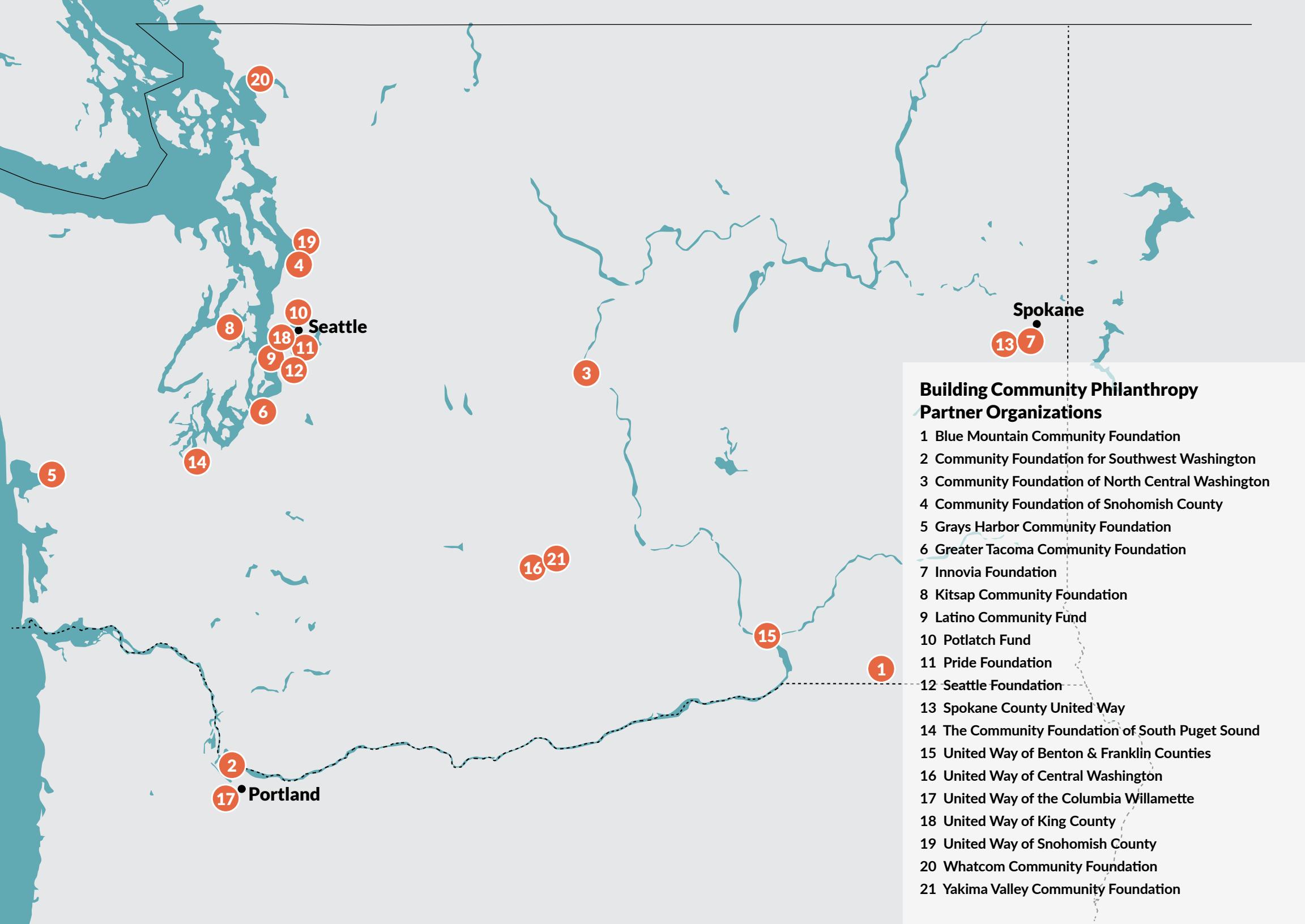




# Journeys in Building Community Philanthropy

**How an Eight-year Initiative is Changing  
People, Organizations and Communities**





# The BCP Initiative

The Building Community Philanthropy (BCP) Initiative is a partnership of Philanthropy Northwest, The Giving Practice and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and is designed to promote equitable philanthropy and support community-led solutions across Washington State and Portland, Oregon. The BCP cohort consists of 21 partner organizations, including 12 community foundations, five United Ways and three identity funds.

What began as a shared effort by the BCP partners to alleviate intergenerational poverty in 2012 has blossomed into a formal statewide learning network in which community foundations, United Ways and identity-based grantmakers are gaining knowledge, sharing best practices and working collaboratively to tackle common community challenges.

The third phase of the BCP initiative will continue to build on this foundation, with an emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion. BCP partners will intentionally center racial equity in their work and

grantmaking efforts, prioritize shifting power to communities of color and hold themselves and each other accountable to their equity commitments. This next chapter of BCP is an exciting one, where the partner organizations, Philanthropy Northwest and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will co-develop a vision for the next horizon of community philanthropy in Washington.

## About the Report

This report was developed by Philanthropy Northwest and The Giving Practice.

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## Foreword

In 2012, the Washington State team of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was at a crossroads. As a place-based funder, we wanted to build deeper relationships within communities across the state. But we knew that a hub and spoke model relying on our Seattle-based staff to understand opportunities and needs throughout the state would fall short of our aspirations to support community-driven solutions. We wanted a network model instead, so we sought to partner with a network that had existing community-level relationships and that shared our team's focus on addressing intergenerational poverty through multi-sector solutions.

In alignment with our foundation's domestic strategies, our team was increasingly focusing on education as the pathway to opportunity we would invest in. But as our U.S. division's only place-based initiative, we had also seen the power of cultivating cross-sector collaboration, so we didn't want to limit our focus solely to the education sector. Building from a series of preliminary investments into regional community foundations, we landed on community philanthropy as holding the greatest promise to cultivate deeper relationships that could lead to sustainable, community-led cross-sector solutions for increasing opportunities within thriving communities. We knew that leveraging the full power of the regional community philanthropy network would require an intermediary positioned to build indelible relationships within the network in ways that were mission critical. We found that intermediary in Philanthropy Northwest.

What follows is the story of the first eight years of the Building Community Philanthropy (BCP) initiative. All learning is social, so relationships are at the core of the BCP learning journey. We invite you along on this journey to better understand how long-term reciprocal relationships can support deeper learning at the individual, organizational and community levels. As you'll see from these stories, our relationship-driven learning is resulting in a broad range of impacts at multiple levels. One of the central impacts — interconnected with all other impacts — has been the network's deepening focus on putting equity at the core of our individual and collective work.

Philanthropy overall has been slow to contribute meaningfully or sufficiently to our national reckoning with racial injustice — and intensified through the racially inequitable impact of the pandemic and its accompanying economic crisis. While we all have much further to go, BCP members — including our staff at the Gates Foundation — have been better positioned to learn with humility and follow through with concrete actions. This is because trust fostered within the BCP network created space for discomfort, vulnerability and growth as we challenged each other to act more decisively and effectively on our collective value of racial equity.

What began as an investment strategy of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is now a more tightly woven network that is thriving — independent of the foundation — and is fully owned by its members. The BCP title was always a misnomer — neither community nor philanthropy needs to be “built.” They are inherently present in the social fabric of humanity. As this network evolves to its next stage, we’re eager to continue to learn from this remarkable web of leaders, organizations and communities that have invested deeply in an interconnected cycle of reflective learning and collective change.

### **Marie Sauter**

Advisor to the Director, Pacific Northwest Initiative  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

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This is the story of an initiative that started with a vision:



Better Philanthropy  
Through Community  
Participation

This vision was  
brought to life by...

initiative partners:

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

UNITED WAYS

IDENTITY FUNDS

initiative designers and facilitators:

PHILANTHROPY NORTHWEST

THE GIVING PRACTICE

a funder:

BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

WITH CO-FUNDING FROM INITIATIVE PARTNERS

With the right  
hearts, minds and  
following elements  
involved...

- Multi-year capacity-building funds
- Peer convening & learning
- Reflection & conversation
- Challenging conventional wisdoms defined by dominant culture
- Community engagement
- Trust

...we witnessed partnerships that fostered widespread impact, bringing communities to new and exciting destinations.



