Strengthening Collaborations to Build Social Movements:

TEN LESSONS FROM THE COMMUNITIES FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORM FUND (CPER)

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By Melinda Fine and Lauren Jacobs

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INTRODUCTION:
Leveraging Investments through Strengthening Collaboration

When change goals are large and far-reaching, no single organization or foundation can achieve them. Rather, big changes are most often achieved by broad movements.

Movements require a diversity of people and organizations who develop a shared vision, identity, and message frame for the changes they seek to bring about. They are fueled by common campaigns and coordinated action. They are grounded in relationships that are sturdy enough to navigate challenges and to seize collective opportunities that emerge from coalitions and alliances forged across regions, constituencies, and issues. These essential elements do not simply arise out of good will and best intentions. They depend on funders' sustained investment in field infrastructure, their tolerance for ambiguity, and their patience in realizing results.

Grantmakers that support movement building often find that they can achieve greater results when they collaborate with their donor peers by aligning or pooling funds toward shared goals, thereby increasing the total dollars available. Equally important, funders leverage their limited resources when they strengthen grantees' capacity to collaborate effectively with *each other.*

This report explores how grantmakers can help strengthen collaborations among supported groups to advance ambitious social change goals. As noted by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations in *Many Hands, More Impact,* grantmakers can play a number of critically important roles in supporting social movement building: investing in a broad range of organizations, change strategies, and issues; brokering relationships among groups and their allies; connecting grantees to one another in impactful ways; fostering learning to grow a field; and influencing peers and policy through these supports.[1]

We focus on grantmakers' "connector" role because we see it as a crucial – and often underexamined – strategy for expanding impact. But how, specifically, can grantmakers nurture connections – and

[1] See Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, *Many Hands, More Impact: Philanthropy's Role in Supporting Movements,* Washington, DC, 2013.

productive collaborations that may eventually arise from them—while remaining attuned to the strategic intentions of supported groups and the relationships they themselves want to cultivate? And how can the enhanced capacity that genuine collaboration requires be reflected and resourced in ways that meet funders' expectations of collaborative impact?

Our perspective on these questions is grounded in the experience of Communities for Public Education Reform (also referred to here on as "CPER" or the "Fund"). CPER is a national funders' collaborative committed to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for students—in particular students of color from low-income families—by supporting community-driven reforms led by grassroots education organizing groups. Maximizing collaborative potential has always been central to CPER's DNA, and is encoded in the Fund's vision, strategy, and operational structure. **In sharing lessons learned by CPER funders, staff, and grantees over the Fund's eight-year lifespan, we hope to contribute to the conversation about how grantmakers can nurture collaborations that advance building social movements for opportunity and justice.**

THE CPER MODEL: Strategies to Support Collaboration

In 2007, funders active in Grantmakers for Education's Working Group on Education Organizing (WGEO) launched Communities for Public Education Reform (CPER), in partnership with NEO Philanthropy (then Public Interest Projects), the 501 (c)(3) public charity engaged to direct the Fund. Over an eight-year period, NEO engaged a highly diverse set of 76 local and national funders in the CPER collaborative, raising close to $34 million and investing nationally in some 140 community groups and advocacy allies in national coalitions and in six target sites of varying scale (California, Chicago, Colorado, Mississippi, New Jersey, and Philadelphia). These groups, in turn, developed local leadership, national coalitions, and cross-issue alliances that helped to achieve over 90 policy reforms that have strengthened educational equity and opportunity.[2]

CPER's commitment to leveraging resources through collaborative action drew on funders' analysis of what it would take to reframe national discourse about public education's challenges and how to fix them. Since education policy is set at the local and state level, parents and youth in low-income communities of color must actively engage on their home turf, bringing grounded wisdom to bear on local conversations about policy and practice. Consequently, **the bulk of CPER's resources focused on supporting clusters of organizing groups with shared purpose in specific, local communities.** At the same time, to interject community voice into the national dialogue about what is needed to ensure educational equity and excellence, grounded conversations in particular locales must be seen as part of a larger whole. **Strengthening links across constituencies, issues, and geographies is critical to amplifying the collective voice of parents and youth** and, it follows, to having an impact on the national narrative about public education's purpose, problems, and promise.

