and social challenges that new mothers endure. A successful entrepreneur with energy, passion, and financial resources, Paul began to champion workplace daycare, lactation education, and the creation of lactation centers on college campuses and in other public buildings. Then, in 2000, he and Natalie launched the Orfalea Family Foundation and in 2003, The Orfalea Fund.

By that time, they had spent a lot of time in childcare centers. As Paul remembered, "The directors in those centers were just like our store managers; they were working at a frenetic pace, and each was doing something others could learn from, but they were isolated. There was no inherent network where they could share best practices they were discovering." Not surprisingly, then, one of the fund's first actions was to launch a series of Children's Center Director Retreats, bringing early childhood educators from Santa Barbara County preschools together into a network that had never before existed. The events offered inspiration, education, and camaraderie in a stress-free, resort setting. (Is it a coincidence that the county's preschools now achieve national high-quality accreditation standards at eight times the state rate? I don't think so.)

The fund's impulse to partner, convene, and appreciate is a carryover from Kinko's unusual corporate culture, which was anchored by a very public set of company values known as Kinko's Philosophy and Commitments to Communication. These values embraced an entrepreneurial compulsion for reinvention, and a partnership ethos driven by a passion for democracy. The company (sold to FedEx Corp. in 2004) aspired to treat each stakeholder—coworker, vendor, customer, and community—as a citizen with a full voice in the enterprise, and it expressed that aspiration through mentorship, profit sharing, and participation.

At the fund, those values similarly created a culture where staff members rolled up their sleeves and worked alongside partners, to better understand and develop each party's strengths. Staff members mentored grantees, and the fund also brought internationally renowned experts to the community to share their knowledge. While all philanthropy might be considered "profit sharing," The Orfalea Fund took an extra step, issuing "staff grants," so that each team member might select his or her own grant recipients. And participation has been apparent in events such as the Children's Center Director Retreats, an annual School Wellness Summit (which brings together stakeholders including food service workers, superintendents, teachers, and parents), and the fund's Aware and Prepare disaster preparedness initiative. (These events, in fact, were explicitly inspired by the Kinko's Picnic, a week-long annual meeting that was part trade show, part training conference, and part family and coworker reunion.)

The company Philosophy included this reference to its partnership ethos: "We develop long-term relationships that promote mutual growth and prosperity." In the fund's early years, that same commitment manifested itself as an entrepreneurial enthusiasm for encouraging grantees to dream big. Grant applications asked prospective recipients to describe what they would do with twice or even ten times as big a grant as what they were seeking, and when many applicants struggled to respond, their difficulties led foundation staff members to offer ideas, try new things, and strive to be audacious for a greater end result.

Even when the fund launched its own initiatives in the areas of school food reform, disaster readiness, early childhood education, and youth development, that same commitment to the idea of mutual growth and prosperity was clear. The fund has always been a limited-life entity, and with that in mind, staff members have been purposeful about creating partnerships to ensure that their initiatives would not only survive, but thrive well beyond the fund's involvement. They sought to bake the partnership ethos into relationships that will provide continuity for the Orfalea family's philanthropic vision, even as the family moves on.

The Orfalea Fund's impulse to partner, convene, and appreciate is a carryover from Kinko's unusual corporate culture and very public set of company values.

Entrepreneurs who move into the realm of philanthropy often bring with them a desire for a businesslike approach to giving. The experience of The Orfalea Fund reminds us that there is more to a business than its policy manual and balance sheet. A culture that prioritizes human relationships and cooperative solutions can bring out the best in everyone it touches.

Orfalea Foundation communications manager DEAN ZATKOWSKY is the author of *E Pluribus Kinko's: A Story of Business, Democracy, and Freaky Smart People* (BookSurge, 2009).

The Pillars of Partnership

When funders and grantees are aligned on mission and trust one another, lasting change stands a chance.

BY BARBARA ANDERSEN

In business, the idea is to align everyone toward the same profit-driven goal. One would think that foundations and their grantees would share a similar mentality—after all, aren't we all driven to eradicate social ills?

Well, maybe, or then again, maybe not. Foundations and grantees are sometimes aligned only in the broadest sense. Drill down a level or two, and you will often discover competing priorities. That's because although a funder may prioritize one issue—say, emergency readiness—and allocate resources to making progress on that front, potential grantees are almost always already working to achieve their own organizational missions, which may not completely overlap with that of the funder. Unfortunately, some nonprofits will pivot to access additional resources even if doing so compromises their own goals.

The situation, though, suggests an important difference between everyday grantees and true partners. A grantee provides a service or operates a program that is aligned with a funder's priorities. Partners already share the funder's vision, and are even more motivated to achieve their goals with the additional funding support. Ideally, the funder and grantee collaborate to articulate a shared vision, improve how they work as they adapt to each other's approach, and inspire buy-in from additional stakeholders.

At The Orfalea Fund, we aspired to that ideal. We sought partners in all aspects of our work, from responsive grantmaking to strategic initiatives. As a small foundation with limited staff and finite resources, we knew that working in partnership would not always be the most comfortable option. But we also knew that partnerships would be essential to achieving the social change we sought.

It wasn't easy. We experienced many challenges in initiating and sustaining partnerships, and found it necessary to develop a framework to assess our current partners and vet future partners, and guide us during the inevitable rough spots of developing and sustaining relationships. We called our framework the Six Pillars of Partnership, and we share it here in the hopes that others will find it as useful as we have. (See "The Six Pillars of Strategic Partnership" below.)

Our pillars aren't earth shattering; some of them may even seem common sense. But we have seen first-hand that common sense is sometimes blinded by naiveté and hope—or by narrow thinking and funder interest. We have learned that funders need to be honest and transparent about their expectations for the short and long term, and so do the nonprofits they support. If that transparency does not exist, neither party can be expected to adapt to the other's evolving situation, perspective, and needs. Communication is essential to building trust, and building trust is paramount in developing mutually beneficial partnerships.

As the fund approaches its sunset we are ever more mindful about how we communicate with our partners, create mutual expectations for success, maintain trust with and empower our colleagues, and ensure that our investments can continue to demonstrate value and be leveraged well into the future. It is a bittersweet but gratifying role to be in as we watch our partners take full ownership of our co-created vision.

BARBARA ANDERSEN is director of strategic partnerships at the Orfalea Foundation.

The Six Pillars of Strategic Partnership

An effective partnership…

1. **Reforms ineffective and/or inefficient systems** | We engage in partnerships to build scale and continuity otherwise unattainable on our own, to solve problems others either do not see or are unwilling to tackle.

2. **Aligns with and advances the missions of all partners** | We ensure alignment of interests and values to reduce doubt and improve trust essential to risk-taking.

3. **Fosters an entrepreneurial approach to problem-solving** | We form partnerships to achieve what has not been done before, requiring creativity, adaptability, bold action, and an attitude of possibility and embracing challenges.

4. **Leverages strengths specific to engaged parties** | We choose partners whose knowledge, capacity, and experience are complementary and targeted to achieving the desired outcomes, and who are willing to learn and make adjustments along the way.

5. **Focuses on building stakeholder empowerment** | We leverage existing strengths, build new skills, provide educational opportunities, and build pathways of success for beneficiaries by accessing current data and resource experts in the field to build on the overall stakeholder body of knowledge.

6. **Commits to the attainment of visible, measurable results** | We work with our partners to develop a continuous improvement cycle, in which all partners use both data and empirical observation to refine strategies and assess progress. We are committed to explaining what was accomplished so others may take up the challenge in their own communities. We are open to honest assessments of what works and what doesn't, and to making improvements along the way.

Accepting the Challenges of Partnership

Collaborative efforts can lead to outcomes that might otherwise be unattainable—but they are inherently difficult to manage. Expect the rough spots, and prepare for them.

BY LOIS MITCHELL & PETER KAROFF

In the fall of 1988, there was an unusual changing of the guard in the world of philanthropy, with three new people stepping into CEO positions at big foundations—Rebecca Rimel at the Pew Charitable Trusts, Adele Simmons at the MacArthur Foundation, and Peter Goldmark at the Rockefeller Foundation. These leaders wanted to bring their collective resources to bear on tough issues. They selected energy as one of their focus areas. None of the foundations had an energy program, but after much discussion, the three leaders decided to do something radical and create a foundation whose sole mission would be to help the world meet its energy challenges.

This was an ambitious move for three major institutions with very different cultures. At that time, there were no roadmaps to guide partnerships or collaborative relationships for philanthropic ventures. And yet, some 27 years later, 13 other major foundations have joined the partnership; it is still going strong. There are many more such stories, both national and local. But the path to successful partnerships is also littered with many attempts that have failed. Even today, with a growing body of experience as our guide, joining forces to make a difference is not an easy prospect.

A DIFFICULT LEARNING EXPERIENCE

At The Orfalea Fund we have had many successes, but our partnerships did not always succeed. For example, consider one of our School Food Initiative's investment areas: School Gardens. Research demonstrates that children participating in school garden programs are motivated to consume more fruits and vegetables, can identify more vegetables, and often develop preferences for eating a variety of vegetables. Motivated by those findings, the fund partnered with a community college to build and maintain 35 gardens in six school districts, and to support educators in using the gardens to enhance students' learning experiences. With the assistance of garden education managers (GEMs), lead teachers, and parent volunteers, the gardens would serve as an outdoor classroom in which children reconnect with their food and learn about biological processes, community building, and cooperation.

The concept was strong, but several challenges soon emerged. We struggled with hiring practices, overhead costs, and staff turnover. We knew that hiring part-time GEMs with a restricted maximum hourly wage would limit our applicant pool, but we also knew that growing the number of program employees would increase overhead costs and jeopardize the initiative's sustainability. Additionally, we faced pushback from our partner because food literacy did not fit easily into its STEM-focused curriculum, and we received minimal buy-in from schools and school districts because the program was to be operated by an independent partner with direct funding support. We were not aligned with our partner on how to approach problem solving, and we were unable to leverage the strengths on both sides of the partnership to overcome our challenges.