# DESTINATIONS

# We'll begin with the destinations.

An eight-year review of the initiative found results in six areas:

1. Communities across the region
2. The organizations that participated
3. Leaders in those organizations
4. How equity plays out in organizations and place
5. Local and state public policy advocacy efforts
6. The flow of government, corporate and private funding



## Community Results

**Community members have grown their sense of power and purpose.** BCP partners<sup>1</sup> report that they're seeing a greater sense of urgency, agency and possibility among people — nonprofit board members, residents on advisory committees, grassroots advocates, etc. — and organizations in communities in how they lead and also in their work with philanthropy. Where before working with nonprofits was considered community engagement, now BCP partners are going a step further — to engaging community members themselves.

**Funders have become more focused on equity.** BCP partners who say equity issues weren't even on their radar a couple of years ago are now asking tough questions of themselves, their organizations and their communities. Equity goals and metrics are being created. The question of how well their board represents their community is now being asked, as are questions about where philanthropic dollars are going. Some have significantly diversified their boards. Most have an equity goal framework in place. While the equity focus is especially true of those in BCP, participants are noticing a ripple effect on local partners.

**Increased understanding of systemic causes of social problems has changed community planning.** Participants are thinking upstream. In particular, they're focusing on root causes of disparities including systemic racism and the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), along with issues such as education equity and food security, and accounting for them in community health assessments and other local plans as well as their own theories of change.

**Community conversations are leading to community-defined priorities.** One participant held a series of conversations that ran for eight months and engaged more than 1,000 residents. The effort led to grantmaking that reflects emerging priorities. Other participants are rethinking their role as "conversation broker," recognizing how residents know their neighborhoods best, getting unexpected answers to questions and finding that meeting with community members is galvanizing board and staff work.

**Local networks are expanding their power.**

Participants are seeing how working through community networks – formal and informal – can open doors that once were closed. They're also seeing how they have the power to not only plug into networks but to help expand them – brokering relationships, encouraging collaboration, and convening distinct pockets of players around big issues.

**Funders see community foundations and United Ways as trusted local portals and partners.**

In several instances, participants were entrusted by large public and private funders with running ambitious local programs focused on children, cross-cultural communication, and economic development as well as organizing funds in response to the census and COVID-19. This all told a vote of confidence in their organizational capacity, local knowledge and community influence.

## Organizational Results

**BCP partners have trusted advisors who help them activate networks.** Moving to strategies that relied on engaging informal and formal local networks was effective in itself and yielded a lasting benefit – relationships with local leaders trusted by the community whom they could count on for advice and connection.

**BCP partners are engaging community voices in their grantmaking.** This was a big change to the traditional way of working. Grants committee charters were amended. Advisory committees were empowered. Local relationships were formed, going beyond the board. This also brought about a change in community approach – from “doing for” to “doing with.”

**BCP partners are giving community members more power over the grantmaking process.** This has been an accountability moment for community philanthropy organizations. Bylaws have been changed so community members can serve as the majority on a grants committee. Decision-making roles have been entrusted and power has been shared and released.

**BCP partners are shifting their role from transactional funder to learning partner.** The relationship has become key – and learning has become a critical part of that relationship. Seeing themselves more as a community partner than funder has enabled participants to push for shared success, focusing on outcomes and greater accountability.

**BCP partners are trusting grantees to shape their own capacity building.** Partners are moving towards trust-based philanthropy, allowing grantees to decide how money is spent, giving them patience and space to experiment, and respecting their practical wisdom and know-how.

**Board members of BCP partners are becoming bolder and more innovative.** Many board members who joined BCP convenings described these events as a turning point for their knowledge and skills. They changed their minds about organizational practices and began centering racial equity in their thinking about the work. They applied what they were learning from peers in other regions. They tested new roles and mental models. And they stepped up their leadership with fellow board members in advocating for BCP-inspired changes in their organizations.

## Leader Results

**BCP leaders – both staff and board – report they are shifting from leading with answers to leading by listening, bringing curiosity and offering what they can.** Humility, confidence and patience have been a critical part of this change. Leaders report a consistent set of realizations: they don't have to have the answers; listening is part of leadership; and learning together can help organizations create more meaningful outcomes.

**BCP leaders are realizing their job is not just to do good work but also to take on the role of community advocate.** And they report learning how they can shine a light on critical issues and lift up voices in their community.

**BCP leaders are realizing how much change can happen through relationships.** Partnership with community members is increasingly seen as the main route to progress, more so than funding. Participants say they feel more prepared to take risks and more confident to be vulnerable with those in the community. Community members are gaining trust in these leaders as a result.

**BCP leaders are seeing the importance of their own learning when it comes to issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion.** They report being aware of the responsibility to learn and support learning in others, which in turn requires a willingness to be challenged. They report being increasingly aware of the need to "do their own work" first. And they report greater awareness of their roles as ally, listener and a holder of space.

## Equity Results

**BCP partners developed shared language and theory about equity.** This alignment, they report, has influenced the initiative's learning priorities over time and has been key to getting traction within their organizations. They've used data to highlight the effects of local disparities. They've added equity concepts to board conversations. They've trained staff. And they've added equity commitments and considerations to their strategies and theories of change.

**BCP partners have changed internal strategies, policies and practices.** They've taken a fresh look at their work, using an equity lens. They've shortened board terms to increase board diversity. They've rewritten job postings to emphasize skills, experiences and relationships related to equity. They've added non-discrimination statements to their grant applications. And they've engaged consultants and researchers on equity issues.

**BCP partners are pursuing community partnerships that advance equity.** One joined a coalition where they were trained in the Intercultural Development Inventory and are now addressing local incidents using interculturally competent strategies. Another partnered with a local transportation department to bring the National Equity Project to their community. A third became the go-to organization for public and private funders seeking to strengthen the Census 2020 count for their community.

## Advocacy Results

### **BCP partners are pursuing public policy advocacy together.**

Over time, partners have shifted their mindset on advocacy, recognizing how much advocacy work they were already doing without seeing it as such, and building their skills and confidence in this domain. And the results are telling: In 2018, a set of BCP partners signed onto a letter from philanthropy leaders to the U.S. Department of Commerce denouncing the Census Citizenship Question. In 2019, nine partners became co-investors in the Washington Census Equity Fund. They also funded community-based organizations that successfully advocated for the state legislature to allocate \$15 million for census outreach and education in hard-to-count communities.

### **BCP partners are bringing local voices to elected officials and are becoming go-to resources for government leaders.**

Two partners arranged board and staff meetings with local officials to educate them about the importance of early childhood home visits. Another met with legislators to share the results of community visioning and secured federal funding for action

plans. The latest cohort of BCP partners provided recommendations that helped inform a \$50 million allocation from the legislature for low-income housing. And another BCP partner helped create an equity discussion among four mayors and two police chiefs.

### **BCP partners are becoming champions of community efforts by advocating for community-identified priorities.**

One partner supported research into an affordable housing levy and elevated focus on housing issues in county government discussions. Another partner promoted child safety policies in the community. A third worked to raise awareness about the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls while a fourth partner encouraged community members to support tribal communities in their effort to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline.

## Funding Results

**Government, corporate and private funders are investing in BCP partners, support that many partners attribute in part to the skills and capacity they built through their participation in the initiative.** One corporate philanthropy regranted \$500,000 to seven partners for their work addressing behavioral health and health equity in their communities. The City of Seattle chose a BCP partner to regrant dollars. And a health collaborative of three BCP partners attracted investment from multiple public and private funders. These investments reflect a growing understanding of how BCP participants deepening relationships across the communities they serve allows them to regrant funds rapidly while also including groups that have traditionally had lesser access to resources.

**Funders are looking to BCP partners to serve as backbone organizations for local and state initiatives.** One partner was chosen by public and private funders to serve as the backbone for \$10.5 million for hard-to-count census funds in Oregon. An initiative created by two BCP partners received an initial infusion of \$750,000 from a private funder to engage families in identifying and creating new support and resources for this neighborhood of essential workers with historically high rates of transiency and underinvestment by local government.



The background features a teal gradient. On the left, there is a pattern of semi-transparent teal circles of varying sizes. On the right, there are several sets of parallel, slightly curved teal lines that create a sense of depth and motion.