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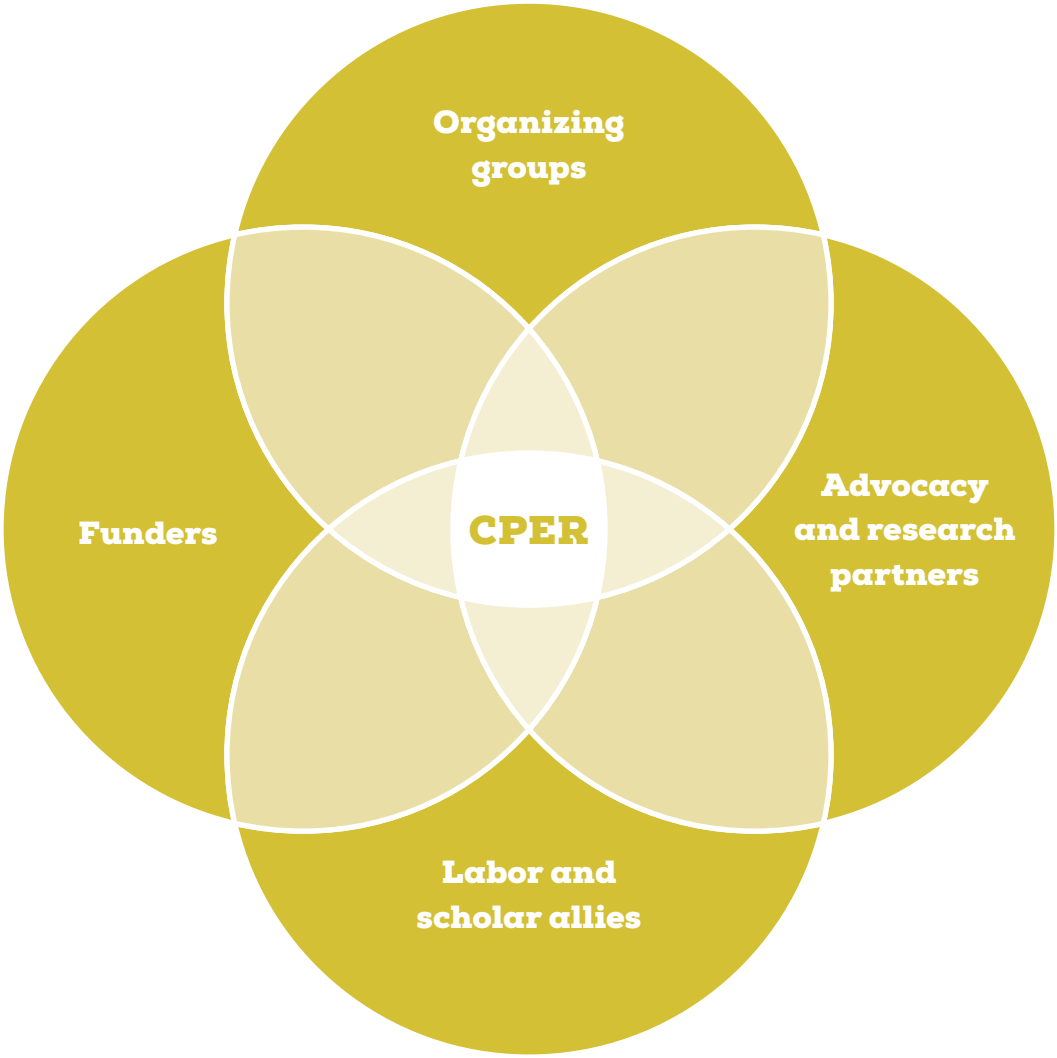
[2] For a description of CPER's impacts, see CPER's complementary report, *Greater Power, Lasting Impact: Effective Grantmaker Strategies from the Communities for Public Education Reform Fund,* available at www.neophilanthropy.org.

CPER's collaborative partners



Guided by this set of assumptions, CPER sought to engage collaborative partners from four main realms:

FUNDERS: In each of CPER's six investment sites, **a consortium of local donors pooled dollars** to meet the $250,000 threshold needed to trigger 1:1 matching funds from CPER's national donor members. Supported by CPER's local and national staff, local donor decision-making "tables" met quarterly to assess challenges and opportunities, deepen knowledge of grantees' work, and advise on local grant awards, in partnership with NEO Philanthropy. **National donor members pooled their resources as well,** serving on CPER's National Steering Committee along with an anchor donor from each local site; as such, they were able to deepen their knowledge of local particularities and advise on overall Fund strategy, programs, and budget.

ORGANIZING GROUPS: CPER supported clusters of community organizing groups with shared goals within its investment sites and supported coalitions. These core grantees included youth-led, parent-led,

and intergenerational organizing groups. Most focused on education reform; some focused on related issues, such as immigration reform, racial justice, and criminalization; and still others worked simultaneously on multiple issues of importance to their members. **Individual organizations received direct funds and capacity building resources, but multiple groups within investment sites collectively agreed upon shared policy priorities and campaigns.** In so doing, they navigated challenges that sometimes occurred over issue turf, attribution versus contribution, and resource competition. Over time, national networks and coalitions grew out of the organic partnerships among local groups within and across supported regions.

ADVOCACY AND RESEARCH PARTNERS: In addition to the organizing groups, which were firmly at the helm at each investment site, **CPER secondarily supported a small but important set of advocacy, litigation, and research partners** in order to strengthen and scale community-led work. Embracing a broader ecology of change strategies within sites challenged groups to accommodate differences in organizational mission, pace, priorities, and culture.

LABOR AND SCHOLAR ALLIES: External stakeholders such as teachers unions and educational scholars enhanced credibility and reach. Alliances were formed with both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) to help redirect conversation from a focus on teachers' employment rights and alleged culpability in public school "failure" to a focus on how teachers and communities can productively partner to improve learning opportunities for all youth. Organizing groups seized on these new openings with teachers unions while making sure to safeguard their independent voice.

Collaborations within and across CPER's various constituencies brought enhanced visibility, power, and success, but they were not without their challenges. **CPER employed various programmatic and operational features to support groups in building trust and productive relationships.**

Connectivity is the lifeblood of movements; they depend on the ability to collectively strategize and work together across levels (i.e., local, state, nation), issues, organizations, and communities.

