

SHARING POWER FOR SHARED PROSPERITY

As a part of our Democracy Lens tools, for each state in our region, we report a data snapshot and case studies (called Bright Spots) about philanthropy's role in democracy. You can access all these data and Bright Spots on the [Democracy Northwest webpage](#).

Many philanthropic organizations strive to use funding mechanisms that respond to community need. With an increasing number of philanthropic organizations engaged in racial equity strategies, there is still a huge gap in how philanthropy responds to the immense need for community-driven sustainable solutions. For example, many foundations in 2020 find they lack the ability to integrate racial equity into grantmaking in response to COVID-19.¹

The external environment, including policies and actions taken by the public sector, consistently impacts philanthropy and communities. However, meaningful and lasting change requires philanthropic organizations to not just come together with communities, but to be true partners.² [Seattle Foundation](#) identified that when efforts across the Greater Seattle area are siloed – between the public, private and charitable sectors, as well as communities – priorities will not support the needs of the community. Michael Brown, vice president of programs, realized there was a need for an upstream approach to align priorities, impact public policy and co-design equitable solutions across sectors.

Infrastructure

With support from the Seattle Foundation leadership, Brown launched [Civic Commons](#) in 2018 as an independent entity to create a platform, which became the [We Belong Here](#) project, to cultivate cross-sector collaboration to address community needs. According to Brown, now the civic architect at Civic Commons, and Frank Nam, We Belong Here project director, Civic Commons creates a new paradigm of deep and meaningful cross-sector partnerships to share power and elevate impact. Rooted in concepts of collective belonging and accountability, Civic Commons incorporates three key approaches to adapting work together.



Key Components of Civic Commons⁶

We Belong Together	<p>We Belong Together is a platform to build a sense of belonging between people and institutions from all sectors to shift the narrative from scarcity toward shared prosperity. Belonging requires an ability to think creatively and expansively about approaches and solutions that move away from individual losses or gains, and toward building a sustainable infrastructure where everyone can meaningfully contribute to and benefit from economic and health solutions for the Greater Seattle area. Cross-sector working groups meet over six months to discuss local issues in this context, ranging from economic growth to livability.⁷</p>
Network Weaving	<p>Network Weaving means bringing cross-sector partners together through Civic Commons to align on collective work. According to Brown and Nam, here is where Civic Commons innovates new models for supporting regional change. Partners work toward being open and transparent about their resources, assets and opportunities to impact change together. This type of knowledge sharing is the key attribute that drives partnerships and decision making.</p>
Scorecard for Shared Prosperity	<p>The Scorecard for Shared Prosperity is a tool to support civic leadership by facilitating the use of common metrics and setting the stage for collaborative strategizing that drives regional change. The objective is to reframe what it means to achieve shared prosperity and to equip regional leaders with a means to evaluate the region's performance.</p>

Interweaving Strategies to Create Long-Term Change

The interplay between these key components is where Brown asserts long-term transformational change toward shared power and prosperity can occur. Building civic infrastructure may be incredibly transactional in the short term, such as by hurriedly collaborating to meet goals and drive agendas. However, an important pivot is necessary for the transformational work to happen over generations.⁸ Through the Scorecard for Shared Prosperity, partners can measure how the region is building civic and economic prosperity, with



key indicators like voter participation, public health and income. However, objective data alone will not measure progress. Building trusting relationships across sectors, creating a sense of belonging and sharing goals convert the work from transactional to transformational, and from outputs (what activities were done) to outcomes (how impactful those activities were).⁹ To do this, Civic Commons began bringing people together through generative spaces and events to wrestle with difficult aspects of belonging, creating common solutions and adapting the agenda to meet the needs of various stakeholders in real time.¹⁰

Getting to Shared Prosperity

While outputs are important, Brown and Nam emphasize that the focus must be on the outcome of shared prosperity. They assert that philanthropies must:

- Adapt to working across sectors,
- Demonstrate courage by taking more risks in investments and partnerships, and
- Learn to let go of pre-conceived notions about outcomes.

Given that the primary function of philanthropic organizations is to facilitate funding to community organizations, trusting the communities and adapting to strategies that work the best for them can maximize the impact of funding. Philanthropy can begin by building bridges with the right partners, analyzing regional trends and dedicating proper resources to create a framework of shared goals to successfully impact change.¹¹

Key Takeaways

- Philanthropies must adapt to working across sectors, demonstrate courage by taking more risks in investments and partnerships and learn to let go of pre-conceived notions about outcomes.
- To unify cross-sector stakeholders and create positive change in a region, philanthropy can begin by building bridges through convening and by dedicating proper resources toward a framework based on common goals.

Endnotes

1. “Foundations Shifting Practices but Slow to Share Power, Study Finds,” *Philanthropy News Digest by Candid*, September 21, 2020, <http://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/foundations-shifting-practices-but-slow-to-share-power-study-finds>.
2. Patrick Guerriero and Susan Wolf Ditkoff, “When Philanthropy Meets Advocacy,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer 2018, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/when_philanthropy_meets_advocacy#.

3. Michael Brown, interview with author, September 8, 2020.
4. “Seattle Foundation Launches New Civic Infrastructure Project,” Seattle Foundation, May 30, 2018, <https://www.seattlefoundation.org/Blog/Articles/2018/05/civic-commons-announcement>.
5. Brown, interview; Frank Nam, interview with author, September 8, 2020.
6. Brown, interview; Nam, interview.
7. “We Belong Here,” Civic Commons, accessed September 30, 2020, <https://www.civic-commons.org/webelonghere>.
8. Brown, interview; Frank Nam, “What is Belonging?,” Civic Commons, accessed September 25, 2020, <https://www.civic-commons.org/recentnews/whatisbelonging>.
9. Brown, interview.
10. See “‘You are the agenda:’ Perspectives from the first We Belong Here Gathering,” Civic Commons, April 14, 2020, <https://www.civic-commons.org/recentnews/you-are-the-agenda-perspectives-from-the-first-we-belong-here-gathering>; see also “Creating Connections – A Synopsis of Civic Commons Gatherings,” Civic Commons, November 22, 2019, <https://www.civic-commons.org/recentnews/creating-connections>.
11. Brown, interview; Nam, interview.