# JOURNEYS

The destinations were significant. But for BCP partners, the journeys to get there were even more so. Six main journeys were taken during the initiative.

Journeys to...



1.  
More Authentic  
Community  
Engagement

2.  
Greater  
Commitment  
to Equity

3.  
More Engaged  
Board  
Members

4.  
Robust and  
Ready  
Networks

5.  
Stronger  
Organizational  
Capacity

6.  
Community  
Philanthropy as  
Leadership

1.

More Authentic  
Community  
Engagement



## When it comes to building community philanthropy, whose work is it?

One BCP leader's evolving response to that question echoes the journey of many. Her initial answer was that it was the work of her and her organization. But after reflecting on her experience, she realized it was the community's work — and her role was to hand over power and support that work.

"It was a shift in how partners thought about what it means to be in a community and who knows what's best for a community," said one of the BCP initiative designers. "They had to overcome the perfectionism in the source code of a lot of community philanthropy organizations."

Over the course of their participation in BCP, community foundations, United Ways and identity funds have shown the change made possible when broader community participation and perspectives are engaged. For BCP partners, the journey to more authentic community engagement had a few key stops along the way: adopting a listening and learning stance, cultivating relationships and integrating trust-based practices into grantmaking efforts.

## Adopting a Listening and Learning Stance

In the early days of BCP, community engagement was discussed often but in terms of tactics, such as holding convenings. In the years since, the definition of community engagement has expanded dramatically. BCP partners are now asking:

- What does it mean to be in community?
- Who do we not know in our community and how do we build relationships with them?
- What does our community need at this moment?

Asking those questions has led BCP partners to change the way they engage with communities. They started listening tours to learn about community needs. By showing up at new tables, BCP partners found they could better navigate community dynamics and ensure that organizational strategy and funding better matched the landscape. Building relationships helped get more candid feedback about how they had (or had not) shown up previously.

### CASE STUDY

**Blue Mountain Community Foundation's new strategic plan** "has us out in the community and seeking and using community input for grantmaking." The foundation partnered with others to host a series of Community Conversations that ran for eight months and engaged more than 1,000 community members. As a result, the foundation is not only making more focused and larger grants that reflect the community's priorities, but they are also thinking more regionally and are deepening their relationship with the Latinx community.

**Potlatch Fund** created a new committee to help coordinate its grant panels. Listening to their grantees helped Potlatch Fund see potential for overlap between some of their grant pools and recognize the need for twice-yearly grant application cycles.

#### CASE STUDY

**The United Way of Central Washington began taking their board out to the community.** This community engagement provided an opportunity for the board and staff to listen to community members share their needs and ideas about where United Way's next grant cycle should focus on. This process of going out and listening to the community in partnership with the **Yakima Valley Community Foundation** has been crucial to supporting local networks.

**"The work of community philanthropy can't just sit with us; we need to expand the network."**

#### On Listening and Learning

*"Our biggest shift is being vulnerable. What is the feeling people have when working with us?"*

*"Conversation broker is a new way of thinking of our role."*

#### On Moves That Work

*"Convening community conversations unearthed public safety (i.e. lighting to cross the street) as the #1 concern among our Latino/a population participants. We didn't anticipate that."*

*"We mapped out places where we weren't as engaged and began showing up to learn, listen and meet people."*

*"We had our first community training on DEI. Despite our anxiety, it went well. We showed up as a vulnerable participant and admitted we were a learner in this too. It demonstrated for us that admitting your vulnerability as a funder can change relationships for the better."*

## Relationship Building

BCP partners see relationships as the heart of philanthropy – the currency of its work, even more than money. They also recognize the time needed to cultivate and strengthen relationships. Often, community foundations and United Ways have found that they can fall into the trap of working “to” and “for” community rather than “with” or “as” community. To avoid that trap, BCP partners began making intentional pivots to strengthen their role in the community.

“Part of doing ‘with’ is showing up,” says a BCP initiative designer, “and they did that by going out into the community. Ten years ago, a lot of community philanthropy organizations saw themselves as ‘grass tops’ organizations at best. Now they’re essential participants at community tables. They know the community and are relevant in a much more immediate way.”

For communities of color and rural communities, who have been historically left out of the conversation, the way that BCP partners show up is crucial. Changes in outreach strategies, increased representation on grantmaking committees, and grants earmarked for communities of color are three ways that BCP organizations have developed and strengthened relationships with communities that have been marginalized.

## On Outreach Strategies

*“In our refreshed strategic plan, we’re making a commitment to increasing connections in Native communities. We haven’t been intentional in doing this up until now.”*

*“By switching to a strategy of activating community-based networks through convening trusted community leaders in our Census 2020 collaboration with the County auditor’s office, we have seen remarkable results. When we invited Black community leaders to work on the census, 38 people came to our office. This would not have happened in our old way of doing things.”*

## CASE STUDY

**Whatcom Community Foundation:** According to Mauri Ingram, President and CEO of Whatcom Community Foundation, the foundation's greatest asset is its community ethos. By 2019, while Mauri had seen meaningful improvement in the foundation's efforts to engage the community, it still had work to do before making an "A" grade. We asked her what this grade would look like.

"I think that we would have more individuals in the community and certainly more nonprofits coming to us and asking us to be a part of something," Mauri says, "because they trust us and because they believe that we're going to add some sort of value to their effort. That's success."

One example of collaboration that has paid off was prompted by 2016's divisive presidential election and the further polarization that it fueled. During this time, the foundation reached beyond the nonprofit sector to also include the

community at large, hoping to create meaningful ways for neighbors to connect. Project Neighborly offers small grants of up to \$5,000 for projects rooted in creative ideas that build relationships and understanding. The project was not just a "feel good" campaign. It has had a real impact on neighborhoods and city policy. More than 95% of respondents to a 2018 Center for Effective Philanthropy evaluation of Project Neighborly said their efforts resulted in more people learning about their neighbors, and more than 80% of respondents believe people are participating in more community events because of the effort.

"You may have heard the notion that you can 'do to...,' 'do with...' or 'do as' community," Mauri says. "We're always striving to 'do as community,' because we all live here. We are part of the fabric and the fabric is part of us."

### On Increased Representation

*"We question if our community is 30%-40% Latino, should we also have 30%-40% Latino representation on our board."*

*"We amended our grants committee charter to add representation from rural counties. We now have more active advisory committees with clarified roles and co-ownership. This might mean more input, but as we become better listeners, we have come to see the input not just as more opinions, but more of a community-voiced mandate that we need to respect and respond to."*

*"How do we address capacity building needs in rural nonprofits? Considering a model of partnership councils or formalizing affiliates where local boards would make local decisions. Thinking here is to allow them to lead themselves with our support."*

### On Increased Financial Commitment

*"We've created specific equity goals and metrics, increased community engagement for planning and review to promote more diverse representation, and have a commitment to increase funds to match communities of color in our area, which means increasing funding from 10% to 40% to communities of color."*

*"We began working on our logic model that seeks to span all our grant programs and puts Native youth at the center of our work. As a result, I wanted to learn more about ACEs and models of resiliency and hear more about how other funders are seeking to address these concepts in their work. BCP provided that content and understanding."*

## Trust-Based Philanthropy

Trust was consistently named as a crucial component of the BCP initiative. The Gates Foundation started BCP by providing grants to participating organizations in a trust-based way — through multi-year unrestricted grants, offering support beyond the grant through convenings, being transparent and responsive to BCP partner needs and not mandating a formula for success. As highlighted by the quotes below, by modeling trust-based practices the Gates Foundation inspired BCP partners to do the same. The partners began to embrace a trust-based approach to their own philanthropy to alleviate power imbalances and increase longevity of their relationships with grantees.

“Conversations with the Gates Foundation reinforced that funding is flexible and that we can do course corrections”

“Amazing that we should use the grants to do whatever will serve our organization to meet BCP’s overall goals”

“This made me realize BCP wasn’t just a project...but a process with learning as one of the key outcomes”

### CASE STUDY

For the **Pride Foundation**, an important takeaway from BCP has been an increased commitment to the practice of trust-based philanthropy. The work of the Pride Foundation is very community connected. Because they are an LGBTQ philanthropy organization, most of the staff are LGBTQ or are in the community. As Jeremiah Allen, Director of Programs, shared “we are part of the community work. And I think that those relationships are transparent in the work that we do.” Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pride Foundation awarded proactive grants and eliminated all of its reporting requirements for community grants. At the end of 2020, the Pride Foundation’s team held phone conversations with each grantee and the staff members wrote the reports rather than placing additional work on the grantees. Moving forward, Jeremiah said the goal is to have minimal reporting, and eliminate “the most amount of burden” for organizations.

