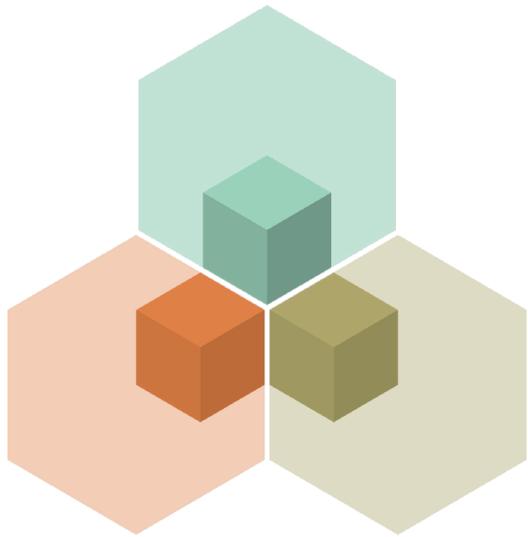


# The Philanthropy Framework



ROCKEFELLER PHILANTHROPY ADVISORS

# The Philanthropy Framework

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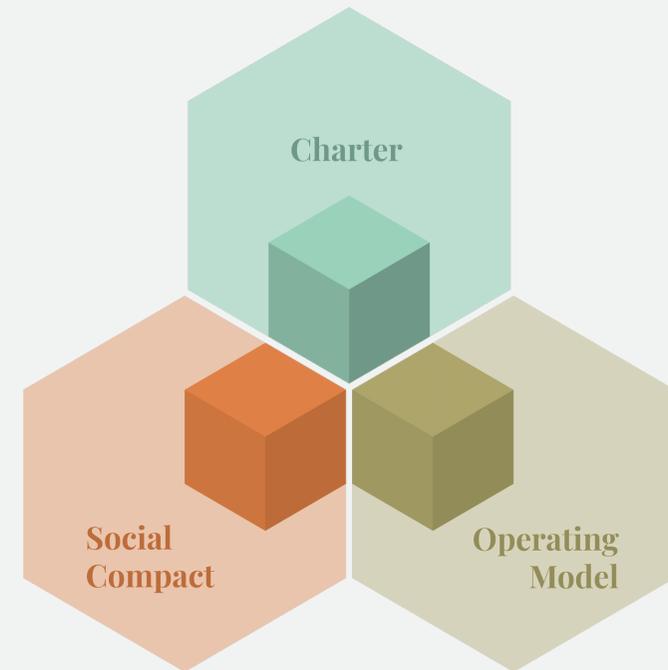
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# Executive Summary

Across the world, philanthropy is undergoing a rapid transformation that offers both exciting opportunities and complex challenges. As a more unified global culture around giving and social investment emerges, new players, vehicles, strategies and approaches are creating commitment, enthusiasm and optimism. Yet shifting attitudes toward philanthropy, intense debates about power and effectiveness and difficult operating environments require philanthropists and social investors to demonstrate their value to a wide range of stakeholders. And, as many philanthropies broaden their activities from grantmaking to impact investing, knowledge-building, advocacy and coalition-building, they face the need to change how their organizations assess and allocate non-financial resources.

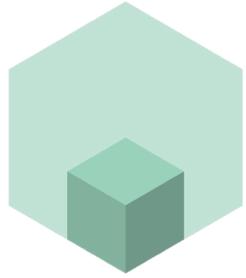
With so much in flux, emerging donors and established funders are seeking new models not only for funding strategies and impact measures, but also for organizational design and management systems that will serve them well into the 21st century. Leaders are asking how philanthropies achieve impact as institutions, not just as sources of funding. In response to this surge of interest, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors developed the Philanthropy Framework, a tool to give an emerging or established philanthropy (whether in the form of a foundation, trust, funder collaborative, LLC, donor-advised fund or direct giving) a structure to align resources for maximum impact.

Figure 1. The Philanthropy Framework



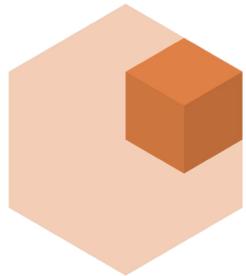
The Framework is comprised of three core elements:

- **Charter**, the organization's scope, form of governance and decision-making protocol.
- **Social compact**, its implicit or explicit agreement with society about the value it will create.
- **Operating model**, the approach to the resources, structures and systems needed to implement strategy.



### Charter

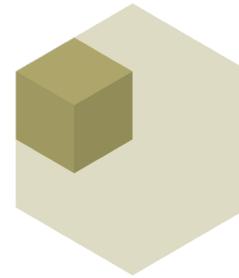
The Framework prompts philanthropic leaders to examine their organization’s charter to better understand how its present methods of decision making connect to founding ideals. Other charter-related considerations include culture, how the organization approaches formal guidelines or rules, breadth of mandate, time horizon and focus on the present versus the past.



### Social Compact

Next, the Framework encourages an investigation into six dimensions that create a lasting effect on an organization’s social compact, the reciprocal agreement with society which is often called a “license to operate.” These dimensions include:

- Accountability
- Legitimacy
- Transparency
- Direction of influence on society
- Independence/interdependence
- Approach to risk



### Operating Model

Finally, once a philanthropic organization’s scope and reason for being are examined, the operating model can articulate how strategy is implemented. The operating model is shaped by how the foundation approaches six key capabilities, each of which exists on a spectrum of decision points:

- Resourcing: buy vs. build
- Decision-making: centralized vs. decentralized
- Initiative: proactive vs. responsive
- Flexibility: creative vs. disciplined
- Programming: broad vs. deep
- Relationships: networked vs. independent

Within the operating model, an organization’s operating capabilities represent the specific resources, activities, costs and relationships at its disposal for carrying out its strategy. Of course, philanthropies may use more than one operating model for different areas of their program work.

The Philanthropy Framework is a practical, concrete tool for analysis, planning and decision-making. Foundations in the U.S. and Europe have begun using this framework successfully with their boards and leadership teams. Their experiences have helped shape this guide.