The dissolution of that partnership was one of our greatest lessons. In hindsight, we realized that the fund had inadvertently created reliance on our funding support, and when the program became unwieldy, we had pressured our partner to think differently—admittedly, to think like us—in solving problems. It was an untenable situation, so we sought a new partner. The School Gardens program is now led by another local partner, and has been restructured to eliminate inefficiencies and maximize impact with the direct engagement and support of schools and school districts.

It seems clear now that, from the beginning, our expectations regarding the goals, roles, processes, and responsibilities of partnership differed from those of our original partner. We had not aligned our standards and values, and so we became uncomfortable in our day-to-day interactions. It was an agonizing experience, and we knew that we needed to avoid repeating those errors. So we took the time to reflect deeply on the process of partnership, to see if we could determine how to position ourselves to be consistently productive collaborators.

We determined that there are at least three distinct phases of partnership and collaboration: initiating the partnership; developing the partnership; and maintaining and sustaining the partnership over time (or implementing an exit strategy). Each phase generates opportunities for disciplined rules of engagement that lay a strong foundation for a successful partnership. The fund's Six Pillars of Strategic Partnership were codified after a handful of particularly challenging partnerships, but are based on lessons from the most productive experiences of our first decade.

INITIATING PARTNERSHIPS

Those who initiate a partnership need to be clear on what the goal will be and why a collaborative effort will lead to outcomes that might otherwise be unattainable. Then these parties must tackle an array of tough questions: Should it include other funders? Which nonprofits, educational institutions, NGOs, or government agencies ought to be involved? What qualities do participants need? What are the potential deal breakers? What "red flag" threats would rule out a

Lois Mitchell is president of the Orfalea Foundation.
Peter Karoff is founder of The Philanthropic Initiative.

potential partner, or signal that a partner would need to be monitored?

The initiators also need to be careful when identifying and approaching partners. Early in our experience, we fell into partnerships organically, but as we gained experience we learned to be more deliberate. We started to think farther ahead. In addition to defining goals and providing financial support, funders may build or provide conceptual frameworks, identify and convene key local actors, establish ground rules for action, define success, and put in place a way to monitor and assess progress. But then what? The Orfalea Family Foundation began convening directors of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Centers in 2001, managing every aspect of an annual multiday retreat. But we knew that our goal was to create something that would ultimately take off on its own. Now, with intentionally diminished support from The Orfalea Fund, the ECE sector runs its own council, facilitating learning sessions and tours, and identifying and sharing best practices among its members. When the fund sunsets, the now self-sufficient partners will continue to advance the goals we agreed on long ago.

In cases where partnerships are initiated and driven primarily by nonprofit groups and community leaders, foundations may find that their most important contribution is flexible funding to help launch, sustain, and evaluate the effort. Funders may also be uniquely valuable to a partnership for their contacts and relationships—additional resources that can support the partnership in different ways over time.

DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

Effective collaborations start with a discussion about values and mission statements, and agreement on operating principles that will govern and guide the work. In those early talks, it is helpful to cover topics such as: ground rules for discussions, planning, and decision making; metrics for the ongoing assessment of progress; and planning for the inevitable unintended consequences and “unknown unknowns.” Partnerships involving community-based nonprofits should also cover the balance of power between funder, grantees, and the community being served. A commitment to the principle of “deep listening” encourages better ideas and fewer surprises.

Potential partners also need to explore various types of collaborative structures in order to ensure effective leadership, and in some cases they need to provide for (or allow) different types of leadership at different levels of the partnership or network. The structural planning exercises we have found most helpful include: documenting each partner’s conditions, needs, assets, and strengths; developing a process that ensures active engagement; and identifying resource needs to support planning, implementation, evaluation, and other elements. If partners don’t pay attention to those kinds of specifics up front, relationships are likely to become unnecessarily strained. This is what occurred in our partnership with School Gardens. The Orfalea team believed that food literacy should anchor the curriculum, while our partner believed it should be STEM. The stalemate on this point strained our relationship and ability to resolve other issues.

MAINTAINING AND SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

Designing a partnership carefully can provide the solid framework necessary for an effective ongoing collaborative effort, but design alone does not suffice. Several additional elements are also important: ensuring that all participants have a legitimate voice; creating a comprehensive plan of action that all parties embrace broadly and deeply; committing to reviewing—and meeting—evolving leadership needs; committing to reviewing and reworking partner roles as needed; and identifying appropriate metrics to measure progress, improve, and capture evidence of concrete success.

Most of all, though, partners must be resilient in the face of inherent tensions and inevitable conflict. Establishing clear rules of engagement does not eliminate the conflict inherent in a relationship, but doing so will mitigate the most damaging effects and help build trust. Your partner will frustrate you. You will frustrate your partner. Your partner will let you down. You will let your partner down. Accept the challenges of partnership because together you are stronger, together you are smarter, together you are deeper and wider. Together, you have a much better chance of achieving your goals. Where two rivers meet, the water is never calm. But doesn’t philanthropy stir things up to enhance and improve life for everybody?

Valuing Stakeholders in Early Childhood Education

A conversation with Adrianna Foss

On an overcast March morning, a dozen preschool children rush out through the doors of a former elementary school in downtown Carpinteria, Calif. The air suddenly fills with bursts of Spanish and English as a pair of teachers pull back tarps and haul buckets of toys. Unprompted, two little boys carry out a sand table for themselves, plopping it down several feet away. For the next several hours these teachers and children will play, nap, eat, and rest outdoors.

Welcome to the outdoor classroom area of CAC Main, a nationally accredited Head Start preschool run by Santa Barbara County's Community Action Commission. CAC Main is just one of the child-care centers in Santa Barbara County affected by The Orfalea Fund's work in this area, which is overseen by **Adrianna Foss**, director of Early Childhood Education. The Outdoor Classroom Project sprang from research showing the profound impact of high-quality outdoor environments on every aspect of a young child's cognitive, social, and physical development.

"Many children come from families that are very confined—there might be multiple families living in a single home," says Theresa Embry, Outdoor Classroom Project coordinator. "They don't have the ability to move around and to play. But physical activity is such an important thing for kids at this age. Young children need to be able to move."

The Outdoor Classroom Project is just one component of the fund's multifaceted approach to early childhood education, which has contributed to Santa Barbara County preschools' achieving high-quality accreditation at eight times the California average rate. **Barbara Andersen**, director of strategic partnerships, spoke with Foss about building an engaged early care community, leadership development, and why the fund launched its own initiatives to change the culture of early childhood education in Santa Barbara County.

ADRIANNA FOSS

Barbara Andersen: The anxiety experienced by parents selecting an affordable, high-quality center with an available space can often feel insurmountable. In Santa Barbara County, The Orfalea Fund and First 5 of Santa Barbara County have worked together for more than a decade to address these concerns and fundamentally improve early childhood education leadership and practices. Based on accreditation statistics, it looks as though progress has been made.

Adrianna Foss: We transformed the ECE [early childhood education] sector in Santa Barbara County by valuing, recognizing, and supporting a sector that is underpaid and under-resourced, and isn't given as much respect as it deserves. For the last 15 years, all the brain research has told us how important the early years are, but I don't think people's attitudes have caught up with the research to appreciate how important these preschool teachers and directors are to the well-being and long-term trajectory of the young children in their care.

Andersen: In most families, all of the adults work. Less than one-third of children have a full-time, stay-at-home parent. As a result, almost one-quarter of children under the age of 5 are in some form of organized child-care program, which includes preschools, Head Start, California State Preschool, and private and nonprofit programs.[1] These centers affect a huge swath of our society.

Foss: Absolutely. Our fund's ECE efforts support the development of a healthy whole-child vision, in which play and social-emotional development are not sacrificed for early academic programming. In Santa Barbara County, there are more than 150 early education centers, where thousands of kids spend 6 to 12 hours a day. These centers hold a key to the healthy development of our children, so we crafted an integrated strategy that included three main components: first, teacher and director education and professional development; second, national early childhood education quality accreditation; and third, whole-child programs including the Outdoor Classroom Project and the Preschool Food & Healthy Habits Initiative.

TEACHER AND DIRECTOR DEVELOPMENT

Andersen: A recent study showed that early childhood educators' low wages resulted in workers feeling demoralized and lacking motivation to advance their careers.[2] The fund's earliest forays into ECE set out to address this situation, didn't they?

Foss: That was a direct carry-over from our business experience. Paul and Natalie Orfalea, and several of us here at the fund, spent our early careers at Kinko's, where there was always an emphasis on valuing the frontline coworker. A lot of people talk about empowering others, but it's really important to understand that the people we're talking about, whether they are frontline retail coworkers or preschool teachers, already have enormous power. They hold the future of our customers or our children in their hands. They don't need empowerment nearly as much as they need appreciation and attention. They need leadership development to make the most of the power they already have.

Andersen: Was that the impetus for the Center Director Retreats?
Foss: Yes. We saw that ECE directors were a lot like Kinko's managers, in that they faced common challenges but lacked opportunities to network and share ideas. We based the ECE Center Directors Retreat on the Kinko's Picnic, an annual gathering of the tribe with educational opportunities, a trade show, and ample time for personal interaction and sharing of best practices.

The retreat was a three-day event for the directors and teachers of child development and early care education centers in Santa Barbara County. The purpose was to provide cutting-edge education, inspiration, networking opportunities, and tools. We always did a tour of two or three local centers, so that rather than just talking about quality practices, we could actually see and borrow ideas from other high-quality centers. We also encouraged two people from each center to attend, rather than the director alone, to improve accountability for implementing what was learned, and because we wanted every center to think about leadership development and bench strength.

Andersen: These annual gatherings began to feel like family reunions. Many of the same directors and teachers attended year after year. Would you say these personal connections helped create a tight and active ECE sector in Santa Barbara County?
Foss: Absolutely. And that's essential because one thing that I always try to focus on is making our work transformational. We're trying to change not just the activities people do, but who they are when they're with children, how they present themselves, and what view they have of their role in the lives of the children and the families in their centers. We knew from the beginning that we wouldn't always be there, so we needed the ECE community to be ready to lead itself.