### On Relationship and Mindset

*"We're evolving from a transactional grant maker to a transformational change maker."*

*"We are now exploring how we can involve community members and neighbors, along with nonprofits as partners."*

### On Evaluation and Expectations

*"Building resilience can't be measured. The impact of the work is less about quantitative data and more about how to use data to show real impact in our community."*

*"We've moved to seeing ourselves more as a community 'partner' and not 'funder.' This helps us ask the question 'How do we succeed together?' It also helps us correct perception among grantees that have lots of assumptions about what we want. We are now encouraging grantees to report back to us on what was accomplished and not what was spent on what."*

### On Grantmaking

*"Historically, we have been project based and seeking instant gratification with our grants: start something and see it in action in six months. The grants we are making in early learning and capacity building are either general operating support or long-term bets, and it will take time to see results. It makes us nervous, but we are excited."*

*"Flexible, nimble funding is such a gift even in a small amount. It really frees our partners to think creatively."*

*"We are looking at different power sharing models. Most models focus on programmatic allotment of grant awards. We are taking it one step further and looking at how to share power about our overall grantmaking strategy and shifting towards that."*

*"We broke the grant committee into three committees with the goal of getting more community members on these committees."*

*"We offered funding for organizational support grants for grassroots organizations in early learning. Instead of making the decisions ourselves, we invited community leaders – people who are directly affected by the issues – to determine the grant awards. That was new for us and very exciting."*

2.

Greater  
Commitment  
to Equity



For participating organizations, BCP spurred a stronger commitment to equity.

The initiative helped create a shared language and theory of action around equity. While BCP partners started in different places, they are all making progress toward more equitable practices, both internally and externally.

**For organizations striving to further embed equity, they can learn from their fellow BCP partners.** For example, Pride Foundation, who brings an intersectional lens to all of their work, has served as a beacon of support. As Jeremiah Allen, Director of Programs, shares “what Pride Foundation brings and why I think that we’re so good at our work is because we recognize and work really hard on understanding that in order to support LGBTQ communities, we have to support the most marginalized within LGBTQ communities, which are communities of color, trans folks, disabled – everyone in the margins of LGBTQ. We’re intentional about it.” This strong and intentional approach to equity has also allowed Pride Foundation to support other BCP organizations who are beginning to bring an intersectional lens to their own work.

“While the initiative was committed to equity work in the beginning,” says a BCP initiative designer, “it was the power of sharing stories and learning together about inequities that influenced the group to choose this as their central focus for the second iteration of BCP.” This continuation serves as a pivotal moment as BCP partners work towards operationalizing and internalizing equitable strategies, practices and policies.

#### CASE STUDY

**Greater Tacoma Community Foundation’s leadership team has revisited their approach to initiatives, strategy and projects through the lens of DEI. They are moving toward designing a theory and a logic model of outputs, outcomes and impact for all their discretionary grant making. “We have been actively evolving from transactional to transformational over the past four years. BCP provides models of learning, a peer cohort to learn from and with and a good dose of courage to jump out there and put a stake in the ground around community, DEI and advocacy.”**

### On organizational equity shifts

*"We hired a researcher to look at our department and analyze what we say or don't say about DEI, what we are or are not doing, and what are some next steps related to our policies, mission and strategy. The info we have gotten has given me courage to push ahead."*

*"We heard repeatedly the importance of the commitment from leadership. It makes a difference when the CEO is committed to the work and that accountability and institutionalizing DEI comes from leadership."*

*"How we do our work is different. Our internal work (grant review; being in community) has been influenced by our external work. Racial equity is now embedded in our strategic plan. Every priority has a focus on centering racial equity in all functions."*

### On board shifts to advance equity

*"For this round of board recruitment, we prioritized folks with lived experience or if they were white, they had experience with racial equity work. Our current board was recruited with the understanding that equity is a priority for our organization. We know what we need to do as a community foundation. We can't go back."*

### CASE STUDY

In their recent Program Officer hiring process, **Yakima Valley Community Foundation** rewrote the job description to emphasize several aspects of the role that are DEI-centered, such as being bilingual, having both experience with and strong relationships within communities of color, and having a background working with elected officials. They then created a community advisory group of leaders of color and offered a stipend for conducting the first round of interviews.

Simultaneously, leaders of participating BCP organizations have undergone their own personal equity journeys. Their experience parallels the evolution suggested by the CompassPoint Leadership Framework, which acknowledges how leadership is built outward

from the self, as leaders first identify personal purpose and increase their self-awareness before they can lead others and an organization.

### Leadership Skills to Build Power



© 2015 CompassPoint Nonprofit Services. Adapted from the work of Center for Creative Leadership, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, Daniel Goleman, David Day, V. Jean Ramsey, Jean Kantanbu Latting, and Building Movement Project.





**Sharon Miracle,**  
**President and CEO,**  
**Yakima Valley**  
**Community Foundation**

### **What does equity mean to you?**

"People of color have systematically been left out of access to resources in our society. Prior to getting trained on it, I viewed it as people who were just poor. I had the old 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' mentality — some people make it and some people don't. I never knew that it was tied to systemic racism. At first, I wondered, can that even be true? There's insurmountable evidence. There's no doubt."

### **How has your understanding of equity changed over time?**

"When I joined the community foundation ten years ago, I don't know if I even used or heard the word 'equity.' It was not part of my daily conversation. Now there isn't an hour in the day when it's not being thought about and discussed. It's completely different."

### **What do you think others can learn from your journey?**

"Some folks aren't ready to let go of deeply-held beliefs. The older you get, the deeper the story is in your head. But most people are loving human beings who can empathize. If this is how you were treated, what would your life be like? What's the right and loving thing to do? That's how I approach philanthropy.

Some folks aren't ready to let go of deeply-held beliefs. The older you get, the deeper the story is in your head. But most people are loving human beings who can empathize.

”

It's a lifelong journey. When I started in my position I participated in some trainings. I was a sponge, taking it all in. You can't let it stop there. Life can go on, you're pushing paper, but it keeps coming up if you watch for it. The pandemic — wow, has a glaring light been put right on equity. Every day I have a little more knowledge. What do I do with that knowledge?"

### **What are examples of how your organization is living the value of equity?**

"Staff asked, 'Can we do trust-based grantmaking?' I said, 'What do you mean can we? We will do trust-based grantmaking! We built relationships. When the pandemic hit, we picked up the phone and asked 'What do you need?' and started getting checks out the door. Trust is when you live in a community and know what organizations are doing and what life would be like without them.



Trust is when you live in a community and know what organizations are doing and what life would be like without them.

One example is our support for research on missing and murdered Indigenous women. We don't view our work as spokespeople. We listen and help them open doors and build relationships and have their voices heard. How can we ease the path? What can we do? That's what influence is about."

### **How have you lived the work internally?**

"One challenge is on board and staff recruitment. We had a program officer position open up. We found a spreadsheet that helped us weight applications in terms of lived experience and diversity. We had some incredible candidates and ended up with someone with deep lived experience. As you start diversifying, you get more connections in the community.

It can be challenging but also super rewarding. I know some leaders worry, 'I don't know if I can move my organization.' We can make an excuse every day to not do something that is hard. But you're in this role for a reason. Don't let there be excuses."



**LoAnn Ayers,**  
**President and CEO,**  
**United Way of Benton &**  
**Franklin Counties**

**How has your understanding of equity changed over time?**

"It's about the personal journey and connecting with theory and the lived experiences of those we're representing. During my academic career, I realized I had advantages that many of my students didn't, and there were dozens that weren't able to overcome them. BCP surrounded me with a whole different understanding of equity. It's so cool to have the tools and relationships and be able to make progress individually and as an organization. It's been an amazing evolutionary journey."