# Genesis of the Philanthropy Framework

Philanthropy is in a remarkable era of expansion in many senses:

- As a culture of giving spreads globally, more wealthholders are engaging in philanthropy earlier in their lives, and more deeply.
- The concept of what philanthropy entails is expanding to include impact investing, and there is a renewed interest in advocacy, capital aggregation and partnerships.
- How philanthropy connects with communities increasingly incorporates community-based decision-making and participatory engagement.
- “Giving while living” and spend-down philanthropy are on the rise, expanding concepts of how impact occurs.
- Corporate interest in “social business” models is changing the scope of corporate giving and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to focus on societal impact.
- Foundations and other giving vehicles are expanding their ideas about how to source and develop talent, how to develop and share knowledge and learnings, and how to use their voice and reputational capital.
- Newer vehicles for philanthropy, including donor-advised funds and LLC umbrellas in the U.S. allow for more donor flexibility.
- Many traditional grantmaking foundations are taking a bigger role in shaping and operating programs rather than just underwriting them.
- Expectations of philanthropy and donors themselves are expanding, both from public sector officials who sometimes seek to shrink philanthropy’s sphere of action, as well as from critics of private philanthropy’s role and privilege.

New models are essential to helping philanthropic leaders manage the opportunities and risks of this expanding space.

In light of these trends, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors launched a multi-year program of collaborative research called the Theory of the Foundation, co-developed and supported by more than 50 funders to date. The initiative was inspired by iconic management expert Peter Drucker’s seminal article “The Theory of the Business,”<sup>1</sup> which called on business leaders to assess their fundamental assumptions in response to changing conditions. Drucker’s challenge is highly pertinent to philanthropy, and is particularly urgent in this era of innovation and reevaluation. After interviewing more than 75 foundations and hosting dozens of working sessions with funders, experts and research partners in the U.S., Europe, Asia and Latin America, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors developed the Philanthropy Framework. This establishes, as Ford Foundation President Darren Walker calls it, “an exciting idea and an important framework for bringing more rigor and a depth of analysis to understanding philanthropy’s role.”<sup>2</sup>

Since launching this project, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors has published articles in SSIR.org<sup>3</sup> and the Foundation Review,<sup>4</sup> and co-published reports with partners at the Marshall Institute of the London School of Economics<sup>5</sup> and Foundation Center’s GrantCraft series.<sup>6</sup> This publication synthesizes our findings, along with lessons learned from participating foundations that have used the Philanthropy Framework. We are deeply grateful to all the foundations that have contributed, and to our many advisors, co-authors and partners.

**An exciting idea and an important framework for bringing more rigor and a depth of analysis to understanding philanthropy’s role.**

**DARREN WALKER**  
President  
Ford Foundation

# Elements of the Philanthropy Framework

The Philanthropy Framework provides new tools for analyzing how a philanthropy makes decisions, interacts with others and the broader society, and utilizes its capabilities and resources. Together, these elements define a philanthropy’s culture, inform its structure and shape how it carries out its strategy. By examining the questions and topics raised in the Framework, foundations and other philanthropic entities can better:

- Assess, validate or crystallize identity, structure and approaches.
- Align trustees, board and staff around core concepts and values.
- Manage organizational inflection points, such as leadership transition, restructuring, change in time horizon, shifts of focus, new strategic direction or a new operational approach.
- Allocate financial and non-financial resources to maximize impact.
- Realize aspirational goals, including launching a new philanthropic endeavor, by helping identify and articulate the current state and future vision of an organization.

Figure 2. Charter components



## Charter

An organization’s charter tells its origin story and defines its intended scope, form of governance and procedural guidelines. The charter includes both written and unwritten elements, such as history, governance, decision-making processes, culture and values. Risk tolerance—the type and level of risk considered acceptable—is also embedded in every charter. Many organizations in the philanthropic space describe themselves as “risk-taking,” but the term’s meaning isn’t always adequately unpacked across programs, governance and staff. A philanthropic organization’s charter may also define key geographic and issue areas (such as the arts, the City of Cleveland or the well-being of children), or a set of beliefs (such as social justice, the enterprise system, a faith or a particular type of leadership). It may include broadly understood norms (such as an aversion to advocacy, or commitment to a particular field) that may or may not echo the entity’s formal documents. A few of these components are explored below.



**While some organizations view their original charter as a mandate to honor forever, others expect change based on shifting conditions, new observations or emerging leadership interests.**

## Founding Legacy as Origin Story

Origin stories, including the role of the founding legacy, are central to a philanthropic organization’s charter. They serve as a reference point and source of inspiration, typically informing both culture and programmatic areas.

This is illustrated by the Wellcome Trust. According to one team member, the legacy of founder Sir Henry Wellcome, an American-born pharmaceutical entrepreneur, “has been and still is quite a strong source of philosophy and inspiration in terms of the breadth of what the organization does. [His legacy] also shapes how the organization interprets concepts such as health and medicine, beyond just the medical, because of the way that Henry Wellcome thought about the world.”<sup>7</sup>

While some organizations view their original charter as a mandate to honor forever, others expect change based on shifting conditions, new observations or emerging leadership interests. Massimo Lapucci, secretary general of the Fondazione CRT, provides a clear example of the interplay between his organization’s original charter and ongoing flexibility. “We have a very clear charter: we are a foundation of banking origin, established by law. The foundation has a statute and bylaws that legally define our mission, endowment and geographic focus. That said, we do adapt our approaches over time—and we use our charter as a guide, to ensure that we are achieving meaningful results.”<sup>8</sup>

## Charter Continuum

Philanthropic organizations typically trace their roots and founding stories to an individual or group of donors, a philanthropic family, a corporation or company, public or private institutions or the government. The way in which an organization connects to its founding donor(s) can be described as a point on a continuum. While this may change over time for any given entity, philanthropies can fall into one of the following categories.

- Founder-led**

In founder-led organizations, the living founding donor(s) sets the mission, priorities, allocation of resources and forms of engagement. While these elements may evolve, they directly represent the desires and goals of that donor or donor group, which, of course, may change. For corporate and public foundations, decisions typically follow the values and goals of the organization’s founding source or a legislative/regulatory agreement.
- Stewarded**

Stewarded philanthropies are founder-determined, and often still led by those who knew the founder(s) well or feel a profound sense of responsibility to carry out the wishes of the founder(s). While the original founder(s) may no longer be alive, their decisions continue to shape the organizational mission, program areas and approach, whether legally or by custom.
- Founder-connected**

Founder-connected organizations include successors—sometimes family members, sometimes not—of the founder or group of founders, who honor the original vision and approach without feeling tightly constrained by them. The successors see themselves as interpreters of tradition: not bound to specific policies, but walking the path of the organization’s original directives.
- Open**

In open charter organizations, board members and organizational leaders—whether descendants of the founder(s) or not—feel empowered to make decisions based on their collective assessment of external forces and internal capacity.