Andersen: The fund hosted ten annual retreats, but now it takes a different approach.
Foss: The retreat evolved into the Directors Leadership Series, through a partnership with the Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council. Instead of bringing everyone together for three or four days annually, we meet with them quarterly and make it a more sustainable, ongoing professional development opportunity. That's where the ECE community comes together and shares best practices now.

Andersen: Of course, the ultimate goal is to improve outcomes for the children and families that these programs serve.
Foss: The Center Director Retreats and the Directors Leadership Series have facilitated relationship building over 13 years. We believe this investment in ECE professionals has contributed significantly to our region's success. As a foundation with entrepreneurial roots, we hosted the retreats at upscale hotels and really pampered the attendees, because, as I said before, they already had great influence, but they lacked appreciation and connection.

NATIONAL QUALITY ACCREDITATION

Andersen: Improving center quality has been an overarching goal for the fund. Why have you chosen to focus on accreditation as a measurement of quality?
Foss: Everything we do in ECE is related to center quality in one way or another, because center quality significantly influences children's life outcomes. The NAEYC [National Association for the Education of Young Children] accreditation is a professional, voluntary self-study process through which programs demonstrate that they meet ten national standards of excellence and quality.

We partner with First 5 Santa Barbara County[3] to provide support services to center-based programs seeking national accreditation. The fund believes that the process of earning accreditation helps centers to pursue quality improvements beyond those measured by NAEYC.

First 5 took on responsibility for visits, training, and technical assistance, under the banner of the Accreditation Facilitation Project, providing a variety of services to improve the quality of early care and move programs toward successful accreditation. Tactics include on-site technical assistance, learning communities, financial incentives to cover materials fees, and opportunities for professional development and higher education scholarships.

Andersen: The results are impressive.
Foss: The number of accredited centers in Santa Barbara County rose from six in 2004 to 48 in 2015, with several more in the candidacy process. Today, 32 percent of centers are accredited, up from 25 percent in 2014. The rate of accreditation in Santa Barbara County is now five times the national rate and eight times the state rate. The fund considers this a significant win for children and families in Santa Barbara County.

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM PROJECT

Andersen: The fund also launched its own ECE initiatives, ostensibly focused on outdoor activity and food practices, but your colleague Eric Nelson of the Child Educational Center refers to them as stealth quality initiatives.
Foss: Since 2009, we have worked with more than 83 percent of the early education centers in Santa Barbara County through the Outdoor Classroom Project to create outdoor learning environments and programming that supports the development of the whole child. In 2011, we began work with the ECE community to implement the Preschool Food & Healthy Habits Initiative to support ECE programs to become centers of wellness for children and families across the county. Both of these initiatives are aligned in their outcomes to advance so-

Early Childhood Education Accreditation

	Number of Center-Based Accredited and Licensed Programs[1]	Number of Center-Based Licensed Programs[4]	Percent Accredited Programs
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY	48	151[5]	32%
CALIFORNIA	518[2]	12,350[6]	4%
UNITED STATES	6,879[3]	114,000[7]	6%

1 - National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) website as of Jan. 9, 2015. 2 - NAEYC website: search California. 3 - NAEYC website: search of summary of accredited programs minus international military programs. 4 - California Community Care Licensing website. 5 - California Department of Social Services. 6 - California Department of Social Services. 7 - Child Care in America: 2014 State Fact Sheets. 114,000 estimate based on data provided by Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies for Child Care Aware of America's 2014 State Fact Sheet Survey. Data reflects the 2013 calendar year.
NOTE: Due to the variability in the dates of available information, and the way licensed and accredited programs are counted, these numbers are not exact, but do reflect the best data available at the time.

cial, emotional, physical, and cognitive development during the most critical years of a child's growth. The case for academic programs is assumed in our highly competitive society, but the case for play, healthy food, and so-called soft skills has to be made again and again, as if we didn't have 60,000 years of evidence on hand.

Andersen: Why did the fund make it a priority to promote the philosophy and practice of outdoor programming and environments for young children?

Foss: The Outdoor Classroom Project is a mechanism for confronting the seven challenges to the health and well-being of children in the 21st century: lack of exercise; preoccupation with electronic media; lack of play time outside; isolation from, and fear of, nature; lack of interest in and understanding of our world, including nature and human impact on it; current trends toward a one-dimensional approach to ECE; and epidemic use of behavior-modifying drugs on children.

The goals of the project are to increase the quantity, quality, and benefit of outdoor experience for young children in Santa Barbara County early care and education centers; to provide for increased physical activity, hands-on learning, social skill development, peer interaction, and multifaceted approaches to cognitive development that maximize children's success; and to educate early care and education professionals on the value of outdoor environments and activities, and assist them in cultivating both at their individual sites.

Young children especially need quality outdoor environments full of nature, beauty, and real materials, not concrete and plastic. While high-quality environments do not have to be high-cost environments, they do send a very clear message about how much we value our children.

Andersen: In practice, you saw that the Outdoor Classroom Project improved not only the quality of outdoor environments and programs, but the entire functioning of an ECE center.

Foss: It's all connected. The engagement and communication skills that teachers learn, along with activity facilitation and support, transfer into everything that a teacher does. Children's learning and skill development improve overall.

Andersen: Eric Nelson and the Child Educational Center had already established the Outdoor Classroom Project in Los Angeles. Was it difficult to re-create that success in Santa Barbara?

Foss: It required thoughtful execution, but having Eric's experience and working model made it easier. Creating enthusiasm for the Outdoor Classroom Project was critical to the initiative's long-term success. The project conducted two orientation workshops, followed by two introductory workshops that were highly effective in generating interest in on-site consultation and teacher training events. The first year, requests focused almost exclusively on site consultations for play yard assessment and redevelopment. The Outdoor Classroom Project responded with consulting visits and by offering its next training on an environment-related subject—gardens and gardening.

Andersen: How do we know that these environments have a positive impact on young children?

Foss: New research, published in 2014 by the Children, Youth and Environments Center at the University of Colorado, Boulder, examined the extent to which high-quality outdoor environments enhanced child outcomes. One of Santa Barbara County's Outdoor Classroom sites was included in the research. The study's findings found that nature-based education enhanced the children's learning and increased their physical and mental well-being.

FOOD AND HEALTHY HABITS

Andersen: How did the Outdoor Classroom Project come to be a part of the Preschool Food & Healthy Habits initiative?

Foss: Back in 2007, the fund had launched its School Food Initiative to help public schools transform into centers of health and wellness. Because of the Outdoor Classroom Project we were spending a lot of time in preschools and we saw that the food some were serving was awful—chocolate milk, graham crackers, goldfish. It makes my blood sugar go high just thinking about it. If you consider there can be up to twenty students in a class, and each birthday could be celebrated with cake—well, there are many ways to let a child feel special that are not dependent on sugar and frosting. We realized that with the Outdoor Classroom Project, we had developed really amazing relationships with the centers. We had created this delivery vehicle through our trainings, visits, and consulting—and we could put a different set of content through that same pipeline. Food quality and food practices came up as the priority because they were obviously important but no one else was focusing on them. So we launched Preschool Food & Healthy Habits, which includes gardens and outdoor environments, as well as healthy food practices, hydration, and things like that. In its first two years, the initiative reached 90 centers. Again, it's not just a child's brain that comes to school—it's the whole child.

Andersen: How have centers changed as a result of that work?

Foss: Since our baseline measures in 2011, the most significant changes have been in two key areas. The first is that the food served in centers is of a much higher quality. For example, it is minimally processed, whole, with no added sugar. And these standards are written into the programs' policies and communicated to parents. Food quality standards at centers have risen 55 to 66 percent since our baseline measures. A second area of major impact is that families are serving more healthful food and spending more time outdoors with their young children. These measures are up 40 to 42 percent across the county.

Andersen: Do you expect other communities to replicate Santa Barbara County's successes in ECE?

Foss: We certainly hope that our experience will add to the ever-growing body of knowledge, and that others will adapt, expand, and improve on our methods. By the end of 2015, our website will include an overview of our programs, detailing the challenges we set out to meet, the approach we took at the start, adaptations we made along the way, impact achieved, and continuity plans for moving the work forward. The site will also include a repository of tools, from theories of change to evaluation matrixes.

But the continuity of the work really comes from the outdoor classroom demonstration sites, the ongoing Directors Leadership Series, the new food and activity policies in place at centers, and most of all, from the way directors and teachers have embraced new ways of thinking about quality in early childhood education and how to deliver it.

Over the years, we've seen a big focus on academics in preschools as a result of No Child Left Behind, and one of our values is to provide a balance to that approach, and remind parents and centers that play is the work of childhood, and that's where learning occurs. We have helped teachers and directors articulate this philosophy and feel validated that it's the right direction, because they know it from their work with children every day.

People reading this article already understand the importance of early childhood education, and most probably already agree that a whole-child approach pays long-term benefits. But what we know only matters to the extent that it becomes what we do. We hope our work on center quality, accreditation, and whole-child initiatives provides a helpful roadmap for people ready to act.

NOTES

1 Sarah Jane Glynn, "Child Care Fact Sheet: Families Need More Help to Care for their Children," Center for American Progress, August 16, 2012.

2 Daniella Miletic, "Childcare Workers Undervalued and Underpaid, Victorian Study Reveals," *The Age*, April 7, 2014.

3 First 5 Santa Barbara County Children and Families Commission was established when California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998. Proposition 10 added a 50 cent tax on tobacco products, with revenues to be used to promote the healthy development of children prenatal through age 5.

Early Lessons Propel a Movement

BY SUSIE BUFFETT

When I was growing up in the 1960s, my mother was not doing what most other women her age were doing. She was volunteering in the north side of Omaha, Neb., a tough but resilient part of town, helping to start Head Start, Girls, Inc., and several other ventures. Doing this, my mother (also named Susan) got to know people from all walks of life. She also gained a greater appreciation for the hand many are dealt. From her, I learned that getting to know people—their hopes, their dreams—makes you a better neighbor and, certainly, a better partner in co-creating solutions to complex social problems.