–Barbara Masters and Torie Osborn, "Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building"

Key Initiative Features to Support Collaboration

GRANTMAKING

- Direct grants over multiple years to *individual groups* within *site-based clusters*
- Direct grants over years to regional and national *alliances and coalitions*
- Supplemental grants to *clusters of groups* for *collaborative projects*

FIELD ACTIVITIES

- Development of shared site-based goals and policy campaigns
- Locally based staffing support to coordinate and facilitate work across groups
- Site-based trainings to address common capacity needs
- National-level technical support for research, facilitation, and networking
- Site-based donor briefings to build grantee-donor relationships

CONVENING OPPORTUNITIES

- Annual convenings
- Peer learning communities
- Cross-site visits and exchanges among grantees
- Scholarships to attend national and regional conferences and trainings

THIRD-PARTY LEADERSHIP

- Partnership with 501 (c)(3) public charity responsible for directing the Fund and all grantmaking and grantseeking, thus reducing grantee burden and competition
- Strategic developer and manager of programs to meet Fund field and movement building objectives (capacity building, learning activities, networking opportunities)
- Convener and neutral bridge between funder and grantee partners
- Host of cross-issue, cross-region donor strategizing and learning opportunities
- Provider of legal, financial, and administrative services

NETWORKING KNOWLEDGE: **Ten Lessons for Grantmakers**

What did we learn, in our eight years of working together, about effective funder practices to enhance grantee collaboration? Here are ten key lessons that grantees would like funders to know.

1. Support clusters of groups with shared goals

Grantmakers committed to movement building can leverage the power of targeted investments by engaging in "ecosystem grantmaking" – a term coined by the Akonadi Foundation (a CPER member). Akonadi supports its mission of creating a racially just society by funding "not only organizations that are doing base-building work but their key allies and partners as well." Akonadi further explains:

> *We emphasize the importance of funding interconnected clusters of organizations because funding in this way bolsters the capacity of each of the organizations within the formation and, more importantly, supports a more effective and impactful movement to challenge structural racism overall.*[3]

This holistic approach informed CPER's grantmaking structure as well. In each of CPER's six investment sites, **funders supported interconnected clusters of groups that shared site-level policy goals while pursuing campaigns and programs embraced by their individual organizations.** In keeping with CPER's mission, the bulk of CPER's resource dollars went to its core constituency – community organizing groups – although site-based consortia frequently also included research, advocacy, and/or media-focused partners. These allies worked closely with the organizing groups to help strengthen and scale up grassroots campaigns.

Individual organizations received differently sized grant awards and completed reporting requirements independently. Importantly, though, they all knew that **groups within a site-based cluster would receive grant**

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[3] See Cassandra Shaylor, *Ecosystem Grantmaking: A Systemic Approach to Supporting Movement Building,* Akonadi Foundation, 2011, p.1.

awards over multiple years for their part in shared work. This understanding incentivized collaboration by reducing funding tensions among groups. "It is hard to work in coalition if you are struggling within your own organization," noted Chicago-based Anne Hallett of the Grow Your Own Illinois (GYO) coalition. "CPER funds helped alleviate competition between organizing groups and education policy groups."

NEO Philanthropy's commitment to showcasing the work of different groups within the cluster also paid off, as local funders came to appreciate the varied contributions of different organizations and change strategies pursued. **CPER encouraged collaborative will by funding diverse groups through both direct organizational grants and supplemental awards** for collaborative projects initiated by groups within sites.

Grantees themselves recognized the added value of supporting clusters of different types of groups with shared goals. Maisie Chin of the Los Angeles-based organizing group, Community Asset Development Redefining Education (CADRE), observed:

> *CPER created a much more inclusive "common ground" on which marginalized parents' and students' stories and voices mattered just as much as funders, advocates, researchers, and media. This inclusivity as a practice across CPER in turn fostered much more equitable conditions for relationship building and knowledge-sharing among differently sized organizing groups, and between organizing and allied strategies.*

David Lapp of the Philadelphia-based organization Education Law Center (ELC) offered a similar assessment from an advocacy perspective:

> *Groups combined their strengths, with the organizing groups bringing the experiences of their members and their capacity for direct action while the advocates brought their expertise and mastery of district and government policy. This expanded the scope of the campaigns and the depth of the solutions we proposed. An example of this would be the statewide school funding fight where pressure from parents and students across the state facilitated the use of a well-researched school funding formula.*

Finally, **CPER granted to regional and national coalitions** (such as the Alliance for Educational Justice and the Journey for Justice Alliance), **which emerged organically out of CPER's locally supported groups.** Some funders might see this approach as "double-dipping," since these coalitions subgranted a portion of funds received to member groups that also received direct CPER grants. However, CPER funders felt that providing dual opportunities of support helped grantees connect their local knowledge to the national education landscape, thereby improving chances that supported groups would achieve their aims. They also recognized that local groups need additional resources in order to invest their staff time in national coalition work.

2. Trust grantees to identify the partners they need

Funders can play an important role in networking grantees with potential allies (and, of course, funder peers). However, these introductions are best done with a light touch. Arranged marriages among organizations

rarely succeed. Instead, **successful collaboration almost always depends on groups identifying their own collaborative partners.**

In most CPER sites, grantee collaboration among well-established organizing groups drew upon the existence of longstanding relationships and organizational histories. In fact, in one site, funders allowed the core grantees (the organizing groups) to select their advocacy, research, and media partners, and to set the initial grant amounts for these allied groups. In another site, organizing groups formed coalitions based on existing relationships, and funding went through these coalitions to support participating members and their coordination with one another.