The Philanthropy Framework In Action:

**S.D. BECHTEL, JR. FOUNDATION**

The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation (SDBJ), based in San Francisco, was established in 1957 by Stephen D. Bechtel, Jr. as a reflection of his personal commitment to ensuring a prosperous California. To this day, Mr. Bechtel remains involved with the foundation as Chair of the Board; his daughter, Laurie Dachs, serves as President. As of this writing, the foundation has a professional staff of 35 and maintains close ties to the founder and the family under Laurie’s leadership.

Organized as a private foundation, SDBJ is a grantmaking organization. Its formal mission states: “The Foundation invests in preparing California’s children and youth to contribute to the state’s economy and communities, and in advancing management of California’s water and land resources.”

Based on Mr. Bechtel’s interests, SDBJ has made grants in the areas of education and the environment since its founding. These issue areas have been further developed to focus primarily on K-8 STEM education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), character development, effective education policy and environmental issues, including water management and land conservation. In 2009, the Foundation made the pivotal decision to spend down its assets in a defined period of time. The Foundation will sunset at the end of 2020.

SDBJ operates based on a donor led charter, in which the Foundation’s guiding principles and operational style were largely set by Mr. Bechtel in 1957. Although SDBJ does not have a formal documented charter, Mr. Bechtel’s vision and character are clearly woven into the fabric of the organization. The ideals that he champions—such as integrity, excellence, optimism and respect—comprise the Foundation’s values and guide the way the staff members work. In addition, under the influence of Mr. Bechtel, an engineer, the Foundation focuses on advancing sensible solutions that are based in scientific practice and backed by clear evidence. The staff promotes what works, as opposed to pushing an ideology. They also conduct deep, analytical due diligence to understand context, risk and opportunity alongside grantee capacity.



The founder’s interests and the needs of the fields in which the Foundation invests are aligned to shape organizational priorities. This may, be due, in part, to Mr. Bechtel’s approach to philanthropy. Foundation President Laurie Dachs shared what it was like when she started working for the Foundation: “What was great about it was that [her father, Mr. Bechtel] wasn’t one to say, ‘This is how you fix it, this is what I want you to do.’ He said, ‘Go find people that you trust and work with them to come up with what we need to do to fix the problem.’”

Staff maintain that having Laurie at the helm is as good as having a written charter, if not better. She embodies the donor’s intent, interpreting and exemplifying it through her actions and advice as President. She also plays a bridging role between the board, family and staff.

**In large part,  
we look for  
open doors and  
opportunities  
that fit with the  
interests of the  
founder.**

**ALLISON  
HARVEY TURNER**  
Environment  
Program Director

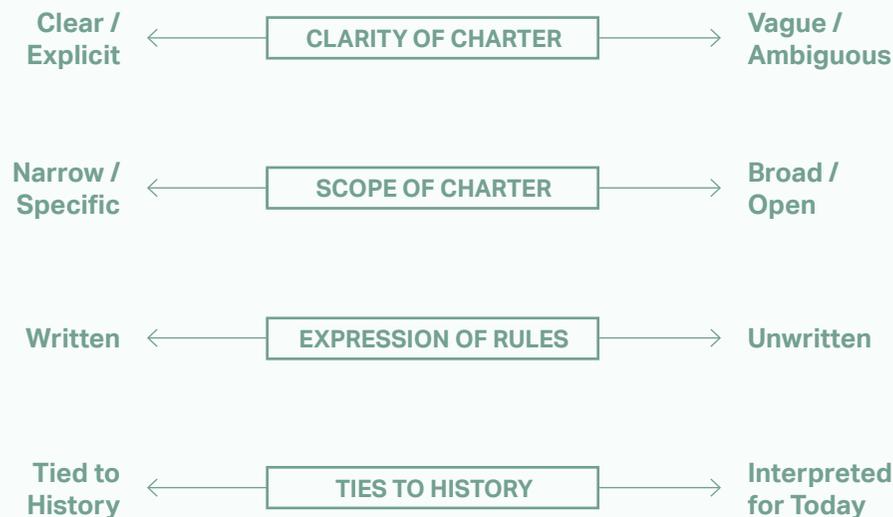


## Charter Parameters

Another way to look at an organization’s charter is to define:

- How clearly the charter is set out.
- How narrow or broad the charter is.
- Whether the organization’s rules are written or unwritten.
- The strength of the charter’s ties to history.

Figure 3. Charter Parameters



Unwritten norms or rules of the charter may play a critical role in both inspiring and challenging philanthropic organizations. For instance, the Hewlett Foundation has such a long-standing commitment to the environment that its leadership cannot imagine abandoning this issue—although how the foundation engages with the issue may change. Another major foundation interviewed as part of the Theory of the Foundation project reports that, for many years, its board reviewed individual grant summaries—but not the foundation’s strategy. Eventually, a new leader recognized that this unwritten rule of not reviewing strategy no longer served the board, staff or partners of the foundation. This fresh perspective opened the organization up to regularly evaluating its strategic direction.<sup>9</sup>

Another important charter consideration is time horizon. The charter of an in-perpetuity or a long-horizon organization will look markedly different than one of a spend-down philanthropic venture. The chosen time horizon plays a significant role in shaping an organization’s governance, decision-making, intrinsic risk tolerance, culture, written and unwritten rules and areas of work. A change in the spending timeframe of an entire organization or a program should ideally trigger a reassessment and adjustment of the charter.

Moreover, as impact investing is gaining traction as an extension of philanthropic approaches, more and more organizations are reevaluating and fine-tuning core elements of their charter to allow for the use of this new instrument.



**Unwritten norms or rules of the charter may play a critical role in both inspiring and challenging philanthropic organizations.**

Figure 4. Social Compact components



## Accountability



Some philanthropic organizations find power and freedom in the absence of mechanisms holding them accountable to the broader society. Others see the same absence—and the lack of input from outside voices—as potentially problematic.