The challenges we face are daunting. Omaha's poorest babies live in pockets of high crime and concentrated poverty that rival similar areas in Detroit or Chicago. In fact, the percentage of African-American children living in poverty in Omaha is the highest in the United States, topping nearly 60 percent. The national challenges are equally dire: Poverty is worsening; about half of all US births are now paid for by Medicaid; and, for the first time in at least 50 years, more than half of the students in America's public schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

We can do better. Investing wisely in the first five years of life matters—big time. Furthermore, planting deep roots in the community, forming strong partnerships, and working effectively together has never been more necessary.

Over the past decade, I have learned a lot about planting roots and building strong partnerships through our work with Educare. Supported by hundreds of partners across the country, Educare is a network of 21 high-performing, well-evaluated schools serving more than 3,200 vulnerable babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families in 13 US states plus the District of Columbia.

Each Educare is locally owned and operated by a public-private partnership involving Head Start, Early Head Start, school leaders, parents, philanthropists, and others. Each Educare provides full-day, year-round, high-quality education and care. Seven years of consistent research findings show that Educare is a new proof point for the argument that starting early with strong beginnings can—and does—change life trajectories. What's more, Educare is a catalyst for broader change, now reaching thousands of additional children and families by reshaping effective practices and policies at the community, state, and federal levels.

Educare, in fact, is an exemplar in the growing national movement to change how America thinks and acts when it comes to early education. And interestingly, our work suggests a striking lesson: The traits it takes to be a good partner in community work are the same social skills young children should learn as they grow and develop. Those include:

- Curiosity: learning to delight in discovery
- Confidence: knowing you are capable of accomplishment
- Communication: cultivating the ability to express what you think and what you want in clear, compelling, and respectful ways
- Persistence: forging your ability to "stick to it," especially when the going gets tough—and the going almost always gets tough
- Cooperation and Empathy: developing the ability to see, know, understand, and interact well with others
- Self-Awareness, Self-Control, Self-Regulation, and Reflection: honing your ability to wait your turn, manage frustration, and respond in measured ways
- Thankfulness: feeling and expressing gratitude

In very young children, these early skills are building blocks for later success in school, work, and life. Among adults partnering in communities and working collectively to propel a national movement, these skills are essential. And you know what? These are skills I remember my mom displaying. She passed away in 2004, at about the time our early childhood work was just taking root. The day she died, our friends and colleagues at the local Girls, Inc. in Omaha were building a new playground on their athletic field.

As word spread of my mother's passing, all of these little old ladies from the neighborhood began arriving at the playground, carrying plates of food—neck bones and gravy, macaroni and cheese, brisket—to give to "Ms. Susie's family." They came from throughout the community. All of these women. All of this food. And what they really were offering was their love.

That was a testament to my mom—and the kind of partner she tried to be in north Omaha. And it's a testament to the kind of neighbor—and champion—each of us has the potential to be.

SUSIE BUFFETT is chair of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund. Over the past 10 years, the foundation has invested more than $225 million in public education where America is most underinvested: the first five years of life and learning.

Building Disaster-Ready Philanthropy

Reacting in the wake of a disaster isn't wrong, but think of the difference a proactive funding strategy could make.

BY ROBERT G. OTTENHOFF & REGINE A. WEBSTER

This year marks the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. To many, it may seem like the perfect time to share insights about the nature of disaster-related giving by foundations, corporations, and individuals, and also to ask whether the level and type of support are sufficient. But the truth is that we really do not need a flood of TV images or stories that retell the horrors of what happened a decade ago to have this discussion.

Katrina—as horrific as it was, causing more than 1,800 deaths and $100 billion in damage, and disrupting countless lives up and down the Gulf Coast—is only one of thousands of disasters that we have suffered in the United States and around the world. And it is far from being the only catastrophic disaster, either. Just recently, a devastating earthquake struck Nepal, killing thousands. Before that, over the past decade, we experienced Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, Hurricane Sandy in New York and New Jersey, and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Slowly developing disasters such as Ebola in Africa and the protracted humanitarian crisis in Syria have taken their tolls as well. Disasters are many and frequent. According to The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, in fact, worldwide in 2013 there were:

- 334 natural disasters
- 22,616 deaths related to natural disasters
- 109 countries affected by disasters
- $118 billion in damages

Big or small, when disaster strikes, the philanthropic sector is likely to be called on to respond. Can it be said that, in every case, foundation, corporate, and individual givers do all that is needed and expected? No, it cannot. Can we say that every response is planned, thoughtful, and executed with precision? Again, the answer is no. These are not criticisms. Instead they are honest reflections that disaster philanthropy is not yet state of the art in the world of giving. It is an evolving practice. It's getting better, but it's far from perfect.

Perhaps one of the reasons that disaster philanthropy still has so far to go is that it is different from virtually all other kinds of giving by foundations, corporations, or individuals. For grant-making foundations—especially those focused on finding and rooting out causes of problems, and, in the best instances, making those problems go away—not a single penny spent will ever lead to a headline announcing the end of disasters. Disasters will be with us for eternity, and if the recent past is any indicator, we have to gird ourselves for the likelihood that, in the future, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, tornadoes, flooding, and even acts of terrorism and mass violence will occur with greater ferocity and frequency.

Perhaps one of the reasons that disaster philanthropy still has so far to go is that it is different from virtually all other kinds of giving by foundations, corporations, or individuals.

And yet much can be done through smart investment, thoughtful planning, and some innovative giving practices—if not to avoid these disasters, then at least to make them less deadly and to ensure that affected communities recover more quickly.

HERE'S HOW

The best way to start is to take an expanded view of disasters and recognize that they do not start and end with the event. Disasters have their own unique life cycle—one that begins before tragedy strikes and continues to unfold until long after the event itself is over and the news media have moved on to other stories. And within each disaster life cycle, five stages—risk reduction and mitigation; preparedness; response and relief; recovery; and resilience—provide opportunities for different types of philanthropic action.

Most philanthropic giving today centers on response and relief. As we have seen time and again, donations typically occur in the days immediately after a disaster strikes. Within three months, donations typically stop or have slowed to a trickle. But the work is far from done.

We do not question the importance of supporting immediate response. But that does not mean that giving in the moment is always thoughtful or well planned. A 2012 report from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation found that although "quick giving by private foundations often helps to jump-start activities ahead of larger funding that comes later ... there is such a thing as too quick. It takes a little time to be sure of the right avenue to assist."

More important, although we know that substantial giving follows a disaster, we have not understood, until recently, just how much, by whom, and for what. Without that base of knowledge about where money is going, we have not been able to identify gaps in funding and to use that information to help direct investments to where they are particularly needed.

Last year, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy teamed up with the Foundation Center to provide an annual summary of disaster giving titled *Measuring the State of*

Robert G. Ottenhoff is the president and CEO of the Center for Disaster Philanthropy. Regine A. Webster is the vice president of the Center for Disaster Philanthropy.

Disaster Philanthropy: Data to Drive Decisions. Our first report, based on 2012 data, details giving by 1,000 of the largest US foundations. We found that:

- Some 234 US foundations made 884 grants totaling $111 million for disasters. The majority of this funding was for natural disasters (58 percent). Almost half was directed to response and relief efforts (46 percent).
- About three out of every five grant dollars (62 percent) addressed human service needs related to disasters.
- The majority of grant dollars targeted disasters in North America (62 percent). Countries in Asia received 16 percent, and countries in Africa received 13 percent.
- Giving is often influenced by the media, which tend to focus on acute disasters and those that lend themselves to video and photographic coverage. For example, of all large-scale US disasters in the past 26 years, the attacks of September 11, 2001, the Oklahoma City federal building bombing, and Hurricane Katrina have received the most attention on US television news.
- Complex humanitarian emergencies, famines, and other events that are considered "slow-onset" disasters tend to receive less media attention and, as a result, less funding.

We have spent time poring over the findings and other data included in the report. We have considered that information, and other research, in light of the knowledge we have gained over many years of work in the disaster field. In addition, we have had numerous conversations with people at other foundations about their approach to disaster giving, and their attitudes toward this work. As a result, we believe that we have deepened our understanding of the nature of disaster philanthropy and how it can be done more efficiently and effectively.

To sum up what we have learned, a response mindset characterizes how most institutions approach this work, and because of that, it is rare to find staff who are dedicated to disaster grant making or who bring the same level of knowledge or expertise to disaster issues as their colleagues who oversee other program areas do to those areas. Also, because many of the individuals who make disaster grants lack knowledge, expertise, and experience, they often default to supporting relief efforts and publicly recognized organizations and activities. Those are not "wrong" choices. But they are mostly reactive and limited in scope, and do not take account of what is going to be needed in the future.

Similarly, with rare exceptions, disaster funds are not part of a typical grant-making portfolio nor are there dedicated strategies to guide what to do when disaster strikes. For the most part, money is made available when needed—a little from here and little from there. And although grant making for disasters reaches several hundred million dollars a year, it is neither enough nor always properly deployed or coordinated, and, at best, it is still a small part of total annual philanthropic giving.

As long as the media continue to treat disasters as short-term events and, for the most part, ignore the needs that emerge in the months and years that follow, there will be continued pressure on donors to come to the aid of affected communities quickly and to show their support for first responders and survivors. No one will be asking about—or keeping tabs on—what the plan is for down the road.

So, where do we go from here to make disaster philanthropy more focused and strategic, and to ensure that it has greater impact? Here are some suggestions we think deserve more scrutiny and discussion:

- Start considering now what we can do before disaster hits (and what we will do in the face of disaster) instead of waiting to determine the appropriate course of action after the fact. Research estimates that for every $1 spent on disaster preparedness, at least $7 is saved in casualties, property damage, and the like.
- Boost efforts to educate donors so that they understand how giving today—rather than only after a disaster—can have bigger payoffs. Historically, the donor community has measured impact almost exclusively by meeting immediate needs in the wake of a disaster. The benefits of disaster risk reduction, preparedness, resilience, and disaster recovery are less obvious but no less important.
- Decide now how to address the needs of vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, the poor, and the chronically ill when a disaster strikes. These populations are often the hardest hit. Start now

to shore up the agencies that work with them so that, hopefully, in a disaster situation, a plan for minimizing harm and for coordinating relief and recovery efforts will be in place.