**How is your organization living the value of equity today?**

"Part of the challenge is thinking about the unintended consequences of well-intended structures. We had a beautiful structure – with unintended consequences. For example, our grantmaking process required an audit. We did a listening tour of nonprofits and learned that small and new organizations

couldn't apply because of that requirement. We're also rethinking our relationships with nonprofits and moving away from a vendor relationship – the McDonald's method of how many burgers did you serve with this grant?"

**What does it look like to rethink your relationships with nonprofits?**

"Now we're including small and new nonprofits. We're getting more intentional about addressing inequities. We're trying out unrestricted funding. We're building feedback loops. We're offering debriefs and grant writing training whether or not you get a grant from us. Rather than being 'more work that it's worth' we're trying to be 'more worth than it's work.' In other words, bring more to the table than we expect back. "

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**Your organization has used your resources in some unconventional ways. Can you talk about some examples?**

"During the pandemic, we've used our office space to be the Personal Protective Equipment depot for local nonprofits. We worked with FEMA and provided 175,000 masks to nonprofits. Another example: We helped facilitate a group buy of retirement benefits among a partnership of nonprofits. For some, it's the first time they can offer retirement benefits to staff."

**You're in a racially diverse community that is also conservative. What has that meant in terms of the pace of what you've done?**

"I see so much opportunity. Patience is a virtue that I continue to pursue. One thing I got from BCP is having a thoughtful approach to managing change. We have a lot of divergent philosophies here in a Republican stronghold. We're trying to create relationships, conditions and the confidence to go faster. We're framing equity, respect for all and inclusion as social and business imperatives for our community.

We're framing equity, respect for all and inclusion as social and business imperatives for our community.

“

I've pulled the seventh-generation principle from various BCP convenings as a guide star, thinking ahead seven generations and also back and how people's families got to where they are now. When I hear objections about social justice, it helps to frame it with the seventh-generation principle. Chances are if you go back seven generations, most people's families were immigrants from somewhere. It's a very calming perspective."



**Karri Matau,**  
**President and CEO,**  
Community Foundation of  
Snohomish County

**How would you describe your personal journey related to equity and where you were at the beginning compared to where you're headed?**

"I was oblivious to the pervasive white culture that existed everywhere in myself, organization and our systems. I did not understand the connections to systemic racism and my own privilege and internalized superiority. Where I am now is simply going deeper into these same issues and being able to 'catch' myself earlier falling back into racist patterns and behaviors."



I was oblivious to the pervasive white culture that existed everywhere in myself, organization and our systems. I did not understand the connections to systemic racism and my own privilege and internalized superiority.

**What is the best example of how your organization is living the value of equity today?**

"We are not doing anything that feels like an initiative or a project. We are working on embedding the culture, accountability and action of equity and social justice everywhere so that it's not an add-on. We have not been waiting to do things perfectly. We have been learning by doing, with a clear understanding that we are not going to do something or make a change if we are not living into the value."

One example is we chose not to write a Black Lives Matter statement because we were so far away from truly demonstrating that we stand with the Black community. We felt it would not be authentic even if it was what we aspired to do. We knew our actions up to that point were not aligned.

Another example is we are hiring a new position and contracted with an equity consultant to coach and mentor us along the way, from job description to interviews. We've made significant changes to our process as a result. Our VP of grantmaking worked with an equity consultant to award several million dollars in CARES funding as an intermediary. She and her team have completely transformed our grant process. We are busting down the doors to the foundation and learning by doing."



**What is one example of how your organization was not living the value of equity and what did you change?**

"Our organization has been white-centered and white led since inception. We recognized that we would have to make a big shift in our board and staff culture to attract and retain people of color onto our board and staff. We shifted our thinking away from just adding people of color to understanding we had to make internal changes first. We spent two years shifting the board focus before we recruited folk of color to join us.

Our networks have consistently included the same 100-200 community leaders, mayors, CEOs and white-led nonprofits. In 2019, I began with a goal of meeting 100 new contacts – including informal and formal leaders who we had never talked with before. My priority was on communities of color. That was a slow start that continued into 2020. However, we've seen a more significant shift since our COVID fund work. We had very few relationships with BIPOC-led organizations. The COVID fund last spring launched us into a new era of engagement with communities of color as we began prioritizing funding to BIPOC led/serving groups."

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**Tim Henkel,**  
**President and CEO,**  
**Spokane County**  
**United Way**

**When you think about your organization's journey related to equity, how would you describe where you were and where you're headed?**

"I don't know if we set off on a purposeful journey. We knew we needed to pay attention to it in a way that is more than lip service. Our effort got started with working with the Harwood Institute to have some intimate community conversations. We knew we had to look internally at who we are and what we represented. I had board and staff do the Intercultural Development Inventory. That launched us into a more active, 'now what?' direction. How do we use this information? Then BCP happened."



We knew we had to look internally at who we are and what we represented.

**How has your board engaged in this work?**

"They wondered what we were doing early on. 'Let's see where it goes.' It helped to engage board members to think about these issues in their own workplaces. No one has said 'This is the greatest thing in the world' and no one has said 'What the hell are we doing and why?'

What we all experienced with the death of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd changed things. You can't walk away from that, or from how people of color are disproportionately being affected by this pandemic. There was a lack of understanding of how people have been impacted. People in Spokane weren't listening to each other."

**How has your personal approach to equity issues changed over time?**

"The most important frame I learned, and it's been difficult, has been doing with rather than to. I've been doing this work for more than 30 years. I had been doing to — 'Here's my perception of what you need to do.' It was a savior mentality. I had to understand how that can be received. It was personally challenging and hard for me to accept. But that's where the learning takes place. How do you approach the work so that people are embraced for who they are?"

### **What makes equity work challenging?**

"Philanthropy in our community is white-based. There can be a perception of 'to' versus 'with' and an accidental delivery of 'to' versus 'with'. We need to continue to question what and how we're doing things and be authentic about that and be open to criticism and challenges. It can be a bumpy road. How do you build trust and sustain trust, especially with communities of color? You do it by living it and when you screw up, you start over."

We need to continue to question what and how we're doing things and be authentic about that and be open to criticism and challenges.

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3.

More Engaged  
Board  
Members



BCP convenings have provided an added benefit for participating organizations – the opportunity for board members to learn, explore and share with peers.

Staff at BCP organizations have noted how their board members share what they experienced and learned with other board members upon returning home from BCP convenings. By all accounts, the experience for board members who participated in those convenings was illuminating and in some cases transformational.

A BCP initiative designer expanded on this by saying that “board and staff alike shared that they rarely had time to travel, learn, reflect and plan together like they had at BCP. Many explained that their time at BCP was often the moment where major strategic pivots have happened.”

Furthermore, peer influence among board members was particularly important for work related to diversity, equity and inclusion. The convenings created a space for pushing conversations further because board members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions, be inspired by others and learn to take greater risks within their own organizations. Many board members of color reported that they felt affirmed in this process and that BCP helped increase their influence.

## Three examples highlight the power of BCP for board members.

**Whatcom Community Foundation:** For board member Aaron Brown, that engagement takes the form of foundation staff “challenging us to dream bigger.” Their BCP peers have shared new sets of tools and new ways of thinking, according to Brown, learning right alongside staff members. **Because of this, the “board began moving from a traditional fiduciary role to more of a board that was collaborative and really co-generating ideas with staff,” Brown says. “That was a real cultural shift.”**

**Community Foundation of Snohomish County:** Maddy Metzger-Utt and Karri Matau of the Community Foundation of Snohomish County made sure board members participated in BCP. “We wanted to not be the ‘staff experts,’” Karri says. “At first, we took the same board members so they could go

deep into these conversations,” and share what they learned with the full board. More recently, various board members attend BCP to participate in its community of practice centered on equity, diversity and inclusion. “The initiative played an important role in widening the foundation’s perspective on these issues. **“As a result of this BCP work, the board has started having much more explicit and serious conversations around racial equity.”**

**Greater Tacoma Community Foundation:** BCP has built the board’s understanding of what advocacy means in a community foundation and why it’s so important to what we do. **“Our board has learned a lot about the importance of being intentional and explicit about language around DEI. Every time we have a topic at BCP it comes back to our board meeting.”**

### On Increased Representation

*"Our board has understood through BCP that to do the work we need capacity to do it. Our board is also opening their minds about value of unrestricted grants and the CEO needs to have some discretionary funding – I now have up to 10% of grants budget which is a complement to the community listening."*

*"Our board members are excited about saying yes to new things. For discretionary funds we've been using our knowledge and community connections to make decisions. It's a great deal of relief to be more responsive. On the grants committee, they have more sense of impact and connection to the work and making things happen."*

*"Where before BCP it was a very top-down kind of hierarchical structure, now staff has a seat at the table for board meetings. We're able to provide feedback and input and guidance. I think the board views us as trusted partners in this work as well."*

*"To us, leadership development goes back to this board-staff partnership. When you try to bring back the experience from a conference, however powerful, it's just not the same, so having board members who've shared that experience and with whom you've been able to process in a different way, that really helps to bring things to life in a more meaningful way and a more actionable way for the board."*

4.