Organizations can be accountable to the legacy of the original founder, populations and communities they support, a geographic region, a chosen cause or a set of values. Most foundations are formally accountable to their boards and to regulatory authorities. Many feel informally accountable to various stakeholders, including grantees, the general public or future generations. And how each organization chooses to honor that accountability varies widely.

## Social Compact

An organization’s social compact is its agreement with key stakeholders about the specific value it will create in society. A social compact is formulated along six dimensions: accountability, legitimacy, transparency, direction of influence on society, independence and approach to risk.

The time horizon of a philanthropic organization has profound implications for its social compact, in that it can shape the targets and expression of accountability, has the potential to enhance or hinder legitimacy and can influence an organization’s approach to collaboration or risk. Also shaping an organization’s social compact beyond the six dimensions explored below are the political and economic systems in which it operates, including prevailing views about private wealth and public responsibility.

### The Philanthropy Framework in Action:

#### THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT

The California Endowment, a health-conversion foundation with a connected charter, defines multiple levels of accountability, notes president and CEO Robert Ross. “We are accountable to the communities covered by our mission, primarily. Of course we have the IRS and attorney general to whom we are responsible as well. We have conversations among our executive team and in our boardroom about the matter of ‘risk’ on a pretty regular basis. Most of the time my team and I are pushing the board, but sometimes the board pushes us about thinking differently. It’s a good healthy balance. We believe in spending the reputational and political capital of the foundation in pursuit of key objectives, but we try to do this thoughtfully, selectively, surgically.” As this example illustrates, a clear social compact commitment orients all aspects of a foundation’s work and helps to frame important conversations about resource allocations.



Other organizations are intentionally accountable to very few. For example, Kresge Foundation's President and CEO Rip Rapson observes, "By definition, we're really not accountable to anybody. And so, it is only the intentionality of our ability to be transparent, listen to criticism and adjust course that ultimately serves as a check on our innate authorities."<sup>10</sup> However, despite this described lack of formal accountability, the Kresge Foundation operates with a balance of internal and external measures in mind. Internally, it has articulated values of stewardship, respect, creativity, partnership and opportunity as its organizational guideposts. Externally, the foundation's effectiveness in achieving its goals serves as the final arbiter of its success.

## Legitimacy

As conceptions about what constitutes public good shift, philanthropic organizations are under increasing pressure from various sources to demonstrate value and consider what makes them credible. There are attempts by a number of governments to undermine philanthropy and restrict its scope and impact. Moreover, the power of private philanthropy and the right of private wealth to exert influence on society is the subject of intense debate, with organizations finding themselves under pressure to justify their existence, the value they add and the use of private wealth for public good. Philanthropists also face criticism for profiting from and representing the engines of inequality. This includes possible divergence between their charitable activities and investment choices, which may further impact legitimacy.

Accordingly, philanthropies often wrestle with whether to engage in public discourse about and with the communities and programs they support—and, when they do, how to do so effectively. Some organizations are seeking new ways of enhancing their credibility within their communities through new networks, technologies, convenings, advisory groups and boards.

As part of the concern around legitimacy, a growing number of organizations are becoming intentional about their external expression of diversity, equity and inclusion. The dimensions of these considerations may vary from region to region but generally include race, ethnicity, gender and belonging to vulnerable, marginalized populations. This not only reflects the increasing diversity of today's world and the communities supported, but also recognizes that a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion are crucial to fulfilling and building legitimacy and trust, particularly where philanthropic activities most impact vulnerable or marginalized communities. Thus, more and more organizations are proactively seeking representation of populations supported in their work and in decision-making.

The oft-heard phrase "nothing about us without us," initially made popular by the disability rights movement, captures the essence of this growing trend. Connected to this, interest in involving communities served in participatory grantmaking is growing. Listening to communities can improve effectiveness, more clearly identify needs and enhance trust and credibility. To achieve this, a robust feedback loop is essential. Fund for Shared Insight's Listen for Good initiative<sup>11</sup> is one example of this practice. It uses the Net Promoter System to receive feedback from people and communities served. Similarly, the Center for Effective Philanthropy's Grantee Perception Report<sup>12</sup> uses an online grantee survey to provide funders with honest feedback from their constituencies.





## ☐ Transparency

An issue related to legitimacy in our current era of heightened public scrutiny is transparency. In some jurisdictions, individuals or foundations receive tax incentives for their philanthropy, creating an explicit or implicit obligation to prove that they are indeed providing public benefit. Even without tax incentives, many societies expect some level of information available to the public to ensure that such privileged resources are being appropriately used. For some organizations, fulfilling expectations of transparency might mean sharing insights to improve the overall philanthropic sector. For others, the desire for privacy might override any external calls for public disclosure, leading them to communicate very little with the outside world.

## ↔ Direction of Influence on Society

Foundations hold a wide range of attitudes towards other parts of society, namely government and the private sector. Some seek little interaction with either, explicitly funding only activities that lie outside the scope of those sectors. Others see themselves as “canaries in the coal mine,” raising the profile of key issues so that they are recognized by state actors as important to the greater good. Still others strive to fund innovation that is potentially scalable through corporate or public sector funding. In recent years, general interest in collaboration has risen as various entities target large-scale problems that could have a substantial influence on societal structures.<sup>13</sup>

### The Philanthropy Framework in Action:

#### LUMINA FOUNDATION

Beyond being a funder and grantmaker, Lumina Foundation sees itself as a thought leader—and a leader in general—within the education field and beyond. For example, in publicly declaring its 2025 goal to increase American degree attainment to 60 percent of the population, Lumina invited others to join in its commitment. Similarly, Lumina seeks to bring key stakeholders together, finding connections that cut across interests, groups and sectors. To this end, Lumina acts as a convener, encouraging and facilitating dialogue among all who must be moved to embrace ambitious goals. Lumina has recognized the importance of engaging the public policy sphere—primarily at the federal and state levels—and has, on many occasions, brought together policymakers who wouldn’t have the opportunity to interact face-to-face without its support. In another example of its leadership, Lumina has sparked cooperation between groups that work on college access and those who work on higher education effectiveness, creating a bridge between postsecondary education access and success.

Dewayne Matthews, a fellow with Lumina Foundation and the Foundation’s former Vice President for Strategy Development, sums it up this way: “Many areas of our work end up being about networks. It’s about how you create and sustain the communities and the networks of actors who are brought together by this common cause.” This focus has helped Lumina foster connections that wouldn’t have otherwise happened, drawing on shared commitment to an impactful agenda.