- Prioritize funding to build resilience. Find ways to help develop a community with the flexibility, communication skills, and social capital to bounce back after disaster strikes
- Start a discussion. Gather representatives from different sectors across the community—including both government and nongovernmental agencies and organizations—to discuss options, strategies, resources, and potential shared initiatives. Work on developing high-level relationships to build awareness and effectiveness, as well as to reduce unnecessary overlaps in service in the event of a disaster.
- Invest in studies and pilot programs that explore the benefits of disaster preparedness and mitigation. As an example, earlier this year, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy launched a $2 million Midwest Early Recovery Fund. Our goal is to help communities in the Midwest that have been affected by "low-attention" disasters—events including tornadoes, flooding, earthquakes, landslides, and wildfires that are destructive but not catastrophic, and thus do not command a great deal of attention. The fund aims to get money quickly and efficiently to organizations working with people who are most vulnerable, such as those living in uninsured or underinsured single-parent homes; the unemployed or underemployed; immigrants; veterans; older individuals; people with disabilities, low literacy skills, low incomes, and people with other significant unmet needs. Without this assistance, these individuals might go without help for months.
- Learn the landscape of disaster funding. One of the preconditions for operating effectively as a grant maker is knowing how your work fits into the larger funding context. This is especially true regarding disaster philanthropy, given the major roles that government and multilateral organizations play in disaster situations. Understanding this context will open up an opportunity—especially for foundations—to intervene in creative ways to fill gaps not being addressed by other funders.

Foundations, corporations, and individuals need to bring the same type of strategic mindset to disaster philanthropy that they bring to the rest of their giving choices.

If foundations, corporations, and individuals bring the same type of strategic mindset to disaster philanthropy that they bring to the rest of their giving choices, they can dramatically increase both the long-term impact of their disaster-related giving and the overall effectiveness of disaster relief in general. ⊗

Strengthening Santa Barbara County's Disaster Resilience

BY BARBARA ANDERSEN

In August 2005, the United States witnessed one of the most devastating and costly natural disasters in its history when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. First responders, volunteers, nonprofit service-providers, businesses, and philanthropists rushed to the aid of the affected communities.

In Santa Barbara County, The Orfalea Fund asked the question, "If a disaster of that magnitude were to happen here, are we prepared?" A civil grand jury investigation and comprehensive needs assessment concluded that the answer was no. Although our community has tremendous vulnerability to natural disasters such as wildfires and earthquakes, the individuals and organizations responsible for responding to and recovering from those disasters had a long way to go toward working together in a systematic and coordinated manner.

To change this, the fund, the global consulting firm James Lee Witt Associates, and the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management developed the Aware & Prepare Initiative. Launched in 2008 with the support of a collaborative of local foundations, the public-private partnership committed to enhancing capacity of government agencies and nonprofit organizations to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Grants were soon distributed to support resource acquisition, emergency and business continuity planning, emergency communication systems, and public education programs. Most important, mechanisms were put in place through which government agencies and nonprofit organizations can share information and collaborate on countywide projects.

Seven years later, the partnership has grown to include more than 45 organizations and community leaders. Various committees and subcommittees meet regularly to identify priorities, develop and implement programs aligned with those priorities, and assess their progress against designated benchmarks.

What is the secret to this partnership's success and sustainability? It's the understanding that strategic philanthropic funding can facilitate strong relationships and organizational partnerships that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of emergency response and recovery, along with lessons learned in hindsight from disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

Philanthropy was the catalyst for facilitating this level of collaboration, highlighting emergency preparedness as a priority for our region, and providing the resources necessary to enhance organizational capabilities. But it is the passion of our emergency management professionals, community organizers, and the people who provide nonprofit services who work every day to ensure the safety of our residents that makes the initiative a positive example of how our communities can benefit from multisector engagement. ⊗

BARBARA ANDERSEN is director of Strategic Partnerships at the Orfalea Foundation.

Choosing the Right Partners for School Food Reform

"Work with the willing" is an important lesson that I learned the hard way.

BY KATHLEEN O'HARE DE CHADENÈDES

I was surprised to see the message in my inbox. Mark (not his real name), one of the most recalcitrant food service directors in Santa Barbara County, had inquired about applying for a grant to replace some failing cooking equipment in his school kitchen.

Four months earlier, I had resigned myself to the idea that we had fatally damaged an already tenuous relationship. Here is what happened: Mark had agreed to host a School Food Initiative (SFI) Culinary Boot Camp at his school district. (The Boot Camp is a five-day session, taught by professional chefs, combining classroom learning along with hands-on kitchen practicums.) But then, as the date approached, he contended that he was too busy to attend. A Boot Camp instructor—one of our consultants—sensed the frustration of the newly inspired participants. Mark's refusal to join them signaled his unwillingness to deviate from business as usual. Overstepping professional boundaries, the instructor urged Mark's staff to demand that the school board replace him with a new director who fully embraced healthy scratch cooking.

When Mark got wind of this, he contacted me, angry and hurt. My embarrassment over our consultant's actions paled in comparison to my exasperation at the fact that we had given Mark a plausible excuse for not engaging with SFI. I tempered my hopes of transforming a difficult partnership into a success story, but hoped for a second chance, which had now arrived via email.

I sent Mark the grant application. I applauded myself for following the first rule of partnerships: meet partners where they are. I succeeded in getting the grant approved and contacted Mark with the good news. After almost a year as SFI director, I felt confident enough in my relationships with prospective grantees to include mutually agreed-on stipulations in the grant agreements. I sent a draft of the stipulations to Mark for his review. But instead of a respectful exchange of ideas, I received an indignant reply. He refused to accept any award with strings attached. Determined to make this work, I carefully crafted my response. Finally, he agreed to accept the funds and the stipulation to use the new equipment to add one more scratch-cooked entrée to the menu each week.

Victory was mine—until it wasn't. In his interim progress report, Mark indicated that he could no longer serve one additional scratch-cooked entrée per week because he lost student participation (i.e., revenue) every day he served a scratch-cooked entrée, while also incurring increased labor costs. Losing money, he said, could lead to the loss of his job. No one at the district disputed Mark's claims, so I asked how we could help support him. He responded that what he really needed was nutrition education for the students so they would learn to accept the healthier lunch choices. I tried a new approach: shower Mark with programs and services as proof of our commitment to his district. That year, I recommended that Mark's district receive two school gardens, complete

Chef KATHLEEN O'HARE DE CHADENÈDES is director of the Orfalea Foundation School Food Initiative.

with a paid garden manager. I also assigned a dedicated SFI chef to provide assistance with menu development, recipe testing, and service logistics.

Still facing resistance, I met with the superintendent. To gauge his level of philosophical alignment with SFI, I asked how he felt about the practice of scheduling recess before lunch. I explained the benefits of recess before lunch: children were motivated to eat more of their lunch and drink more of their beverage; they wasted less food, and returned to their classrooms calmer and ready to learn. He responded enthusiastically, saying that he loved the sound of that common-sense approach and he also appreciated the fact that it would cost nothing to implement such a beneficial practice. He vowed to take the idea to his leadership team the following week for their endorsement.

Well, Mark sat on the leadership team. And when I called to follow up on the issue, the superintendent said that he had met with major opposition from the team. When I learned this, I felt used and naïve. I pictured an unflattering image of myself chasing potential partners down the street waving a $50,000 check, begging them to accept not only our money but also all the support programs we offered.

But then a new image emerged. I realized that Mark had given me a gift: the inspiration to adopt a new strategy. I vowed, from that point forward, to work only with the willing. While I still acknowledged the value of "meeting potential partners where they are," I also saw that achieving systemic change would require different rules of engagement.

Contrast the Mark story with the development of SFI's relationship with food service director Sandra (not her real name either). We got off to a rocky start too, but we each achieved our goals by following other essential rules of partnership: aligning our values, earning trust, and sharing risks.

At an early Culinary Boot Camp, Sandra had folded her arms across her chest, declaring that she would never cook raw poultry in her district's central kitchen. (Her practice at the time had been to assemble processed menu items at a central kitchen and distribute meals to the schools.) The district had built most of its schools during the heyday of the heat-and-serve approach to school meals. The satellite kitchens lacked the appropriate infrastructure and equipment to comply with the local Environmental Health jurisdiction's requirements for serving bulk-packed, scratch-cooked entrées or salad bars. The financial cost of remodeling presented a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

Orfalea Foundation School Food Initiative

Years of programming	**7**
Total dollars invested	**$12,495,000**
Hours of onsite chef assistance	**9,720**
Food service workers trained	**350**
Students benefiting annually	**50,561**
Cost per child per year	**$35**

Unionized food service staff loomed large as another hurdle. Used to the daily rhythms of assemble, heat, and serve, union members might object to processing fresh produce for salad bars and cooking entrees from scratch. The change could mean more work for the same money and more risk of on-the-job injuries. After Culinary Boot Camp, however, Sandra and her staff exhibited a shift in perspective. At Boot Camp, participants had gotten excited about producing healthier, fresher food—and instructors had supported their excitement by teaching them how to do it safely and effectively, and by offering the possibility of procuring equipment so they could do it efficiently. The barriers appeared less daunting.

Before Boot Camp, Sandra had resigned herself to running a school food service operation that fell short of her ideals, but now she began to believe in the possibility of change. More important, her values and those of her staff aligned with SFI's aspirations. That essential pillar of effective partnerships opened the door to progress.

SFI's full-time chef advisor conducted a Boot Camp follow-up session. She also provided on-site assistance—acting as a safety net to help participants leave their comfort zones and achieve the goals they had set in Boot Camp. For example, she convinced Sandra to try a scratch cooking pilot at two elementary schools. SFI would fund the project and offer the chef advisor's support. (The high schools and junior highs in the district offered some healthier menu choices at the time, but the elementary schools still received individually packaged, highly processed entrees.) Sandra possessed the courage to change; her staff exhibited inspiration and dedication to serving healthier school food; and pending the pilot's success, SFI also offered to cover the cost of a district-wide transformation.