In a third region, however, this approach took some time in coming. At this site, local funders channeled the bulk of their dollars toward a newly established organizing network, while more modestly supporting a longstanding advocacy coalition to partner with these emerging groups. Grantees were expected to prepare joint action plans, proposals, and reports. While this structure made sense in terms of CPER's core focus on organizing and collaboration, it yielded mixed results at best. Among other problems, expectations for coordinated action exceeded the organizations' will and ability to deliver. Three years in, CPER funders and staff took stock of the mismatch between expectations for collaboration and groups' constrained capacity. Requirements for collective planning and action were modified and resources were shifted to support existing coalitional efforts. These steps gave grantees the room to invest their time in the relationships that they saw as most important, and it resulted in major gains.

3. Appreciate organizational differences in mission, priorities, pace, and culture

Collaboration always entails negotiating differences among organizational perspectives and methods. When organizing and advocacy groups come together, both challenges and payoff are amplified. Challenges stem from fundamental differences between these complementary but different approaches.

For example, in keeping with their fundamental mission, organizing groups seek to win policy changes in a way that increases their members' civic capacity and power for the long term; every organizing campaign is as much about building a group's power as it is about winning a policy change. For advocacy organizations, policy change is the top priority.

Organizing and advocacy groups often operate at different paces as well, which complicates efforts to advance coalition work. Advocacy organizations are typically able to make decisions quickly, committing themselves to a goal or strategy while a meeting is underway. By contrast, organizing groups prioritize participatory processes with their members. Decision-making typically takes more time as these groups must bring any major proposal to their communities for discussion and buy-in.

Organizing and advocacy: snapshot of collaborative impact

"The 2013 passage of LCFF [Local Control Funding Formula] in California was the culmination of a nearly decade-long effort of organizing groups and advocates to build both the political will and policy understanding necessary to replace what researchers … described as an inadequate, inequitable, and overly complex funding system.… PICO California, together with other CPER groups and non-CPER partners, sustained a multi-year effort that included local and state organizing, education and training of parents and students, outreach to legislators and the media, and more.

In a state as big and diverse as California, the chance for Northern and Southern California groups to meet together was invaluable both for the deepening of relationships and skills, and the identification and development of a shared vision for our schools and state. These gatherings were particularly successful and productive because they were designed by and for groups on the ground – addressing their specific needs and priorities – with advocacy and research partners playing an important supportive role.

Through ongoing trainings, strategy sessions, and convenings, we were able to forge and deepen relationships that have been instrumental in developing and implementing powerful statewide campaigns. One of the most powerful manifestations of this work together was the November 2013 State Board of Education meeting, when youth and parent leaders from around the state partnered with advocates in an unprecedented display of coordination and power to call for an overhaul of the draft emergency regulations. Our collective efforts resulted in a significant redrafting of the regulations, both in regards to how LCFF funds are spent and in the role of parents, students, and school sites in the development of district plans."

– Roberta Furger, PICO California

Finally, these different change approaches mean that different actors are prioritized to give voice to the issue at hand. While advocates draw on lawyers and analysts as credible experts, organizers call on parents and students in order to take power back to their communities.

By acknowledging and planning for differences in organizational mission, priorities, pace, and culture, funders can help both organizing and advocacy groups achieve impact beyond what either constituency can achieve alone. Pam Martinez of Padres y Jóvenes Unidos in Colorado reflected on how her group's collaboration with a prominent advocacy organization advanced the agenda of both partners:

Our collaboration with Advancement Project (AP), which was supported in part by technical assistance grants from CPER, has been a model of collaboration between an organizing group and a policy advocacy group. We have succeeded with AP in building a close alignment of values around the importance of using policy research and analysis as part of strategic organizing, and of engaging grassroots members in the analysis and dissemination of policies and policy strategies affecting their own communities. What made this collaboration so productive was our desire to incorporate policy research and data analysis into our work, and AP's desire to move policy advocacy through grassroots organizing strategies.

Here's how funders that wish to support collaborative work between organizing and advocacy groups can help:

- **Balance expectations for collaboration and independence,** safeguarding a coalition's unified voice while ensuring space for groups to act independently.
- **Encourage partners to set ground rules,** by determining, for example, when it is OK for a partner to act on its own.
- **Suggest mechanisms for accommodating the different pace of organizing and advocacy groups,** such as rapid-response teams that are authorized to make quick decisions on behalf of the larger membership.
- **Shape reporting and evaluation expectations** in a way that values both policy impacts and increased community capacity and power.
- **Set realistic expectations for outcomes** that accommodate the longer timeframe that organizing typically requires.

4. Provide supplemental resources to support collaboration

Good will is essential to jump-starting a collaboration, but sustaining it requires a set of relational qualities—such as trust, respect, and an ability to listen and compromise—as well as the labor and time needed for concrete, coordinated action. These additional capacities are usually in short supply in lean organizing groups. As PICO California's Roberta Furger noted:

By far the biggest challenge to collaborating is capacity. True collaboration—either locally or at a regional or state level—creates additional demands of staff and leaders, from participating in meetings and conference calls to planning joint actions or media outreach, to negotiating with partners around demands and strategy.

Realizing collaborative potential requires dedicated resources that supplement rather than supplant direct grants to individual organizations. Funders nourish collaboration when they augment

organizational resources with supports for collaborative action. They undermine it when they expect groups to shoulder collaborative demands on existing—and typically limited—organizational resources alone.