**The Philanthropy Framework in Action:****SURDNA FOUNDATION**

The Surdna Foundation recognizes that social change must be underpinned by policy change as ultimately, government policies and programs have a profound impact on the lives of people and the communities the Foundation seeks to support. Thus, it sees its role as a collaborator with—and agitator of—government, with the goal of moving state actors in the direction of favorable policies. In addition to direct services, the Foundation supports advocacy at the local, state and federal levels. For example, Surdna has supported campaigns to raise the minimum wage and paid sick leave through its Strong Local Economies program.

“At times we are validators and supporters [of government], in other times we’re critics and organizers to force better decisions or to surface inequities and issues.”<sup>14</sup>

## ↻ Independence/ Interdependence

To what degree does the organization rely on societal support, and to what degree does it act independently? Most philanthropic organizations consider themselves independent actors: they’re free to chart their own strategic course, identify their programmatic focus and goals, and determine how and where they operate. However, there is a growing recognition that meaningful impact requires an ecosystem of external partners and stakeholders, which can include: grantees, populations and communities served, other funders in the sector, policy makers, thought and opinion leaders, government actors and corporate entities. Partnership activities range from consulting and learning to co-creating, co-investing and co-funding, with shared rather than independent decision making. Indeed, many organizations and leaders have come to view convening and facilitating connections among funders, grantees and stakeholders as their primary purpose.





## ⚠️ Approach to Risk

Some philanthropic organizations believe that an obligation to maintain public trust can constrain their ability to take action on matters that might be deemed risky or controversial to key stakeholders. Other foundations believe that as independent actors in society, they are obligated to take risks, engender controversy and experiment with ideas that no one else can—or will. For many, risk is innate to philanthropy, deeply tied to the sense that a philanthropist should also be an innovator, and that philanthropy is risk capital. As one interviewee put it, “A foundation ought to be using its resources to look to new horizons, to experiment, to try out new things and to offer working models that others can take on.”<sup>15</sup>

Foundations often welcome the idea of risk because the term is used as shorthand for risk and opportunity. Being a “risk-taking foundation” has implications for a philanthropy’s social compact because it may open doors for other funders who don’t self-identify as risk-takers. For many philanthropies, adopting a more nuanced view of risk has been useful, separating out operational, strategic, reputational and other risk types. This can give the philanthropic organization a unique role in a particular field, or in society at large.

### The Philanthropy Framework in Action:

#### **EPISCOPAL HEALTH FOUNDATION**

As an expression of its commitment to problem solving, the Episcopal Health Foundation (EHF) prides itself on its willingness to take risks. EHF has taken what it calls an “evidence-informed” approach to philanthropy rather than an “evidence-based” approach, reflecting its position that every program worth funding will have an element of risk. EHF believes that funding the tried-and-true will not move the community forward.

An example of this approach is EHF’s programming aimed at creating community-centered health homes. EHF is supporting thirteen clinics to try this approach, and has allocated \$10 million to support grantmaking, coaching and technical assistance. While the programmatic decision is well informed with solid research behind it, it is not a sure bet. But the program holds long-term promise to improve clinic operations and serve as a model for others.

## The Philanthropy Framework in Action:

**WELLCOME TRUST**

Wellcome Trust describes itself as a “global charitable foundation, both politically and financially independent” that supports scientists and researchers, takes on big problems, fuel imaginations and sparks debate. Created in 1936 with assets from the estate of American-born Sir Henry Wellcome, the Trust’s direct mandate from its founder is to fund “the advancement of medical and scientific research to improve mankind’s wellbeing.”

As the UK’s largest charity, Wellcome has formal accountability to the Charity Commission, its ultimate regulator. In addition, Wellcome perceives the organizations it funds and the public at large to be important stakeholders. This is demonstrated clearly by Wellcome’s advocacy and policy work. Staff members understand that they have a strong mandate to drive reform.

As part of its commitment to these stakeholders, Wellcome’s practices have evolved over time to honor those relationships and lead by example. As one staff member stated, “We aim to be as transparent as we can. So if you look at the website, our annual reports are very detailed and [our] annual reviews are up there. We show who the money goes to and across [which] fields.” The importance of transparency is reflected in the Trust’s stated belief: “If you are acting for the public good, you have to be part of that discourse with the public about what the public good is, and then think about how to involve different communities that you are purporting to support.” But the organization recognizes that there is a balance to strike between being a funder and a member of the public discourse. According to another staff member, this is an “ongoing challenge—how much does one invest in communications, how much does the communications help achieve impact as much as the activity itself.”

Wellcome works strategically with government actors in order to avoid supplanting public resources. There is a clear delineation in the type of funding provided by government versus that provided by Wellcome; for example, Wellcome does not provide the overhead support typically supplied by government grants. Instead, Wellcome focuses on direct scientific research activities, helping to make sure that the UK remains a key player in the international research communities. Given this focus,



Wellcome goes beyond simply funding research; it also advocates on behalf of the UK research community to generally strengthen the field. As one member of Wellcome’s senior staff says, “Every time there is a spending review we go into battle on behalf of the UK research community. We fight particularly for science research and the academic community, to ensure that their funding is at least level, if not increasing.”

In addition to working collaboratively with the government, Wellcome partners with other funders. As an example, the organization negotiated with the other research funders, as well as the government, to create the Charity Research Support Fund, from which universities can receive funds “when they are successful in getting peer review charitable funding.”

However, Wellcome has found that size can also be a barrier to the development of external collaborations, sometimes making it hard to form true partnerships with smaller funders. They have gotten around this difficulty by developing relationships with larger, non-UK organizations. Among these have been partnerships with the Gates Foundation, for example, as well as joint funding opportunities with larger foundations in Germany and Sweden.

Given its social compact, Wellcome places a strong priority on measuring impact and success with a long-term perspective, realizing that research projects may not achieve short-term breakthroughs. Internally, Wellcome assesses each project individually at the end of each grant term. Because it naturally collects so much data through its activities, Wellcome is also looking at how best to manage and use that data. In and of itself, this data could be a tremendous asset to researchers and other UK-based and international funders, and presents Wellcome another opportunity to create positive change.