The pilot had two goals: proving that producing and serving healthy food would cost no more than the current program, and showing that students would accept the new food, resulting in the same or better participation (and therefore revenue). We worked together on the pilot, from kitchen design to menu creation, food preparation workflow, and meal service logistics.

As we negotiated the grant stipulations, Sandra hesitated before agreeing to the terms. She acknowledged that the stipulations might cause some dissension among her staff. She also noted that revenue could plummet if students missed favorite menu items and declined to participate. We countered her concerns by listing all the ways we would help this pilot succeed, and Sandra regained her resolve. Our discussions illustrated another essential rule of partnership: by talking through concerns and solutions openly, we were earning each other's trust.

The pilot succeeded. Students selected the scratch-cooked entrée twice as often as the more familiar prepackaged lunch. Best of all for Sandra, the new program did not increase costs. Sandra took this success to the school board and received support for bringing healthy scratch cooking and salad bars to the entire district.

To make this happen, Sandra teamed up with the heads of facilities and her boss and made a plan to roll out the new food program to the entire district. Working with estimated costs, we identified the financial commitments of both partners, with the district shouldering almost 50 percent of the cost of renovating the central kitchen and remodeling of satellite kitchens, thereby complying with a third essential rule of partnerships: sharing risks.

An additional boon to the transformation of school food service arrived in the form of a new superintendent and assistant superintendent. Both believed that healthy school meals play a role in greater academic achievement, as well as social and emotional development. For the first time since Sandra arrived at the district she felt supported by the administration.

The assistant superintendent invited

Sandra to speak at monthly principal meetings where she could explain the transformation of food service and ask for principals' support as allies and advocates for better school food. She did, and they stepped up. Additionally, after the assistant superintendent reached out to the community to support the district's students, Sandra saw a marked increase in attendance at the Wellness Committee meetings she had been doggedly hosting for parents and other interested district residents for several years. The committee, in turn, began to engage a diverse group of school community representatives such as teachers, administrators, coaches, parents, and school employee union leaders to seriously address ways to comply with federal regulations while making the healthy choice the easy choice for students and staff. The network of partnerships forming within the school district and the community was wonderful to see.

We experienced similarly positive outcomes in other districts in Santa Barbara County. We had begun by supporting food service, the most powerless faction in the school community. And elevating the professionalism and capabilities of food service did produce better school food in many districts. But working with a broad network of partners seeded deep-rooted systemic change, helping schools and districts see themselves as centers of health and wellness, bolstering their efforts to improve student learning and lifetime health.

Our experience with Mark taught us to work with the willing, and working with Sandra reinforced for us some essential tenets of partnership. Progress had nothing to do with money or power or authority—top-down pressure works only as long as pressure can be maintained; it is the antithesis of sustainability. Rather, progress was achieved through the day-to-day work of building relationships that transcend the roles of grantee and grantor, listening to our partners' concerns, and developing alternative solutions.

Developing a partnership based on aligned values, earned trust, and shared risk made it possible to change the food on the plate and the culture of the school district and community, supporting students' lifetime health and learning. ⊗

A Changing Landscape for School Food

BY JESSICA DONZE BLACK

Flash back to 1946: World War II is over and the United States is making plans for a brighter future. Among our country's top priorities is raising healthy children to support and defend our nation in the years ahead. Enter the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, a bold commitment to ensure that all young people have at least one nutritious meal each day.

Today, nearly 70 years later, the national lunch program remains a critical contributor to the health of school-age children, reaching 95 percent of public schools and more than 30 million kids a day. About 15 million children also participate in the national school breakfast program. The importance of these meals cannot be overstated, yet recently they became a topic of some controversy.

For decades, school meal programs focused on serving children enough food to prevent hunger. But as the childhood obesity epidemic grew, and related diseases such as Type 2 diabetes increased, public health groups and nutrition scientists recommended that meals provide students with the nutrients for healthy development while avoiding excess calories, fat, and sodium.

When the US Congress last reauthorized school meal programs in 2010, it heeded this advice and directed the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to update nutrition standards to reflect current scientific knowledge. Congress also told the USDA to update nutrition standards for all foods sold at schools (in vending machines, à la carte lines, and school stores). The USDA issued updated regulations for lunch, breakfast, snack foods, and drinks that increased the emphasis on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and set reasonable limits on fat, sodium, and portion sizes.

Schools have been implementing these updates since 2012, and the ease of the transition has varied considerably from district to district. Many schools were ahead of the curve and had already met or exceeded the updated standards. But some were less prepared and have faced hurdles such as declining student participation rates, increased training and equipment needs, and limited availability of healthier products.

There is tremendous opportunity to overcome these challenges and move forward productively. According to a recent poll by The Pew Charitable Trusts, nearly three in four parents support the healthier school nutrition standards. Moreover, thousands of districts are implementing them successfully, and the USDA has launched an initiative to match struggling food service directors with peer mentors from districts that are thriving under the healthier standards. The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, the National School Food Service Management Institute, and other nonprofits are offering robust technical assistance and training to schools in need, and Congress has appropriated additional funds to upgrade school kitchen equipment. Groups representing fresh produce growers have worked with business and nonprofit partners to supply thousands of free salad bars to school cafeterias. The food industry has developed countless products that will help schools meet the healthier standards.

And here's the great news: These initiatives are working. As of 2015, 95 percent of districts are certified as meeting the updated nutrition standards, and students are adapting to the changes. Research indicates that in districts that have implemented healthier nutrition standards, students are eating more fruits and vegetables, and the amount of food left on plates has stayed level or even decreased. Although a few federal, state, and local policy makers have proposed rolling back the current nutrition standards, the overwhelming evidence shows that schools can successfully serve healthier foods for a reasonable cost, and fulfill the goal of the school meal program: to ensure that all children have access to healthy food every day. ⊗

Jessica Donze Black is a child nutrition expert and director of the Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project at The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Lessons From a Sunsetting Fund

Planning to close our doors in December—thoughtfully, and with consideration for our partners and coworkers—has meant breaking new ground.

BY CATHERINE BROZOWSKI & TOM BLABEY

Walking into the conference room in fall 2013 to inform all of our colleagues that they were going to lose their jobs is a moment we will never forget. We had worked for weeks on what we were going to say. Lives were about to change, and we knew the reaction would be heavy. Coworkers arrived unsure and curious. We had never before had a mandatory staff meeting that demanded that coworkers cancel other meetings and rearrange vacations to attend.

There was the normal buzz in the room as people settled in. But when our board chair arrived, you could see interest levels intensify. She began her comments by saying that we were entering bittersweet times. Scanning the room, we could see people's faces change as they internalized the announcement. Our entire team formally learned that day what some of us had known for years: that we had mapped out the timeline for when The Orfalea Fund would complete its programmatic work.

There was never a question about whether we would "sunset," so that part was not a surprise. Our founders had made it clear from the fund's inception that it would have a limited life, but the details of the timeline had not been established. It would not have been advantageous to do so; our founders imbued the organization with a certain style of entrepreneurial opportunism. We were free to redefine ourselves and our grant-making strategy as we went along; our culture encouraged the flexible approach we needed for striving to achieve our goals while helping to build leadership in our partner organizations. Had we established an end date at our inception, we would not have allowed ourselves that flexibility. So the premise of sunsetting had always been there, but the nuances of when or how went unaddressed until now.

CATHERINE BROZOWSKI is vice president and TOM BLABEY is operations director at the Orfalea Foundation.

A JOURNEY WITHOUT A GUIDE

When a small group of us at the senior management level of the fund started down the final path toward closing, we were surprised at how little information about philanthropic wind-downs was available. A few foundations have been deliberate about sharing their strategies, including the Beldon Fund, Markey Charitable Trust, Atlantic Philanthropies, and AVI Chai, but the resources we found, while helpful, were specific to their circumstances and insufficient to guide us on our unique journey. There are hundreds of books on exit strategies available to for-profit enterprises. But in the social sector, no clear set of guidelines exists.

Partnerships played a key role in our founders business—Kinko's, the business services chain—and that approach deeply influenced the fund's philosophy toward philanthropy, seeking opportunities for collaboration and concentrated initiatives. But therein lurked an ironic complication for the sunset process: We had worked so diligently to foster strong and enduring relationships; how would we extricate ourselves from those connections with loyal coworkers, community nonprofits, government agencies, and other grantmakers? At the earliest stages of sunset planning, the directive from the founders and the board was clear: Do it with integrity, do it mindfully, do it efficiently, and do it strategically so that all parties end up stronger in the end. Our work in sunsetting had begun.

To that end we devoted intense planning and preparation. Our work continues to evolve, but we have learned valuable lessons, and our sense is that sharing what we have experienced and learned (missteps and all) may be of value to other organizations with similar wind-down goals.

To make it all easier to digest, we have broken up our experience into six areas, each of which needs intense effort (and each of which has come with a steep learning curve). Here they are:

- Aligning the fund's finances
- Strategizing about internal and external communication
- Paying attention to personnel logistics
- Engaging coworkers in the transition process
- Purposefully changing the fund's culture
- Ensuring our partners' and projects' continuity

ALIGNING THE FUND'S FINANCES

Four years before announcing our sunset to our colleagues in that conference room, we began midterm financial mapping, projecting various spending scenarios. We approached our donors and our board, offering three options for defining our fund's trajectory: a desirable timeline, a curtailed timeline, or a strategic timeline. The desirable timeline was shorter than the planned duration of a number of our initiatives, but would allow us to spend at aggressive rates for five years. The curtailed timeline—a nine-year plan—was more conservative regarding assets. It would allow more time for the work, but would call for some compromises about what could be accomplished in scope and scale.

The strategic timeline scenario proposed a blend of the desirable and curtailed timeline concepts, using different strategies for different programmatic aspects of our work. It allowed inconsistencies to exist in our granting philosophy, prioritizing select initiatives over others. This method allowed for six additional years of funding. With donor input, the board approved the strategic timeline approach in 2009, and we believe it has served us well.