## Robust and Ready Networks



## Formal and informal community networks proved essential to the work of BCP partners.

The initiative created an opportunity for participants to expand their perspectives beyond their individual organization and see themselves as — and, indeed, become — part of something larger.

“When you have more relationships and are a part of more networks,” says one BCP initiative designer, “you can have your ear to the ground and be more responsive. You can hear what’s going on and play a role. Meeting new and different people and finding ways to be relevant also makes the work more interesting and fun.”

The journeys below highlight what this evolution looks like in practice.

## Internal Networks

Peer learning is at the core of BCP. Organizations are encouraged to share both successes and mistakes, allowing for good practices and lessons learned to expand beyond one organization. In reflecting on the initiative, BCP partners have consistently pointed to the learning that happened within the internal network of participants.

### CASE STUDY

#### **Yakima Valley Community Foundation**

Lindsay Boswell, a Senior Program Officer at Yakima Valley Community Foundation, found that her BCP peers around the state created a place where she could ask questions, get referrals for stellar DEI consultants, and “compare notes” and experiences with her organization’s equity journey. Lindsay said a real estate analogy comes to mind and applies to BCP in terms of “comparables.”

“In BCP, there are organizations like yours, that may be small in staff and budget, or based in a rural area, with an operating endowment,” she explained. “You can identify peers at the same stage of their organizational life as your foundation.”

Lindsay said it’s invaluable to be part of a network outside of central Washington that comprises organizations operating statewide and regionally.

## CASE STUDY

In 2017, additional funding was awarded to a subset of four BCP partners working to support more equitable education outcomes through collective action. The **Collective Action for Education Equity (CAFEE)** partners all met these threshold and selection criteria:

- The partner's work originates from the community.
- Its focus is on pursuing equitable education outcomes – to increase education attainment and close education opportunity and outcome gaps for low-income students and students of color.
- It involves public sector agencies from varying levels of education, including one or more K-12 school districts, higher education institutions, and/or publicly funded early learning programs.
- It includes multiple private sector partners.
- It has collectively identified goals and a formal governance process.
- The collaboration or initiative is already underway.

The four CAFEE partners are:

- Excelerate Success, Spokane County United Way
- Investing in Children, Yakima Valley Community Foundation
- Kitsap Strong, Kitsap Community Foundation
- Successful Families 2020, United Way of the Columbia Willamette

Over the course of four years, CAFEE partners grew into a powerful internal network. Partners met for three days annually as a community of practice in addition to learning through dialogues with guest speakers. Each of the four partners employed various strategies to operationalize equity in their work from the beginning. Furthermore, they explored the role of trust in galvanizing community and the differences in how trust is built and maintained between individuals, organizations and larger systems.

**“When it started, each individual brought their own individual understanding and comprehension into the collaborative. What we've seen over time is how that has shifted into the collective learning.”**

## On Internal Networks

*"I think [it's important to develop] relationships with colleagues, with those with different perspectives, with folks that are in more rural communities than we are. The relationships and access to subject matter experts in the field has been huge."*

*"We are diving into roles we haven't tried before and learning really fast. How do we own our learning without making others suffer? Maybe our reason for not diving in before is because we didn't want to learn (and make mistakes) in public. Our co-learning and learning together is from BCP."*

*"Our whole dynamic, the way we do everything has changed and the board is relying on us learning from other people."*

*"As a fairly small community foundation, it's hard to think bigger than what you see on a daily basis. The diversity, equity and inclusion trainings, the advocacy trainings, the relationships we've built, the access to very intelligent speakers and other partners, I would say has been transformative."*

*"If we were to rewind five years ago, we weren't doing community work and not sure we would be today if not for the learning cohort. The community engagement and capacity building support really influenced us, and we've learned and changed. We have so many more and new relationships and without BCP, we would still be more insular. BCP built our capacity and what we've learned from BCP, we can apply externally."*

## External Networks

The initiative also equipped BCP partners to form stronger external partnerships. Here are four examples within BCP that emerged:

1. **Innovia Foundation** partnered with Greater Spokane Progress to bring *Why Race Matters* into the community and is going to be working with Rural Alliance, a group of school superintendents, to prioritize that conversation. This was a city-wide effort, made up of superintendents, counselors, and rural educators.
2. Six organizations in Spokane, including **United Way of Spokane County**, have been trained to use the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) instrument and now work as a community of practice to advance cultural competence and intercultural conflict resolution.
3. **United Way of Columbia Willamette** was identified as the backbone for the Census 2020 hard-to-count work in Portland. The city, county and private funders turned to them. “With support from BCP, we developed this competency in reaching community. The private philanthropy folks are seeing us differently.”

### 4. **Community Foundation of North Central Washington**

partnered with Our Valley, Our Future, an organization that has done significant community outreach and was very cognizant of bringing the Latinx voice to the table. The group produced a grassroots community priority list based on the thousands of people who shared their opinions on what would constitute game-changing projects for the region. Because of this, CFNCW was able to tackle a whole host of projects that were easy wins and support true community needs. That would not have been possible without BCP funding.

At the beginning of the BCP initiative, many of the participating organizations did not think of themselves as a network. Today, BCP partners recognize that they are a node within larger networks, the initiative network in addition to networks within their own community, and that they are part of a movement toward something larger than themselves.

## CASE STUDY

Leaders from the **Kitsap Community Foundation**, United Way of Kitsap County, Suquamish Tribe and Kitsap Public Health District came together in 2013 to form Kitsap Strong, a collaborative effort to address root causes impeding the health, safety and welfare of county residents.

"Kitsap Strong's goals — preventing ACEs, building resiliency, promoting equity in Kitsap County — are bigger than any single agency can address; collaboration is essential. BCP funding serves as an important catalyst in drawing broader community support, providing enough flexibility to support the multi-pronged efforts of a collective impact project in addition to supporting monitoring and evaluation of the work being done. So, Kitsap Strong gathers data on the strength of partnerships and the impact of its networks," Katie Eilers, former Director of Community Health at the Kitsap Public Health District shares. This data allowed for them to attract additional investments from the Health

District, CHI Franciscan, the Healthcare Authority and Group Health Foundation. Kitsap Strong credits BCP for the opportunity to create the partnership and attract the dollars.

Another important contribution from BCP to Kitsap Strong was connecting it to other organizations with the same aims, particularly the four members of a BCP peer group, Collective Action for Education Equity (CAFEE). Their meetings offered opportunities to share successes and challenges, creating a community of practice. "That was a really important part for me," one member of Kitsap Strong shares. "We work in a foundation, and we work for our community, but we are the community. We are the people who were in poverty, and we are working in the trenches to figure it out for the rest of our community." BCP and CAFEE came at a perfect time for the members of Kitsap Strong, creating a trusted network of peers and allowing for a stronger foundation of this collaborative effort.

5.

Stronger  
Organizational  
Capacity



From the start, BCP sought to build organizational capacity.

BCP partners built their capacity in two distinct ways – through financial and technical support provided by the Gates Foundation, Philanthropy Northwest and The Giving Practice, and through pooling resources and partnering with other initiative participants.

## Financial and Technical Support

Access to unrestricted funding from the initiative, in tandem with learning opportunities provided by the twice-a-year convenings, allowed for capacity to come to life for BCP partners. The initiative created a container where tailored and adaptive support was provided, allowing partners to scale toward their specific needs and unique characteristics.