Figure 5. Operating Model components



## Operating Model

The third component of the Philanthropy Framework is the operating model: the combination of resources, structures and systems that enable a philanthropy to deliver on its mission, strategy and goals. Some philanthropies use one operating model for all of their work, while others use different operating models for specific programmatic areas, for instance, choosing different approaches for their environmental and cultural goals.

An operating model defines where and how key tasks happen, when critical resources should be brought in from outside, how parts of the organization connect, how resources are deployed and how work is distributed. The operating model encompasses financial and non-financial assets, talent and knowledge development, internal and external collaboration and organizational structure. In essence, an operating model defines how an organization deploys its capabilities to implement strategy and achieve results. An operating model can be looked at through two lenses: operating approaches and operating capabilities.

## Operating Approaches

Operating approaches include how an organization functions with respect to its operations. Philanthropic organizations, leaders told us, need to establish and calibrate a specific set of operating approaches around resourcing, decision-making, initiative, flexibility, programming and relationships. Decisions about these approaches can be thought of as points along a spectrum. While there is no “right” place to be on any of these spectra, each choice has important implications for an organization’s operations.



Figure 6. Operating Model parameters





### **Resourcing: Buy vs. Build**

For functions such as programmatic expertise, advocacy, communications and operations, an organization must choose whether to develop in-house expertise or to outsource through consultants. It may choose to act entirely as a grantmaker and/or investor (buying external expertise or action taken on its behalf), or to act, in effect, as an operating foundation by building internal capability in service of its mission. The decision to buy or build may be different for internal operations and external programs, or even among program areas. Many organizations view their people, skills, approach and tools as more important than their financial assets, so the cultivation and deployment of these non-financial resources is a critical decision.

For example, The Heron Foundation took a hard look at its operating capabilities, and then took steps to shift them toward the “build” end of the spectrum. As its former president Clara Miller noted, “We decided that we needed to do more than just conduct financial transactions; we also needed to leverage these transactions by being out in the investment community, by building and helping others to make deals. So we’ve moved beyond thinking of transactional relationships with grantees as the prime influence—we now put other voices to our work, not as a broadcast, but as a community. We hired a VP of Knowledge and Influence who is essentially community organizing around this work.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Decision-making: Centralized vs. Decentralized**

How a philanthropy makes decisions can deeply affect its approach to social change. When and where are decisions made? Do various programs operate independently, or are key program strategy and design decisions made centrally, with each program taking on an implementation role? How much latitude do individual program officers have? How much effort goes into integration across program areas or functions? Many foundations grapple with internal silos between functional and programmatic teams, and are increasingly looking at ways to intentionally create cross-foundation work in order to bridge those divides.

Adopting a centralized decision-making approach allows an organization to marshal all of its resources toward major long-term initiatives and creates internal focus, synergy and alignment around vision and a shared agenda. This approach is most conducive to large-scale, systems change. However, challenges of such an approach may include forced alignment and synergy, or a potential disconnect between designed solutions and the realities on the ground. In a decentralized approach, programmatic decisions and solutions are more closely linked to the affected communities and realities on the ground. However, decentralization may risk creating silos and or a lack of shared organizational vision, priorities and values.



**The Philanthropy Framework in Action:****FORD FOUNDATION**

Over the last eight years, the Ford Foundation has gradually shifted how it makes programmatic decisions in order to engage the entire organization in its mission to tackle inequality. The Foundation had traditionally operated on an academic model, where program officers were hired for their individual expertise and were given the latitude to pursue their own agendas. In order to increase coordination and collaboration across programs and regional offices, Ford refined its focus and condensed its lines of work. The Foundation's new structure requires different capabilities from directors and program officers, who now focus more on strategy and management than on direct grantmaking responsibilities. The push towards long-term, unrestricted funding also requires a shift in capabilities and orientation. Adjusting how it approaches decision-making and programming has allowed Ford to reduce organizational silos and unite the whole Foundation around its mission.

**🕒 Initiative: Proactive vs. Responsive**

Some organizations take a responsive approach to their work, supporting goals and initiatives defined by leaders in their field or community. Others see themselves as creators of solutions, designing their own goals and initiatives in service of their theory of change. Some fall in the middle of this spectrum, with a generally responsive grantmaking strategy complemented by select proactive initiatives. Organizations operating in conflict zones, for example, where urgent issues change rapidly and dramatically, likely need to be responsive. Issues requiring longer-term arcs of change, including human rights, generational poverty or other areas where solutions may take decades, tend to lean toward the proactive approach.

An organization that favors a proactive approach typically has a long-term trajectory that makes it less susceptible to the winds of change, or trend surfing. However, it should be mindful of the dangers of becoming insular. Thus, consideration should be given to a concerted effort to clearly communicate the vision and justification for choosing this approach. On the other end of the spectrum, a responsive organization is more open to input from communities it serves and to partnering with a broader ecosystem of stakeholders. However, it can fall victim to the latest trends and fixate on short-term objectives rather than long-term goals.



The Philanthropy Framework in Action:

**THE KRESGE FOUNDATION**

The Kresge Foundation is a multi-billion-dollar private foundation, based in southeastern Michigan, that works nationally in the areas of arts and culture, Detroit (as a distinct programmatic focus, not a solely geographic one), education, environment, health and human services. Established in 1924 by entrepreneur Sebastian Kresge with a mission “to promote human progress,” The Kresge Foundation today lives out that mandate through its work “to expand opportunities in America’s cities.”

The Foundation has used its flexible charter and its tight social compact as the basis for developing a set of distinct operating capabilities to support its work. The Foundation’s shift away from using a narrowly defined, single tool—the capital challenge grant—to a broad-based approach that “uses every tool in the toolbox” required a new set of skills within the organization. Although the transition has been complete for many years, the Foundation considers its evolution to be an ongoing process of constant reflection, refinement and adjustment that sharpens its ability to operate.

The Foundation works within a carefully crafted, overarching strategic framework to “strengthen the building blocks of vibrant urban life.” All program funding areas work in service of this framework, reflecting a centralized orientation. That said, although the Foundation is strongly centralized, it is also highly matrixed: programs are designed to work across fields and approaches, and there are numerous cross-functional sub-groups of staff that combine program activities with other practice areas as needed.