Furthermore, to be maximally effective, supplemental resources must be allocated through vehicles specifically designed to foster effective collaboration. **CPER augmented direct organizational grants with material, programmatic, and administrative supports to strengthen cross-group and cross-site work.** These resources and services included:

- **Locally based staff** in each of CPER's six investment sites, tasked with coordinating meetings among local grantees; identifying common capacity challenges and training opportunities; and conveying helpful insights about grantees' strategies, successes, and challenges to local funders and the CPER national office. The perceived value of these local coordinators hinged on their credibility with supported groups, which was based in large part on their understanding of organizing strategy and their familiarity with and respect for the experience of youth and parent leaders.
- **National-level facilitators** who helped coalitions develop strategy and build trust. As with local coordinators, national facilitators' success hinged on their education and organizing knowledge and on grantees' request for and receptiveness of facilitation supports.
- **Regional and national coalition staff,** based within supported grantee organizations, hired by grantees themselves to facilitate coordination among coalitional members.
- **Short-term rapid-response grants** which allowed groups to collectively seize new openings and respond to policy developments.
- **A spectrum of convening opportunities** which enabled groups to come together over time for different purposes, in large and small groups, across issues, regions, and constituencies.
- **Third-party leadership** equipped to supervise staffing and consultants, issue time-sensitive grants (as well as longer annual awards), host convening opportunities, and synthesize insights gleaned by the Fund's array of collaborative partners to strengthen field knowledge.

5. Convene groups to bond, reflect, strategize, and dream together

Social media has expanded relational frontiers in ways unimaginable a decade ago, enabling organizations to strengthen communities of joint purpose across regional boundaries in new and transformative ways. But even in today's dynamic virtual landscape, face-to-face networking remains important because it provides groups with the shared space to discuss, reflect, learn, and simply be together. In-person gatherings help make palpable the sense of power that comes from being part of a larger whole.

When funders support grantee convening opportunities, they nurture the conditions for relationship building that accelerate effective collective action. Convenings provide critical venues for groups to come together across issues, sectors, and change strategies; in doing so, they create and sustain multi-issue alliances that advance coordinated work and help to strengthen and expand a field more holistically. Activists in the social justice arena note that such shared spaces have become all the more important in recent years as established progressive networks and coalitions have struggled to sustain funders' direct investment, and forums for joint dialogue, planning, and visioning have diminished.

What kinds of convening opportunities do grantees consider most valuable? Not surprisingly, **different convening activities yield different benefits and outcomes;** as is often the case, one size does not fit all. Funders are well-advised to clarify goals and expectations for grantee convening *first,* and then to develop specific convening mechanisms tailored to these objectives.

Over its eight-year trajectory, **CPER supported a range of regional and national convening opportunities for its grantees.** Most engaged field organizations exclusively, though larger national gatherings – like the CPER Annual Convening – brought both funders and grantees together. Three particularly successful strategies are as follows.

Peer learning communities: Aware that some grantees wanted to deepen their understanding of complex education trends, CPER launched opt-in, year-long "peer learning communities" several years into the Fund's operation. These forums provided participants with an opportunity to engage with colleagues in cycles of learning, reflection, campaign development, and continued reflection. Topical themes for each learning community were proposed by grantees themselves. Learning groups were intentionally kept small (15-20 people)

to foster substantive discussion, and most involved a few people from each participating organization, to strengthen chances that learning would take hold within an organization's subsequent work. Each learning community was facilitated by national technical assistance providers with deep knowledge of community organizing and the particular education reform topic under study. Facilitators provided groups with timely research and analysis.

A CPER learning community on charter school accountability facilitated by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, for example, engaged grantees from multiple CPER sites with other organizing allies and teachers union partners. Participating organizations applied their expanded knowledge to charter school campaigns in their home locales. The collective process yielded an analysis of charter conditions in each region represented, research materials, a publication on charter accountability standards, and a dialogue with funders at the 2014 Grantmakers for Education national conference. Learning community participant Shanee Garner from the Philadelphia-based Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) commented:

> *The learning community helped us to develop our approach to addressing barriers to entry in local charter schools while simultaneously examining best practices throughout the nation. We appreciated the opportunity to work with our colleagues all over the country.*

Annual convenings: Each year, CPER hosted a national conference that brought together some 300 participants, including all supported groups across regions; organizing groups addressing various issues from other locales; member funders and their interested funder peers; and a smattering of other key stakeholders, such as education scholars, policymakers, and union and advocacy partners. Annual convening programs typically combined site visits in the convening host city; a plethora of skills- and content-focused workshops led by grantees themselves; plenaries peopled by grantees and prominent national figures; and informal social opportunities. CPER prioritized the participation of student and parent leaders as well as grantee staff, which made for some programmatic challenges. Accordingly, CPER structured its final convening to include both beginner and advanced sessions on key topics, so that all participants could find useful content and access points.

Peter Kuhns from the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) in Los Angeles summarized the impact of the convenings as follows:

> *The CPER national convenings were extremely helpful in allowing us not only to feel part of a national movement but to understand our local experiences within a national context. Convenings have allowed us to connect with groups and resources not present in California. For example, at the 2012 convening we connected with the policy group Demos, which helped inform and frame our advocacy efforts around Proposition 30 and revenue work in general….There is a sense of alignment that develops over time when groups regularly convene and the sharing of struggles and successes across the country are truly useful in helping us to avoid making unnecessary mistakes.*

All CPER grantee organizations were expected to attend the annual convenings and were fully compensated for their expenses. Since these events required significant material support, staff labor, and grantee time, some questioned the use of resources, though most credited convenings with powerfully fostering movement momentum.