### CASE STUDY

In 2014, the **Latino Community Fund of Washington** had two staff members. In 2017 LCF joined BCP, which offered resources not simply to increase funding for local programs but to invest in the leadership of community organizations — including their own. Funding from BCP has enabled them to attract, manage and deploy additional resources which have in turn allowed their staff to expand to nearly 15 people and their grantmaking to sextuple. BCP also provided technical assistance and opportunities for peer learning to support this shift toward greater capacity.

For work related to the 2020 census, Latino Community Fund stood ready to lead across Washington to prevent the undercounting of Latinx community members. They leveraged their volunteer resources and passed on the benefit of capacity to United Way of Benton Franklin, another BCP partner, by providing five summer fellows to focus specifically on census efforts in the Tri-Cities region of Washington.

## Pooled Resources

The relationships built within internal and external networks allowed for the pooling of resources and for more adaptive responses to community priorities. One example of pooled resources is the Casino Road Initiative, a partnership between the Community Foundation of Snohomish County, United Way of Snohomish County and the Whitehorse Foundation (a donor-advised fund of Seattle Foundation).

### CASE STUDY

In Snohomish County, BCP facilitated a relationship between **United Way** and one of its fellow BCP partners, the **Community Foundation of Snohomish County** — a rare kind of partnership, given that in many other communities two such organizations are often rivals. Both organizations had separate programs operating in Casino Road, a neighborhood with the greatest concentration of poverty in Everett.

Through their work together in BCP, the community foundation and United Way learned how they could pool their strengths. They agreed the community's needs, as voiced by its residents, should form the basis for their merger in 2018. Today, Connect Casino Road aims to address the needs of entire families rather than providing separate programs for children and adults, bringing together both a programmatic and system approach to the effort.

Their collaboration hasn't stopped there. Staff from the community foundation have also joined United Way's diversity, equity and inclusion work group. "We're having lots of new conversations, exchanging ideas and looking for ways to collaborate," says Allison Barbour, former President and CEO of the United Way of Snohomish County. "I think BCP has elevated that to an extent for us, because they recognize the uniqueness of the growth in our relationship."

An added benefit of increased capacity was that it allowed for BCP partners to accept investments from corporate and private funders. Based on their reputation, Premera Blue Cross' Social Impact Program regranted \$500,000 each to seven BCP participants. The foundations awarded grants to nonprofits addressing behavioral health and health equity in their respective communities. This pilot program allowed Premera Blue Cross to reach further in its efforts to improve access to behavioral health solutions, particularly in underserved communities. "Community foundations are well-positioned to identify and address their region's problems," said Paul Hollie, who leads Premera Social Impact. "They are embedded closer to their communities, enabling them to leave a lasting impact."

Additionally, Greater Tacoma Community Foundation has a multi-year partnership with the Wallace Foundation to support the Tacoma Whole Child partnership, a community-wide effort to ensure every child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged in and out of school, and Yakima Valley Community Foundation partnered with the Knight Foundation, Northwest Public Radio and Radio KDNA in working to build cross-cultural communication.

#### CASE STUDY

A youth homelessness grant from the Anchor Community Initiative reflects a new level of aligned action by Eastern Washington funders. **Innovia Foundation, Empire Health Foundation and Providence all contributed matching funds to Spokane County United Way's application to launch the initiative as one of the first four Washington State community initiatives.** Once funding was secured, Avista Utilities then stepped up to match this original funding pool with an additional \$100K.

6.

## Community Philanthropy as Leadership



## How community philanthropy is understood by practitioners and by communities is continually evolving.

Traditionally, community foundations and United Ways have been viewed as charitable banks. But the tides are changing within the entire field and within the initiative. BCP partners — large and small — are leaning in, leading and presenting a united front against issues negatively impacting their communities.

## Policy and Advocacy

At the beginning of BCP, many partners did not want to step into the advocacy space. Instead, they chose to stay “neutral.” One initiative designer reflects on the first meeting of the equitable policy community of practice in 2015 where “partners shared how little they knew about policy and their discomfort with potentially upsetting donors or stakeholders by taking a controversial position.”

Over the course of many years, the BCP initiative has recast how its members understand and pursue advocacy by positioning it as an extension of the initiative’s values of equity and community engagement. Neutrality has a cost and silence is a decision that can severely impact communities, particularly communities of color and low-income communities. Because of this, BCP partners began to make the journey from “neutrality” to systems change work and to advocate for community-identified priorities.

The following are some examples of the partners’ engagement:

**2020 Census:** BCP participants played a central role in ensuring hard-to-count communities were reflected in the 2020 census. In 2018, a set of BCP partners signed on to a letter from philanthropic leaders to the U.S. Department of Commerce denouncing the Census Citizenship Question. In 2019, nine BCP partners became co-investors in the Washington Census Equity Fund, a collaborative fund of 36 partners held by Philanthropy Northwest. The BCP partners also supported community-based organizations to successfully advocate for the legislature to allocate \$15 million of the state budget for census outreach and education in hard-to-count communities.

### On the Census

*"We are playing a central role with the 2020 Census and stewarding other foundations' resources. We're centering equity and focusing on hard-to-count communities. Upon reflection, if we had been focused on white mainstream organizations, funders might not have been as excited to put money towards pooled funding. We realize it was our commitment over time to support non-mainstream organizations that gave us credibility to partner with these funders."*

*"Through the census work, we were really investing in this coalition building that was happening among our community organizations that were really led by those historically under-counted communities. We invested in them to build up their capacity to get the message out. It was about really investing in communities of color and standing them up to be able to do the work, and then having the infrastructure post-census to be able to continue on that journey."*

**Anti-Transgender Ballot Initiative:** Pride Foundation worked with several BCP partners and nonprofits across the region to provide advocacy related education as part of their efforts to galvanize communities to stand up against an anti-transgender ballot initiative.

**Affordable Housing:** The BCP cohort provided recommendations that informed a \$50 million allocation from the legislature in support of low-income housing. Additionally, the Community Foundation of Snohomish County made an initial foray into exploring an affordable housing levy. The data collected informed a change in strategy to embed affordable housing and proposed funding into county discussions as well as a broader county initiative.

Furthermore, BCP partners who have strengthened their community engagement have leveraged their relationships with elected officials and government offices to amplify community voices and relay critical information on behalf of the communities they serve. Examples of this in practice include Yakima Valley Community Foundation and United Way of Central Washington arranging board and staff meetings with local elected officials, educating them about the importance of home visits on behalf of Investing in the Children Coalition and the United Way of Chelan Douglas; and meeting with legislators to share results of community visioning and action plans. Legislators were impressed by these results and allocated federal funding for this work.

## On the Role of Policy

*"Through local advocacy efforts, we have garnered support of our early learning and alleviation of poverty work. Both are listed as "game changer" initiatives in a community action plan."*

*"We're trying to be intentional about showing up on policy decisions to make sure we're in support of community leaders... We're in it for the long haul for communities that have been most impacted. This is a longer trajectory we're working towards."*

*"We see raising policy issues as 'giving light' in conversations."*

*"We've shifted our approach. We are now actively looking for policies that raise up community issues and community leaders, and build their capacity. We are investing in movements."*

*"Before we were just trying to solve immediate problems, but [policy and advocacy] is a way for us to invest long-term in the community."*

## On Policy Tactics

*"We are hiring a state lobbyist. BCP has opened our mind about how to approach community issues and how to use our funds and influence to bring resources into the community."*

*"We're building relationships with newly elected politicians. They don't live in the world where the work is happening, so we have to bring the work to them."*

## Responding to COVID-19

One initiative designer shared that “COVID-19 served as a final exam for BCP participants.” All of their learning throughout the duration of the initiative was tested, and BCP partners stepped up and stepped in to support the urgent needs of their communities.

### **Community Foundation of North Central Washington:**

The Community Foundation of North Central Washington paused all grantmaking programs indefinitely in favor of general operating support, rapid response, building cross-sector coalitions, experimenting with gathering safety-net funded organizations and having them divvy up resources through participatory grantmaking.

**Seattle Foundation:** Seattle Foundation managed the COVID-19 Response Fund which made grants to community-based organizations working on the frontlines to support the region’s most vulnerable communities. The Fund complements the work of public health officials and expands local capacity to address the many urgent and emerging needs created by the pandemic. Throughout each phase of the Fund, Seattle Foundation continued to hold to the following principles: move dollars rapidly and provide flexible resources, address direct needs, utilize a racial equity lens, support community-

based organizations with deep trust and history of serving disproportionately impacted community, practice a trust-based approach to funding and maximize the benefit of philanthropy's role in addressing needs related to COVID-19.