Importantly, intensive financial planning from that moment on has proven crucial to the process. We immediately linked our deadline to our balance sheet, which

prompted a new degree of accuracy and urgency regarding cash flow. We deployed new cash-based financial tools to ensure that our calculations were precise. We aimed to project and track our total resources against all known or budgeted liabilities. Initially, we recalculated our assets semiannually, then quarterly, and now, in the home stretch, we review available assets on a monthly basis.

Three and a half years ago, we revised our investment strategy to transition completely out of stocks and into more predictable and conservative fixed-income bonds. About two and a half years ago, we began liquidating our real estate holdings, which enabled us to structure transfers of our properties to long-standing nonprofit partners, while also simplifying our list of assets.

Managing reserves has proven equally important. Although the work of our final 18 months was planned carefully, we knew to anticipate the unexpected and therefore we established a $500,000 reserve fund to cover any surprise expenses that might arise in the final months of the organization. If that money is not needed for expenses, it will be rolled into a donor-advised fund that can be used to sustain select aspects of our work.

STRATEGIZING ABOUT INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

As our board prioritized a proactive communication strategy, our first vital decision, as the fund's leadership team, was when to announce the sunset timeline and its implications. We deliberated long and hard about this. Our board anticipated that the announcement might divert the team and our partners from our core work. They feared that coworkers might abandon the organization. They worried about the bond with our partners. They were right. Everything changes when a sunset plan becomes public. Everything.

We knew that our work could not be completed in our now-limited time frame unless our entire team was involved in the conversation and could strategize together. So again we took a risk: we chose to share our timeline for completion 27 months before the close of the office. The planning phase leading up to that mandatory meeting was a time of intense learning. All summer, the office vibe was askew. Different coworkers knew different amounts of information. Managers participated in key conversations relevant to their initiatives. Yet in most cases, the full context could not be shared.

That meeting launched the process of rebalancing the organization and redefining who we were. Representing the culmination of months of preparation, we have to admit that it was a relief for some of us. But it was a day of shock for many others. Termination is uncomfortable, no matter the circumstances, so program directors and executive team members tried to deliver the news as thoughtfully and supportively as possible, conveying what the sunset meant, reiterating the founders' and board's original goals and intents, and articulating the high-level strategy for the completion of our work.

Immediately following the group session, members of the management team met individually with each coworker, reinforcing the primary messages and putting additional personal details on the table, such as a staff member's projected termination date and severance package details.

Nonetheless, it soon became apparent that maintaining a unified, consistent message from all managers in an environment and time of constant change and charged emotion would be almost impossible. We learned early on to continually reiterate facts and confirm that all coworkers had heard the same information. We provided scripted responses to frequently asked questions and anticipated queries.

We used regular team meetings as opportunities to reiterate, clarify, and add to the common pool of knowledge. Though we recognize that we have been wrong on many variables along the way and strategies continue to evolve to this day, after that initial meeting, we shared what we knew when we knew it, and corrected or clarified in real time to sustain the culture of transparency we value and to keep our board, our management team, and the rest of our colleagues on the same page.

Immediately following our internal announcement, we launched an external communication campaign. Given Santa Barbara's small-town nature and intertwined networks, there were many individuals in the community with personal knowledge of the fund, its donors, and its coworkers. Before the public announcement, we received inquiries from a few savvy partners who had deduced that a change was on the horizon, and so we realized that we had to act faster with a public announcement than we had planned.

We considered holding a press conference, but we struggled with whether our sunset was truly newsworthy, particularly since we were simply executing our original plan. Ultimately, we nixed the idea. Instead, we called or met personally with our closest partners, and then followed up with written communication to reinforce the message. We provided detailed speaking points for them to use in conversation with their boards, their staff, and others within their close networks.

Despite our best efforts, ever since the initial communications blitz, explaining the sunset timeline and its various ramifications has required constant reiteration in our community interactions.

PAYING ATTENTION TO PERSONNEL LOGISTICS

Careful and intentional management of personnel matters, such as exit dates, retention incentives, benefits, and contingency plans, has been a vital component to our organization's sunset. To begin, we established clear employment end dates (based on the requirements of each person's work or role in the organization) and committed to notifying each staff member at least six months in advance if his or her termination date changed. In keeping with our values, we prioritized continuing comprehensive health care coverage in order to care for coworkers and their families holistically during a time of change.

To keep our staff members on until their end dates, we crafted retention incentives based on a set formula tied to specific end dates. As of mid-2015, 70 percent of our team has remained until planned exit dates.

To help mitigate the risk of premature departures, we also developed back-up strategies for each coworker. We considered engaging consultants to fill in critical gaps so the organization would have sufficient capacity to achieve our programmatic and operational goals prior to the sunset, but we have not needed to do that so far.

One great irony of trying to retain staff members is our knowledge that in order to sustain the fund's work in the community beyond the sunset, we need to support our coworkers, simultaneously, in identifying and pursuing new job opportunities. Doing this is a way to expand our reach in the sector beyond the life of the fund and leverage our significant investments in our people for continued community benefit. To that end, we engaged an outside HR professional to offer a résumé primer; we offer peer and management résumé review; and we accommodate coworkers' time out of the office for networking, job interviews, professional development, and consulting opportunities.

Interestingly, our staff members *requested* open conversation around issues of job searches and end dates, and help moving on to future employment. Although somewhat unconventional, speaking candidly among coworkers about career explorations and job pursuits aligned with our culture. Yet despite our best intentions, the goal of balancing openness with privacy has been harder to maintain than we had hoped. At best, we have awkward conversations on the topic; at worst, loyalties have been questioned. Additionally, many coworkers find that they could be competing for the same jobs in the community, so a conflict of interest exists in sharing leads, forwarding referrals, and otherwise helping one another in the job search.

ENGAGING COWORKERS IN THE TRANSITION PROCESS

Financial incentives may encourage retention, but maintaining staff engagement is a separate challenge. Despite months of planning and attempting to foresee all possible twists in the road, we remain open to new suggestions and input from our team.

Perhaps the most productive and valuable outcome of their input has been the creation of a transition task force charged with identifying coworker needs and gauging morale. Recruited internally and representing all facets of the fund, the task force has engaged with coworkers on a regular basis.

We anticipated that morale would naturally dip occasionally, but the task force has been instrumental in illuminating some of the causes of lowered morale. Most notably, those causes have centered on changes in our organizational culture and in individual expectations of what work should now entail.

First, the most common disappointment and demoralizing factor has been a sense of loss and frustration among coworkers who no longer feel the spark of working at a progressive, always forward-thinking organization. The fund is no longer engaging in innovation and structuring new powerful partnerships; instead we are wrapping up that work and shutting down operations. Our team members have been frustrated that they cannot support our partners financially and programmatically as we have done over the years.

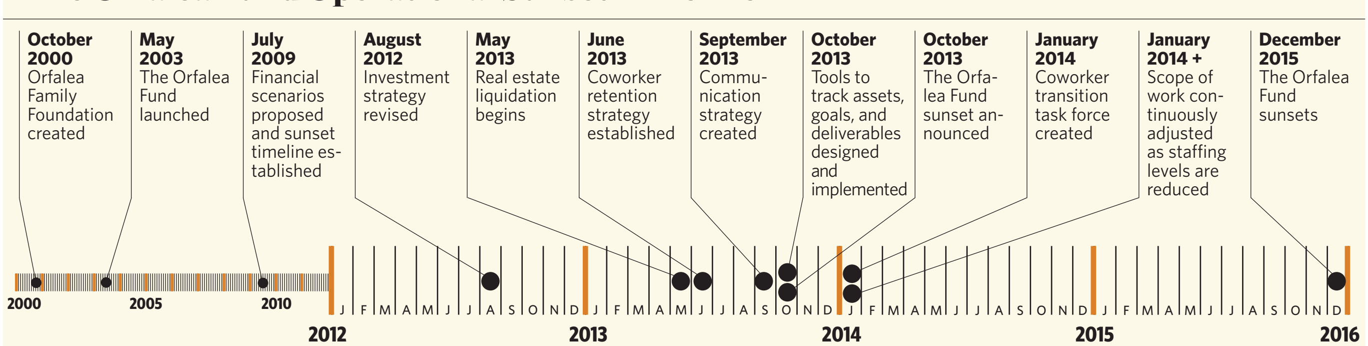
Second, coworker exits have caused anxiety when workloads have shifted. In response, we eliminated most coworker-specific goals in favor of team or departmental goals so that everyone on a team would feel more aligned in working toward universal accomplishments.

Finally, the task force (not surprisingly) identified a need for stress management across the organization. Ultimately, members of the task force have focused on workplace wellness tactics to address that challenge.

PURPOSEFULLY CHANGING THE CULTURE

Our Pillars of Strategic Partnerships promote maximizing stakeholder empowerment, including the empowerment of our

The Orfalea Fund Operational Sunset Timeline



coworkers: our internal partners. (See "The Pillars of Partnership" on page 5.) Yet in the months leading up to the sunset announcement, most of our coworkers felt a keen loss of empowerment. Management meetings behind closed doors and whispered conversations in the halls intimated that something secret was going on. We dashed to get documents off the printer and abruptly stopped or altered conversations midstream when someone popped her head into the room with a quick inquiry. These were some of the first signs that our culture was changing, and the discomfort was palpable. In hindsight, this drama could have been avoided.

The sunset triggered an entirely different way of working. And so, in order to better manage a lot of work in a limited time frame with little margin for error, we introduced new management tools. Historically, we had avoided static strategic plans because our cofounders are such vibrant entrepreneurial visionaries, and experience had informed us that any documented plan would be outdated before it could be printed. But the sunset required a tightly defined strategy because changes in direction or focus could prevent us from completing our remaining work. We now employ highly detailed planning processes, with intricate reporting mechanisms. We have changed our culture to fit the times, committing to the diligent documentation of goals, progress toward those goals, and potential obstacles to reaching those goals—in great detail. It is an unfamiliar way of working, but the structure has allowed time to deliberate on our strategy, allocate our diminishing resources carefully, and map anticipated challenges to better forecast workflow and realistic accomplishments.