Cross-site visits and exchanges: After hearing, at CPER convenings, of exciting developments elsewhere, grantees were able to draw on CPER capacity building funds to do site visits. CPER site coordinators

facilitated exchanges, which often yielded the best conditions for learning about a peer organization's strategy and program model. These visits were most effective when visiting grantees were clear about their learning goals and worked closely with host groups to craft the agenda. Matching the right individuals within each organization was similarly important, in order to maximize chances that lessons learned could be applied once visitors returned home. Finally, compensating host organizations for their time and labor in preparing for visitors was both helpful and appreciated.

For example, a small group of organizers from Together Colorado visited the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) in Chicago to learn more about LSNA's parent mentoring work. Together Colorado then launched a parent mentor program in Denver.

6. Strengthen intersections across issues

In today's philanthropic climate, many funders are advancing their priorities by tightly focusing their investing, sometimes to a single issue. But organizations working to advance social change typically envision their work more holistically. Funding boundaries often bear little relation to how complex social issues are experienced and tackled on the ground.

Funders can productively advance social change goals when they seek to connect rather than silo issues from one another. CPER helped tackle integrally related social challenges by seizing opportunities for collaboration across grantee groups and funders that support different social issues. In addition to bringing allies together through learning and movement building venues, two other Fund strategies are important to note:

Issuing direct grants to multi-issue groups: While CPER targeted campaigns to expand high quality learning opportunities for low-income youth of color, its efforts often encompassed a broader change agenda. For example, the Fund's direct grants included support for multi-issue organizations addressing education reform in the context of racial equity, juvenile justice, immigration rights, and poverty reduction, among other things. Erika Almirón from Juntos in Philadelphia described the power of her group's multi-issue work in the following way:

> *Some coalitions only work on immigration issues and others only on education. Juntos works in both spaces, with various coalitions that sometimes never speak to each other. We have seen our work serve as a bridge and this has developed the framing on both sides to include each other's perspective. The biggest example of this is the framing on the issue of "education, not deportation." Through this frame, we are able to connect the issue of defunding education to that of prioritizing the deportation and expansion of our detention system and how that affects our families. Both coalition spaces have adopted this frame to help shift the dialogue.*

Co-funding: As a project of NEO Philanthropy, CPER was able to tap into allied funder collaboratives and their grantees, seizing real-time opportunities to advance intersecting social problems. For example, in 2011,

when proposed anti-immigrant legislation threatened undocumented families in Alabama, Latino children withdrew from their schools to protect their family members. New opportunities for alliance building arose among African American and Latino organizing and advocacy groups to combat the proposed legislation. By joining forces with NEO Philanthropy's Four Freedoms Fund, CPER was able to educate different donor constituencies about common challenges faced, thus helping to support groups on the ground who came together to protect children's educational rights.

7. Stand ready to support rapidly emerging opportunities

Opportunities for impact can arise suddenly, such as when a damaging policy proposal (like the one described above) requires quick action to defend against it, or a dramatic event draws media attention and creates a new opportunity to engage more people. Often, activist groups must scramble to reallocate resources in order to respond to such crises and opportunities; quick, collaborative action may demand more resources than groups have at their disposal. By the time groups apply for and receive grants, public attention may have shifted and the window of opportunity has closed.

Funders can ensure groups' capacity to seize the moment by providing time-sensitive, special opportunity grants. CPER addressed strategic opportunities that arose in real time by providing short-term rapid-response grants for collaborative campaigns. These supplemental funds were included in CPER's national budget and designed to be allocated over the course of the grant year. Both grantees and local coordinating staff knew rapid-response grants were available if needed. National staff at NEO Philanthropy were poised to respond quickly and to execute grant agreements within two weeks of receiving requests—sometimes even sooner.

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE), a youth organizing collaborative, took advantage of such a grant to enable a nascent coalition to mobilize quickly in 2013. VOYCE acted in response to two developments that had captured widespread public attention: the Chicago Board of Education's proposal to shutter 50 neighborhood schools, and the wrongful demotion of 68 juniors at Gage Park High School on the eve of high-stakes testing (a strategy to boost that school's performance on the upcoming state exams).

Students across Chicago were eager to protest the proposed school closings as well as the overuse of high-stakes tests, which inadvertently pressure schools to push out low-performing students. CPER's $30,000 rapid-response grant supported student transportation and media staffing, enabling VOYCE to help convene a series of student boycotts and rallies. This work solidified and expanded a new citywide student coalition that helped to roll back the testing craze in Chicago. With national attention already on Chicago because of the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike, coalition actions drew national and local media attention. CPER's relatively small rapid-response grant consequently had a notable impact on national discourse about the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing. VOYCE's Jenny Arwade observed:

> *As a result of CPER's rapid-response grant, Chicago Students Organizing to Save Our Schools (CSOSOS) was able to have a ground-breaking victory on the issue of testing in Chicago Public Schools, with 15 [of 25] tests spanning K-12 being eliminated from the Chicago Public Schools calendar for the 2013-14 school year. At the same time, we made progress on calling out the injustice of massive school closings and simultaneous charter expansion.*

8. Facilitate strategic alignment with key stakeholders

Productive relationships between organizing peers and advocacy partners are leveraged when groups reach beyond their immediate allies, cultivating alignment with other critical stakeholders. While groups typically start with the fundamental building blocks of organizing—base building and alliance building—a more mature campaign inevitably requires them to broaden their partnerships beyond usual and natural allies to include other stakeholders and strategic "influentials."