*“COVID-19 gives us an opportunity to think about concrete actions we can take that center racial equity.”*

**Potlatch Fund:** The persistent lack of funding to Native communities is real, and during the COVID-19 crisis, even more so. Less than 1% of philanthropic dollars in the United States reach Native communities during normal times. From the beginning of the pandemic, Potlatch Fund looked for the best way to support Native individuals and communities with emergency funding. By talking to current grant partners – the ones on the ground in their communities – they discovered the need for flexible, unrestricted funding in mostly rural and less populated communities within their service area. Potlatch redirected funds from their grantmaking program and general operations to fund past grantees affected by COVID-19. While they focused first on Native communities in Idaho, Oregon and Montana, they were able to make additional grants to individuals and organizations in Washington as more funding became available.

**Community Foundation of Southwest Washington:** The COVID-19 crisis gave the Community Foundation of Southwest Washington an opportunity to show what trust-based philanthropy looks like. They are demonstrating what happens when you truly center community and what it means to truly center community need. There's also a reaffirmation around racial equity because of the pandemic's disproportionate impact on communities of color. They have equal board and community members on their grants committee and are not requiring grant reports because they are in conversation with their grantees. As an organization, they are committed to keeping these practices going forward.

*"We didn't know what we didn't know going into BCP. We don't want to let a crisis go to waste. There's going to be a lot of changes in business practices that should go forward. There could be value in hearing what folks are doing differently and what they're going to keep."*

**Yakima Valley Community Foundation:** For Yakima Valley Community Foundation, trust-based philanthropy is iterative. The organization consistently talks with grantees and potential grantees about what they need and then designs a custom grant process to meet the specific needs of the grantee. However, YVCF's COVID-19 response has been their first full-on jump into trust-based philanthropy. Today, there's a joint funding review process between Yakima Valley Community Foundation, United Way of Central Washington and Latino Community Fund, where all three organizations, along with representation from their boards and community members review the applications together and make recommendations for funding.

*"We wouldn't have done it that way had it not been for COVID, I don't think, because we stood it up really fast, which was new for us. We're trying to get organizations to give us the very basics of their request. We're no longer asking them to do a whole lot of administrative hoops and burdens there."*

**Whatcom Community Foundation:** Whatcom Community Foundation has been consistently lifting up community voices and building relationships. So, when COVID-19 and related economic fallout started to impact their community, the board was able to quickly pivot to trust-based philanthropy. This meant moving to either no grant application required or asking two questions, with the answers reviewed solely by staff, and decision-making based on either existing relationships or relationships with another trusted partner.

*"It's become really evident how much we've gotten out of the BCP experience right now, with the way we've been able to mobilize in service to our community during the economic crisis and the pandemic that's ongoing. I just don't believe we would be doing the kinds of things right now without that experience. It's really been made visible to us a lot of the changes that have happened through BCP are things we feel really good about and help position us as a key responder for our community."*

**Community Foundation of South Puget Sound:**

The Community Foundation of South Puget sound has three funds for COVID-19 relief, each of them in partnership with United Way. As an organization, they are also beginning to think about what rebuilding and recovery looks like. Having a place like BCP, where they can hear about how other community foundations are adapting and thinking about recovery in their regions will be invaluable in this process.

# REFLECTIONS

Initiative designers from Philanthropy Northwest and The Giving Practice look back.



**The eight years of the BCP initiative have provided numerous opportunities for learning and growth in the initiative design itself.**

Initiative designers identified the following lessons that they learned along the way:

**Have an expansive definition of community philanthropy:**

While community philanthropy can often focus on community foundations — the grantmaking public charities that are dedicated to improving the lives of people in a defined local geographic area — BCP took a more expansive view of community philanthropy that included both United Ways and identity funds.

**Become comfortable with emergent learning:** Part of BCP's success was that it left space for emergent learning. Each BCP convening served as an iterative learning experiment, where The Giving Practice, Philanthropy Northwest and the Gates Foundation made the planning process visible and provided opportunities for BCP partners to shape the agenda and focus. This invitation allowed for more successful learning opportunities tailored to match the interests and needs of BCP participants.

*"What made it a vibrant and relevant learning experience is that we did not assume what they should learn and create a curriculum. Instead we continued to ask what they needed, and adapted the convening content and structure to meet their learning goals."*

**Take an adaptive approach to initiative design:** The design of the BCP initiative was not set in stone. The team changed aspects of the initiative depending on feedback from participants or larger shifts in the landscape. Examples of these pivots include expanding toward more group learning, where staff and trustees learn together and moving the in-person convening to a virtual setting in the wake of COVID-19. This adaptive approach allowed for greater flexibility and an ability to make real-time adjustments to meet the needs of the moment.

**Center multiple ways of knowing:** One intention of BCP was to highlight the expertise that existed within each BCP partner organization. Guest speakers or those at the podium weren't the only ones seen as experts. The initiative viewed each participant as such, with unique skills and experiences to share.

*"We always wanted participants reflecting with each other vs. talking at them."*

*"We didn't impose tools. Our work wasn't to know better. We had to be adaptive and in the flow with them, in the same way they are with communities."*

**Focus on the “how” of the “what”:** BCP created opportunities for participants to explore and give voice to “how” their organizations were showing up in “the what” of their work with community. This allowed for them to reflect on community perceptions of their organizations and led to ripple effects in how they showed up in the community.

**Meet people where they are:** The designers of the BCP initiative recognized that BCP partners were in different places in their learning, whether it be comfort with advocacy, knowing and listening to all parts of their communities, or regarding diversity, equity and inclusion. The initiative created meeting spaces with tailored opportunities for learning and growth. This was particularly effective for individuals who were at the beginning of the learning curve. Those who were further along were also provided opportunities to share their expertise and knowledge with the group.

**Recognize and address bumps in the road:** An eight-year initiative does not come without its challenges. The key was to acknowledge and navigate them together. Bumps in the road included:

- Increasing comfort with risk: The initiative designers shared that they could have leaned further into discomfort when facilitating difficult conversations. While it was an important characteristic of the initiative to meet people where they are, for equity work in particular, it is equally important that the pace of the work is not slowed down in an effort to prioritize the comfort of those earlier in their journeys.

*"To hold the group in conversations we did the 'both sides' thing and we have received criticism that we didn't push people enough in front of a big group."*

- Increasing diversity in who is designing the initiative: While BCP lacked racial diversity in its infancy, the initiative designers recognized a need to diversify who was developing, planning and leading content. In the iterations since, BCP has been committed to bringing diverse voices and perspectives into both the room and the planning process.

**Encourage sharing struggles:** With the support of group consultation and other workshop strategies, BCP participants grew comfortable bringing their dilemmas to the table for group discussion. This contributed to a group willingness to share what wasn't working for their organizations rather than only sharing their highlights or success stories.

*"We are interested in how cohorts can learn as a group. How they can develop enough trust with one another to share missed bets and failures and how we can create an environment and practices that support these opportunities."*

**Dedicate time to storytelling:** BCP convenings often bring speakers to share their work with participants. As part of their presentation, each speaker was asked to begin with their "journey story." Specifically, how did they get to where they are now? These stories resonated with BCP participants and helped to change their understanding of individuals in different sectors and with different backgrounds and lived experiences. If they had to do it all over again, initiative designers said they would have done even more storytelling.

**Build learning that can be replicated at home:** BCP intentionally used exercises and approaches that participating organizations could bring right back to their organizations and implement. Thus, BCP convenings served as a time to model for the group what could be done within each individual organization.

**Don't forget about laughter and full-hearted engagement:** During BCP convenings, the initiative designers tried to replicate the buoyant energy of a connected community. This included running gags and memorable signage that gave permission for participants to show up as neighbors as well as philanthropists. It also included lightning rounds of four-minute check-ins with someone new. This not only generated positive energy in the room — it also wove in any first-time attendees.

*"After eight years of BCP, community philanthropy around Washington feels more like a family network and less like an abstraction."*



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