Perhaps the most difficult shift in our culture has been accepting and embracing the imperative to "let go" and let others step into leadership roles. Traditionally, we kept our antennas up and explored every relevant opportunity for potential collaboration, partnership development, or ongoing learning or sharing. Shifting to sunset mode compelled us to focus solely on the work at hand, completing what we started as best we could within the time frame, and sustaining the work after we are gone.

In a way, this is a liberating mandate. We no longer feel obliged to be constantly looking out for new opportunities. Instead, we have gradually turned inward, focused on our closest and most critical partners, and directed our attention to the three priorities established by our board for the final phase of sunsetting: Evaluation; A Legacy of Learning; and Sustaining the Work. We have never been so focused. Our vision has never been so clear. The hardest part is loosening our grip and letting our trusted partners take on the work and pursue their own vision.

ENSURING OUR PARTNERS' AND PROJECTS' CONTINUITY

After we told our partners about our sunset plan, we explored next steps with each one on an individual basis. We wanted all of our grantees to remain strong leaders in their scope of work and be successful finding other funders to support their efforts. Thus, we sought to support each organization going into their next chapter. We looked at each grant individually, and discussed what aspects of the work needed to be sustained, and which would require financial and programmatic help to thrive.

In many cases, we made challenge grants to help organizations identify new funding sources. Additionally, we offered multiyear awards (sometimes in gradually decreasing amounts) to provide grantees with a few years of stability, allowing them time to develop relationships with other prospective donors.

We helped organizations identify other funding sources, both individual donors and other foundations, via personal introductions and large "friend-raiser" events, simultaneously using our voice to advocate for the value of the specific programs and the merit of funding them. Beyond funding, we formed oversight councils to help carry the burden of accountability and have worked tirelessly toward cultural shifts in school communities through student, faculty, staff, and parent engagement.

We found that determining the value of archived documentation, correspondence, and records, while mandatory for financial and audit purposes, required some existential and technical self-assessment. We asked: Who will want or need to access our history? Where should it be saved? What format (digital or hard copy) will be most helpful? Why save it at all? Our plan is to have our website serve as a primary reference for external inquiries so that other individuals and organizations can replicate the work of the fund, or tailor our successes in early childhood education, school food reform, and disaster readiness to fit their own communities and organizations.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

One of the earliest challenges we faced in managing the fund's sunset was what to call it. While not as significant a problem as ending community partnerships respectfully and productively, or managing finances, or communicating with employees, it has been a vexing issue. What's in a name? If we were going to extricate ourselves from partnerships we had spent more than a decade developing, we needed clear and consistent language to sum up what we were doing.

As the strategic vision for the shutdown shifted, so did our thoughts on that language: Would the work be taken up by another foundation ("conversion")? Would it be better to use a literal description for the financial realities ("spend down" or "spend out")? Would "retirement" be accurate (for the organization maybe, but what about for our people)?

We had found several examples of organizations that initiated a "spend down," so early on, we adopted this terminology to describe the literal exhaustion of our assets. Internally, this term was used interchangeably with "spend out" but in the end, neither phrase really captured the essence of what we are doing. We let those terms fade, and for a while gave "retirement" a little air time. But that did not seem to fit the bill either, and ultimately, we settled on "sunset," which seems to capture both the finality and the sentimentality of what is occurring. If nothing else, this subtly shifting nomenclature has been symbolic of the constant evolution of the process itself.

Eventually settling on the graphically emotional image of a sunset, we realize now that in so many ways, the fund we knew actually experienced "sunset" two years ago—when we announced our end date and the work of winding down began. That's when our culture changed. That's when our work changed. That's when our tools and style changed. That's when our vision and strategy changed.

Publicly and officially, we are shutting our doors on December 31, 2015, but for all intents and purposes, the sun began setting on the fund in the spring of 2013, and we have been in a steadily evolving twilight since then. Our hope, however, is that even when our twilight fades later this year, if we have done our job well, the sun will continue to shine brightly on the work being carried forward by our partners for many long days to come.

When to Lead, Follow, and Let Go

The "servant's heart" knows how roles must evolve in strong partnerships.

BY LOIS MITCHELL

One of the hardest questions a funder could ask when faced with a contentious relationship is this: Am I the problem? Often, foundations that instigate a partnership cling to leadership roles. This is a comfortable choice for grant makers who believe their funds entitle them to direct the activities of grantees. To "dictate with dollars," however, may blind us to the novel ideas and unique experiences for which we chose partners in the first place.

So let us begin with a confession: Sometimes we were the problem. A second confession: Sometimes we *wanted* to be. Why? Because a contentious *relationship* isn't necessarily a problem *partnership*. Here's an example: When Paul Orfalea stood before the County Board of Supervisors, offered a $2 million contribution for an Emergency Operations Center, but said, "This train is leaving the station. You have to decide now," we saw it as bringing out the best in a partner. The board of supervisors undoubtedly saw it differently. But they agreed and, with partner funders, built a state-of-the-art emergency operations center.

Here's another example: To exist at all, the Aware & Prepare disaster readiness initiative needed an authoritative leader to create an environment where diverse stakeholders with varying points of view and different objectives could take small steps on common ground. So The Orfalea Fund took on that role. We nudged, prodded, and pushed. We were a pain. But as trust grew and the common ground expanded, we slowly—and sometimes clumsily—eased out of our leadership role to provide financial and logistical support to the increasingly self-governed organization. First we led, then we followed, and now, as the fund sunsets, we will let go altogether.

Likewise, in early childhood education and school food reform, we strove to build a strong partnership, and then create a culture that would not need us. Changing a culture requires tough love at times.

We were not shy about volunteering our vision, or suggesting how to tackle an issue. We were not afraid of a scuffle, we loved new challenges, we reveled in taking risks and inviting others to join us on the journey. A lot of entrepreneurs thrive on conflict—but conflict should never be an end in itself. So we established rules of engagement for partnerships. Could we see ourselves clearly enough to apply our own criteria? Not always.

As we mentioned earlier in this supplement, one of a leader's chief responsibilities is the development of leadership in others, especially when there are multiple partners and a goal to establish independence and sustainability. Innovation may spring from an individual, but sustainability is an act of community—an act of partnership. To become a better partner, we had to learn to move out of the way and let others lead.

It was definitely not in the fund's nature to follow, yet our business roots and tenets guided us to increasingly appreciate our partners and their positions—to watch, listen, and question those on the ground, working day-to-day with students, health-care workers, teachers, first responders, and others. This path of inquiry helped us build reverence and respect for those working in our fields of interest. It helped us learn to follow and support them.

In this series of articles on the power and challenges of partnership, we have seen that each partner's role can change many times over the course of a program or project. A definitive position on when to lead, when to follow, and when to let go is therefore an attempt to lasso smoke—we cannot do it. Yet we can ask a useful question: If we know that good partners must be both leaders and followers, what is the most important trait common to both?

We contend that it is "the servant's heart." A strong leader continuously asks how she might serve her followers. A good follower is likewise driven by a desire to be of use. In the social sector, strong goal alignment brings leaders and followers together—as servants to a common mission.

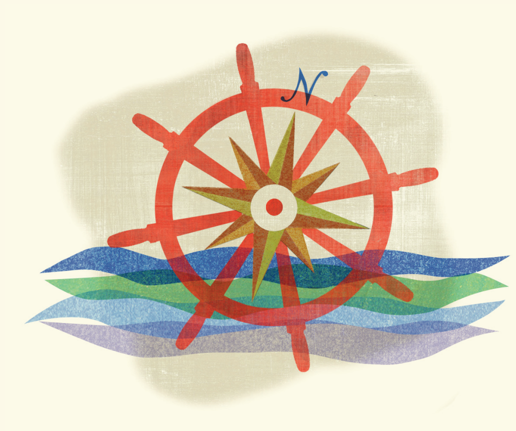
Perhaps this makes clear when to let go: When you cannot elevate the shared vision, you have no rightful place in the partnership. If you can neither lead nor follow with passion, enthusiasm, and purpose, you must let go.

We experienced this in partnership with another foundation. The two of us struggled for years to refine an already active business-giving program—until we recognized that our goals were not sufficiently aligned. We could not serve one another's true interests, and the partnership dissolved—for the better of all concerned.

A strong leader continuously asks how she might serve her followers. A good follower is likewise driven by a desire to be of use.

The social sector is, by definition, social. Everything we achieve, we accomplish through partnership. Self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and transparency all contribute to the quest for effective philanthropic partnerships, and to the fulfillment of our dream of a community and citizens that thrive. As we conclude this phase of our philanthropic adventure, we cannot say we always know when to lead, when to follow, and when to let go, but we will always stand beside our partners and work together to figure it out. However great the challenge, we in the social sector stand together at the gates of hope. ⊗

LOIS MITCHELL is president of the Orfalea Foundation.



THE GATES OF HOPE

BY VICTORIA SAFFORD

Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope—
Not the prudent gates of Optimism,
Which are somewhat narrower.
Not the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense;
Nor the strident gates of Self-Righteousness,
Which creak on shrill and angry hinges
(People cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through)
Nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of
"Everything is gonna' be all right."
But a different, sometimes lonely place,
The place of truth-telling,
About your own soul first of all and its condition.
The place of resistance and defiance,
The piece of ground from which you see the world
Both as it is and as it could be
As it will be;
The place from which you glimpse not only struggle,
But the joy of the struggle.
And we stand there, beckoning and calling,
Telling people what we are seeing
Asking people what they see.

About The Orfalea Fund

In the past decade and a half, Santa Barbara County dramatically transformed its approach to early childhood education, public school nutrition, and disaster readiness. Established in 2003 and sunsetting at the end of 2015, The Orfalea Fund, administered by the Orfalea Foundation, has played a role in this transformation by supporting and conducting innovative programs, bringing together dedicated partners to discover and execute best practices, and helping the community's families, educators, and policymakers raise their expectations for what is possible. As the fund sunsets, some of the most salient lessons we learned can be found at

www.OrfaleaFoundation.org

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