Funders can put their own power as "influentials" into practice when they help grantees broker relationships with key stakeholders. CPER funders facilitated grantees' collaborative alignment with key stakeholders through varied approaches, including the following.

Building alliances with critical actors: In recent years, unprecedented alliances between community groups and national teachers unions (the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association) have coalesced to powerful effect, as these constituencies jointly strive to redefine debates about teaching effectiveness and quality education. These historic partnerships emerged organically out of local action. In California, educators and community groups jointly fought for, and won, the Proposition 30 ballot initiative for increased public education revenue. In Philadelphia, students, parents, and teachers overcame past tensions and joined forces to fight proposals for massive school closings and the dismantling of the school district structure. Through a united front, they helped limit school closings to less than half the number originally proposed and prevented privatization of key district functions. Chicago students and families joined the teachers union to fight back against high-stakes testing and teacher evaluation systems that were too narrowly defined. Encouraged by national union leadership, community groups joined town hall meetings across the country, eventually yielding a platform for equitable and excellent public education, endorsed by some 150 groups in the new national Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools.

Funding strategies to support this work were highly varied and responsive to demands that unfolded in real time. They included: rapid-response grants for joint public actions engaging both unions and community groups; **regional and national coalition grants, technical assistance, and facilitation services** to broker community-union discussions; **and funds for attending national convenings** to strengthen union-community partnerships. The following two comments from grantees illustrate the importance of CPER-facilitated alliances and coalitions:

The most important ally developed during the CPER funding years is the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). The groups recognize that union/organizing partnerships are very important in terms of movement building, providing a strong base for future work. Grow Your Own (GYO) organizations and GYO candidates joined the CTU on the picket lines during the strike. Karen Lewis, the CTU president, testified with GYO at the legislative hearing on the basic skills test. One GYO director now chairs the CTU's Community Education Board. Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) also developed strong relationships with the CTU during the strike and continues to build on their collaboration as well.

– Anne Hallett, Grow Your Own Illinois, Chicago

The Philadelphia Coalition Advocating for Public Schools (PCAPS) coalition marked a significant advancement in how Youth United for Change (YUC) works with other groups. The number and variety of organizations represented and actively collaborating was unprecedented in Philadelphia....CPER funding made it possible to get the PCAPS coalition off the ground and helped PCAPS build its credibility as a community and labor coalition.

– Andi Perez, Youth United for Change, Philadelphia

Networking with influentials: To advance an equity- and excellence-focused education reform agenda at a time when policy trends often veered in other directions, CPER sought the support of some of today's most prestigious scholars of education – Linda Darling-Hammond, Charles Payne, and Pedro Noguera, among others. These highly credible influentials joined CPER's "Scholars Board," speaking on the Fund's behalf at the CPER Annual Convening, funder briefings, and smaller learning sessions with grantees. At no budgetary cost for the Fund, these partnerships, brokered by NEO Philanthropy, served to expand credibility and reach.

Networking funders: The strongest **funder advocates strive to connect grantees with their funder peers,** showcasing grantee work, identifying prospective funding partners, brokering new connections, and facilitating conversations. Collaborative funds are an excellent vehicle for leveraging institutional investments because they generate pooled revenue for work that often stretches beyond an individual institution's capacity to continue direct investing.

9. Nurture the growth of relationships over time

Organizational relationships rarely start with love at first sight. Most often, they begin with informal staff contact that leads to identifying common interests and sharing information and platforms, and from there move to joint work toward specific objectives. These discrete, narrowly bounded efforts (transactional collaborations) serve to build trust and to help work out the kinks in a relationship. **By nurturing relationships during these early stages, funders can support building the foundation for deeper, sustained collaboration on multiple issues – indeed, for the transformational change that comes from social movements.**

Funders can best support collaborations with direct grants over multiple years. CPER's multi-year funding gave grantees time to build the base of support that is needed to move an issue; time to conduct power

analyses and identify key targets, influencers, and potential new allies; time to cultivate relationships with these players; and still more time to make those relationships work.

In addition to producing major equity gains, the California CPER campaign for a Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) provided an environment for local groups to move through these stages. As Katy Nuñez-Adler of Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) observed:

> *The intensity and deep level of collaboration throughout the state campaign provided an environment in which Bay Area CPER grantees were able to build personal and organizational relationships and trust. Strategic partnerships that developed during the organizing effort to pass LCFF in the spring of 2013 led to much deeper relationships with Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network (PLAN), Youth Together, Californians for Justice, and AYPAL. In the fall, we began discussions around core values and alignment.... Today, CPER grantees meet often to develop approaches and strategy to working with the district around LCFF implementation, collaboration with the teachers union, and coordinated leadership development with parents and students. The collaboration has brought alignment to our efforts to make concrete improvements around academic, social, and emotional outcomes for low-income students of color across Oakland.*

The LCFF work also illustrates the importance of continuing to **support collaborative efforts after policy goals have been achieved.** In this case, groups found new opportunities for collaboration as they grappled with local implementation of the new state policy. In all of the CPER sites, groups have had to remain united to defend gains, such as equitably school funding formulas, in each legislative session.