Stemming from its desire to be more than a “checkbook” for nonprofits, the Foundation undertakes an active, hands-on, entrepreneurial approach to its issue areas. This is indicative of a foundation that operates like a builder, rather a buyer. The Foundation is actively involved—from ideation/conceptualization to implementation—in the projects, programs and services it supports. This can result in creating new organizations to fill a void or working to strengthen an entire field, among other approaches.

Although a foundation of Kresge’s size and stature could work far more independently than it does, the Foundation recognizes the importance of working with others in order to achieve its goals. As a result, it can be described as



networked in its operating style rather than independent. President & CEO Rip Rapson described it this way: “You really have to not just go into lockdown. Acknowledge that all of the philanthropy is completely interwoven with the other members of the civic community.” This is a direct illustration of how the Foundation lives out its social compact.

Because the Foundation spends significant time and energy to make intentional, informed choices about its purpose, role and value-added characteristics, it operates in a highly disciplined manner. It has explicitly articulated a cohesive approach that defines its identity, values, tools and methods. These elements provides clear parameters, both internally and externally, for carrying out its work.

The Foundation works across six diverse program areas that arguably cover the most common major funding areas among foundations. The broad approach serves its mission well, recognizing that the needs of low-income people in America’s cities are multifaceted. While many foundations in the last 20 years have eschewed breadth in favor of depth, The Kresge Foundation is able to operate across this wide spectrum precisely because it has taken pains to so clearly define what it seeks to accomplish, how to best do it and why it is singularly positioned to play a specific role in that field.

**You really have to not just go into lockdown. Acknowledge that all of the philanthropy is completely interwoven with the other members of the civic community.**

**RIP RAPSON**  
President & CEO



### Flexibility: Creative vs. Disciplined

For many years, funders have been drawn to the discipline of the logic model, or a theory of change. They therefore want to stick to their implementation blueprint, especially because long-term commitments are critical to making sustainable systems change. Other funders prefer to assess and adjust very frequently. Some want to give staff the ability to make tactical decisions within a broad framework. And some keep some funding capacity in reserve to respond to emerging opportunities, including collaboration. Clearly, neither being completely rigid nor totally ad-hoc is optimal, but there are many thoughtful, valid approaches between those two extremes. Each approach, though, requires alignment of staffing, budgeting and reporting systems.

Organizations on the creative end of the spectrum are most successful when they have tolerance for experimentation and failure, as well as systems and processes light on bureaucracy, in order to encourage creativity. They should be aware that while the sought-after creativity can sometimes yield unexpected solutions, innovations and new approaches, it can be difficult to assess progress, especially in the short term. Disciplined philanthropies that require clear timelines and deliverables can, on the other hand, easily track progress, but they risk a disproportionate focus on short-term objectives and becoming isolated from the realities on the ground and change.

### Programming: Broad vs. Deep

Some organizations favor having well-defined programs with clear boundaries, while others define their role in terms of a broad social change agenda with a variety of modes of implementation among the groups they support. Some foundations seek to create impact in highly specific areas, intending to create ripple effects that reach the systems level; others pursue “big bet” or field-building grantmaking with the intention of seeding an approach, movement or strategy for change.

Those that favor broad programming tend to focus on long-term change and the broad forces that shape the world. However, they should be careful to guard against superficiality, ambiguous focus, diluted resources and a mismatch between resources and problems. To address this from a staffing perspective, they should seek out individuals with strong strategic and analytical capacity, who are comfortable being generalists and working across many subject areas and functions. For organizations that lean toward the deep approach, the deep and narrow focus does not automatically preclude collaboration or a deep understanding of the whole system. They can in fact create change that others can learn from, adopt and adapt for broader applications as long as they are intentionally aware of how their work fits into the larger system and avoid working in isolation.





### Relationships: Networked vs. Independent

How a foundation sees its role and interactions within a community of peer funders, applicants, grantees and other stakeholders is a crucial question. Collaborations are of significant interest to many foundations in principle; however, foundation leaders often have concerns about the time, investment and political dexterity needed to deliver them. Some foundations prefer to take solitary or unilateral action, which they may define as exhibiting leadership, risk-taking and/or ownership of an issue. Others tend to take a networked approach with a focus on collaboration and even co-creation, seeking buy-in, leverage and a larger sphere of influence and impact.

Networked organizations gain invaluable exposure to ideas and approaches generated by others and benefit from the multiplier effect of collaboration. This approach makes it easier to address highly controversial issues, mitigate risks and create movements and coalitions. However, organizations adopting this approach must make an effort not to dilute their activities, resources and organizational identity by joining too many coalitions. Organizations that fall toward the independent end of the spectrum are more likely to experiment and risk failure, as they can more easily align internal resources, set their own agenda, demonstrate leadership and maintain a unique voice. Such independent organizations, however, may risk becoming isolated and irrelevant.

### SCALING SOLUTIONS TOWARD SHIFTING SYSTEMS: Approaches for Impact, Approaches for Learning

Realizing that the world's pressing challenges are becoming more complex, many philanthropic funders are reflecting on how to create more transformational impact. To help answer that question, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, in partnership with the Skoll Foundation and others, launched the Scaling Solutions toward Shifting Systems initiative in 2016 as an inquiry: Can we encourage funders to work more collaboratively to place longer-term, adaptive resources to fund and accelerate scalable solutions targeting systemic changes around pressing global issues?

The initiative's second report, titled "Scaling Solutions toward Shifting Systems: Approaches for Impact, Approaches for Learning" was published by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors in September 2018. It examines existing funder collaborative models aimed at shifting systems and creating more sustainable solutions. Our research focused on two questions that surfaced from our initial analysis. The first question sought to identify how and why funders successfully moved from endorsing approaches identified in the first report (streamlining, collaborating, accelerating impact, learning and empowering grantees) to actually improving their policies and practices around those approaches. The second area of inquiry delved into what lessons we can learn from existing funder collaborative models dedicated to systems change. Based on findings from 25 diverse funder collaboratives, the report highlights effective practices and illustrates the kind of funder collaboratives that are gaining momentum and fostering the ecosystem for solutions to scale.<sup>17</sup>





## Operating Capabilities

In addition to reviewing operating approaches, it is important for an organization to take stock of its entire range of operating capabilities. This can help validate its trajectory or help identify potential tension points, misalignments and gaps. Operating capabilities include the organization’s arsenal of activities, assets and resources—internal and external, as well as tangible and intangible. Among these resources are:

- Talent
- Financial tools (impact investing, PRIs, grants, etc.)
- Knowledge and strategic insights
- Reputation and influence
- Networks and relationships
- Project management

The topic of talent has gained increased attention in the philanthropic sector. There is a growing recognition of the need to build teams that reflect the populations served, understand and espouse the values and needs of the organization, and possess specialized skills and knowledge needed for their roles. Organizations are also becoming more cognizant of the need to shift internal culture to promote, empower and enable talent, break down silos and create a team-based culture.



Globally, philanthropies are placing a sharper strategic focus on overcoming limited diversity within the sector and embedding diversity, equity and inclusion on an organizational level. In addition to recruiting talent representative of groups that have been traditionally excluded and marginalized, the concepts of diversity and equity increasingly come to include diversity of thought and political perspectives, as well as equity of power and equity of pay. There is recognition that greater prioritization of diversity, equity and inclusion involves increasing diversity at the leadership and decision-making level, as well as educating staff, senior leadership and board members on issues related to diversity and inclusion. To achieve equitable and competitive salaries, a growing number of organizations are becoming committed to conducting regular compensation studies and encouraging conversations about pay transparency.

**There is recognition that greater prioritization of diversity, equity and inclusion involves increasing diversity at the leadership and decision-making level, as well as educating staff, senior leadership and board members on issues related to diversity and inclusion.**

**The Philanthropy Framework in Action:  
NEWMAN'S OWN FOUNDATION**

Newman's Own Foundation is an independent, private foundation formed in 2005 by Paul Newman to maintain his commitment to philanthropy. The Foundation is the sole owner of Newman's Own, Inc., the food and beverage company, and is funded entirely through the net profits and royalties generated from the sale of Newman's Own products. It does not have an endowment, raise funds or accept donations. The Foundation has a unique relationship with public consumers through its stated promise to donate 100 percent of profits generated by the Newman's Own company and any associated royalties to charity, and maintains the informal and adaptive style of Paul Newman in its operations and management.

Newman's Own Foundation's core capabilities reflect the balance between adaptability and structure that are at the heart of the organization's culture. Decision-making responsibility is distributed across the organization to give staff leaders autonomy and flexibility, while maintaining strategic focus through the framework of the four focus areas and the Foundation's guiding principles. The President & CEO of the Foundation can approve grants up to \$250,000 and the Managing Director can approve grants up to \$50,000. Larger grants require board approval.

Managing Director Kelly Giordano describes the foundation's approach as flexible within a planned framework. While the foundation makes a plan each year to meet its projected grantmaking budget, it also maintains the spontaneity that Paul Newman traditionally used to make decisions, remaining flexible and open to new opportunities for impact. With a lean team of seven people working on the foundation's grantmaking (including the President & CEO), fluidity and creative thinking are highly valued.



The Foundation looks to nonprofit organizations working in its areas of interest for their leadership in proposing new ideas and initiatives, and is comfortable with supporting pilot programs and new strategies that other funders might not support. It uses its perspective and experience to raise the level of knowledge across the field, offering constructive feedback to help grantees increase their effectiveness.

The Foundation strongly values using networks and relationships to advance its work and operate more efficiently. It relies on proactively conducting research in the field to assess different approaches to key issues; it also prioritizes talking with peer funders and identifying innovative organizations that can help inform its grantmaking strategies. It has invested in connecting grantees with each other, as well as creating peer learning cohorts of grantees to foster collaboration and sharing of ideas. The Foundation also emphasizes strong communications with the public to share what it learns and promote its grantees' work.

**We want to be an organization that's known for its imagination, its ability to engage in new ideas. We are proactive in terms of engaging our grantees, but not prescriptive.**

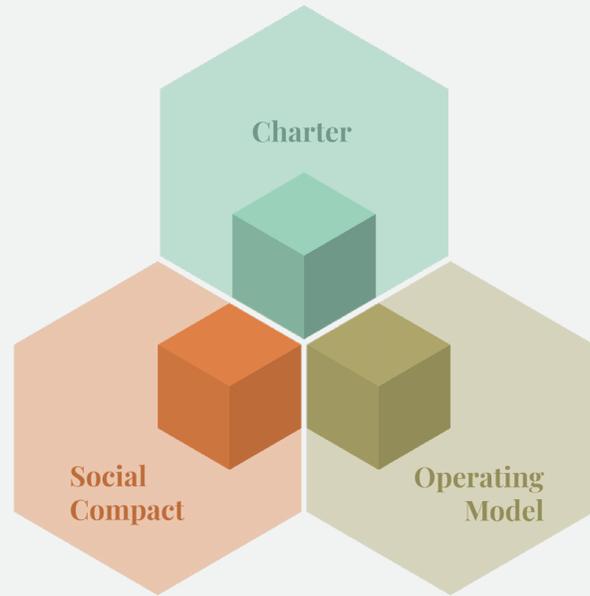
**BOB FORRESTER**  
President & CEO

## Conclusion

Today, millions of foundations and nonprofits are working across a highly developed, multi-sector constellation of institutions, fields and networks. Collaboration at scale has become both possible, given this rich supply of external capacity, and increasingly feasible, as our collective imagination and adaptive capacity have begun to catch up to game-changing advances in technology. At the same time, knowledge and resources are fragmented, and a loss of trust in major societal institutions is on the rise globally. It is vital for foundations to investigate and articulate their role in society, their operational strategies and their relationships to others to more effectively implement change. The Philanthropy Framework is intended to help philanthropic organizations navigate these challenges and complexities through reflection and analysis, contributing to the public good as well as the ongoing evolution of our field.

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Houston Endowment	William Grant Foundation



### Charter

The foundation's scope, form of governance and decision-making protocol

- Governance
- Values
- Decision Making
- Commitments
- Mission & Purpose
- Scope



### Social Compact

Implicit or explicit agreement with society on the value the foundation will create

- Accountability
- Legitimacy
- Transparency
- Direction of Influence on Society
- Independence / Interdependence
- Approach to Risk



### Operating Model

Dominant approaches that guide how a foundation carries out its work

- Resourcing
- Decision Making
- Initiative
- Flexibility
- Programming
- Relationships

# Endnotes

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