Finally, CPER's multi-year funding gave grantees the time they needed to move through the developmental cycle of campaigns and program implementation. Anne Hallett of Grow Your Own described challenges encountered in the early days of GYO's implementing its teacher education model with participating graduate schools of education:

> *Learning how to work with our higher education partner was a significant challenge. Community organizations are small and flexible; universities are large and bureaucratic. When GYO began, there was a feeling that the higher education bureaucracy would take over the initiative and crush it; that we had to "protect GYO" from higher education, rather than finding common ground and working together. One executive director of a GYO member group put in considerable time in building a relationship with the dean. We had to learn to develop mutual respect and share power and decision-making.*

Grantmaker patience – coupled with sustained funding for collaborative work among grantees – is essential to realizing change that is often slow in coming.

10. Walk the talk

CPER founding funder Cassie Schwerner of the Schott Foundation for Public Education observed, "Funders are very good at asking our grantees to work in collaboration, but I think that often we as funders are reluctant to do that."

In CPER as in other collaborative funding efforts, funders "walked the talk" by leveraging institutional investments through pooling dollars. CPER funder collaboration functioned on two levels. First, to fuel sustainable local investment in community organizing work, CPER coordinated a local funder table in each site. At the same time, to facilitate national cohesion, an anchor donor from each site joined CPER's national donors in a national Steering Committee. This partnership helped local funders to locate their work in the national landscape and national funders to acquire better understanding of local complexities. In education, in particular, much of the action is at the local level. A longtime investor in several NEO-led collaborative funds noted how funder collaboration has strengthened her own grantmaking:

> *My participation in NEO Philanthropy donor funds … has helped me gain greater understanding about the relationship between groups I fund at the national level and what's going on at the local level. I don't think I'd be as good a grantmaker without NEO Philanthropy. I don't think I'd be as successful without the ability, through NEO Philanthropy, to get strategic support to the ground.*
>
> *– Geri Mannion, Carnegie Corporation of New York*

Funder collaboration has positive value for grantees too – and not simply because it generates more dollars for the field. In CPER's case, the collaborative helped grantees expand their networks, gain access to new funding partners, and enhance their credibility through showcasing their work at CPER's donor briefings and annual convenings. Last but not least, because NEO Philanthropy managed CPER's grantseeking and grantmaking responsibilities, grantees were able to enjoy vastly expanded resources without shouldering the burden of additional proposal and reporting requirements.


$12x^2 - 26x - 30 = 0$
$a = 12 \quad b = -26 \quad (-36$
$b^2 - 4ac$
$-4 \cdot 12 \cdot -30$
$+ 1440$
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Final Thoughts

In addressing how grantmakers can productively support building social movements, Grantmakers for Effective Organizations' *Many Hands, More Impact* report argues, "Next to funding, perhaps the most important things a grantmaker can provide to support movements are connections that lead to meaningful relationships. In fact, grantmakers with significant movement experience say that they cannot overemphasize the importance of their role as the 'glue' or 'connective tissue' between organizations and networks advancing a movement's vision."

In today's "strategic" philanthropy climate—when focused, foundation-led agendas are increasingly seen as the surest route to achieving desired ends—these holistic, multi-issue, field building strategies are complex, demanding, and may not be for every foundation to pursue. However, they are an essential strategy for foundations that hope to realize sustainable, transformative change.

Samantha Liapes of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth in California sums up why groups on the ground hope that more foundations will take this path:

> ***Organizations are so overtaxed and overwhelmed that we rarely prioritize consistent coordinated communication with organizations outside of our immediate campaign coalition efforts. These connections, however, are crucial to field building and movement building efforts.*** *We have the opportunity to learn from organizations who are one step ahead of us in their city on a specific reform and we can learn from their mistakes and successes. We also have the opportunity to learn from other organizations' issue messaging and from their leadership development curricula. We may be working in different districts but so many of the issues and challenges are inevitably the same or similar. Similarly, when it comes to state-level work, infinitely more is possible when multiple organizations are coordinating their efforts and messaging.* ***CPER's chief lasting legacy has been illustrating to funders and to organizations in the field how much groups with similar agendas and goals have to gain from coordination, communication, and collaboration.***

About NEO Philanthropy

NEO Philanthropy is a leader in developing innovative philanthropic strategies and partnerships that marshal the collective resources of people passionate about driving positive social change. Launched in 1983 as Public Interest Projects, a 501(c)(3) public charity, NEO advances solutions to some of the most complex issues of our time – from immigration to school reform. NEO's unique, one-stop giving platform includes collaborative funding networks, donor-advised funds, policy and issue analysis, advocacy and networking opportunities, technical assistance, and fiscal sponsorship services. Through sustainable partnerships among donors, grantees, and allied groups, NEO brings together diverse organizations driving cutting-edge social change work, resulting in a movement for equality, fairness, and a stronger participatory democracy.

Strengthening Collaborations to Build Social Movements is one of several reports CPER prepared to share lessons learned about Fund impacts and effective grantmaking strategies. It can be downloaded at www.neophilanthropy.org, along with these complementary reports:

Greater Power, Lasting Impact: Effective Grantmaker Strategies from the Communities for Public Education Reform Fund
Addresses the value of community organizing for education reform and strategies pursued to support growth in individual civic capacity, community social capital, and policy change.

Education Policy Impacts 2007-2014
Summarizes key policy wins at the school, district, state and federal level achieved through multi-year campaigns led by CPER grantees.

Building Capacity to Sustain Social Movements: Ten Lessons from the Communities for Public Education Reform Fund
Explores effective grantmaker strategies to build organizational capacity and networks to sustain social justice work.

Acknowledgements

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