S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation National Character Initiative Retrospective

Final Report

DECEMBER 2020

Leah Brown | Maria Payri | Sarah Hodgman | Allison Dymnicki | Deborah Moroney

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1. Background

Over the past few decades, researchers developed a wealth of knowledge about how children grow and develop, how they become learners, and the factors that nourish or hinder their growth into adulthood. A convergence of research across many scientific disciplines—including neuroscience, early childhood, the social sciences, psychology, the science of adversity, strength-based approaches to human thriving, and the learning sciences—paints a more dynamic and optimistic picture of human development than once existed (Cantor et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2020). For example, when children's interests, needs, and abilities are matched with opportunity and support, they develop neural pathways throughout childhood and into adolescence that allow them to master key knowledge and skills. The brain continues to develop from birth to adolescence; during this period, the brain is remarkably resilient in both learning new ideas and overcoming challenges. This understanding highlights the importance of learning and development that occurs in multiple contexts, including out-of-school-time settings (e.g., afterschool programs, summer programs; American Institutes for Research, 2019).

Research on promoting positive youth development and character consistently cites adult training, skills, and relationships with youth as vital to youth achieving positive developmental outcomes (Hamilton, 2016; Moroney & Devaney, 2017; Van Dam et al., 2018). Caring adults, whether they are teachers in the classroom, full-time staff leading YMCA programs, or Scout troop leaders, help youth to achieve their fullest potential (Paisley & Ferrari, 2005; Mahoney & Warner, 2014; Smith, et al., 2012; Starr & Gannett, 2017). Because of this body of evidence, and also inspired by Stephen Davison Bechtel, Jr.'s own experiences in the Boy Scouts of America as a child, the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation (the Foundation) designed its first and only national initiative, which began in 2014.

The National Character Initiative (the Initiative) sought to bolster youth development organizations in supporting character development in youth and to advance the practices of adults who work with young people. The Foundation did so by investing in the organizational capacity of youth-serving organizations, with a focus on improving program quality and organizational infrastructure. The Foundation provided funding to these organizations (totaling $126 million) and offered peer learning opportunities to adults who worked at the organizations that were grounded in evidence-based practices (S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, 2019). The Foundation's approach for the Initiative pivoted away from traditional models of grantmaking by shifting power from the funder to grantees.

Starting in 2019, the Foundation partnered with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a retrospective inquiry that described and unpacked the Foundation's approach to

grantmaking and the outcomes of the National Character Initiative from the perspectives of Foundation staff, grantees, and field experts who served as consultants. This report provides a summary of the findings of this retrospective, including (1) an overview of the initiative, (2) the purpose of the retrospective, (3) findings from the retrospective, and (4) AIR's recommendations for other grantmakers based on the findings of the retrospective.

2. Overview of the National Character Initiative

The Foundation began the National Character Initiative with introductory grants, which they awarded to 13 national youth-serving organizations. These were short-term grants that focused on projects that were ready for immediate implementation. The introductory grants allowed the Foundation staff to get to know each grantee and assess their readiness for larger grants. Then, the Foundation invited these 13 organizations, along with 11 others, to submit proposals for multiyear grants that focused on advancing promising adult practices to enhance young people's character development (S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, 2019).

The 24 grantees that participated in the Initiative were categorized into five cohorts:

- The **leadership cohort** consisted of seven large national organizations that aim to instill character and leadership skills in youth.

- The **sports and play cohort** included three organizations that focus on developing the skills of coaches to support character development and social and emotional learning.

- The **nature cohort** consisted of three organizations that encourage environmental stewardship and aim to develop character through experiences in nature.

- The **policy cohort** included five organizations and influential thought leaders that inform policy and advocacy work in the field of character development.

- The **California cohort** consisted of six organizations, including the California Department of Education and collaborating intermediaries, that aim to improve the quality of publicly funded afterschool programs while infusing character-building practices into those programs.

2.a. Focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Starting in 2018, the Foundation sought to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in its convenings with grantees and later with grantmaking. This priority was a direct response to grantees who expressed a desire and need to address inequities within their organizations. The Foundation provided supports to grantees that aimed to build the grantees' capacity related to DEI in two ways. First, they hired a consultant, Equity Meets Design, to provide technical assistance to grantees on the ways in which inequities are built into organizational design, and

how organizations can develop solutions to address equity problems. Second, the Foundation allocated close to $2 million for *Working Towards Equity* grants, which were provided to existing grantees with the intention of helping them build capacity toward addressing issues of equity.

2.b. System of Supports

Throughout the course of the grant activities, the Foundation provided supports to grantees to help them achieve their goals and advance internal change. The Foundation believed that it was important to invest in these supports to elevate knowledge of evidence-based practices among grantees, connect research to practice, and encourage grantees to influence federal and state policy in support of character development.[1] The supports included (1) technical assistance from Foundation program staff, (2) convenings and communities of practice (CoPs), and (3) technical assistance from expert partners.

Technical Assistance From Foundation Program Staff. Each grantee was paired with a team of highly engaged program staff who met regularly with grantees in person, attended their key events and meetings, and held one-on-one monthly calls. Foundation staff provided tailored support that was responsive to grantees' needs and ongoing feedback throughout the grant period. Foundation staff also connected grantees to other grantees across the Initiative portfolio and with relevant experts in the field so they could collaborate and develop knowledge that could benefit them.

Convenings and CoPs. The Foundation assembled convenings of grantees and partners (i.e., expert partners, other foundations, policymakers, and influencers) initially once a year, and twice a year beginning in 2019. The convenings included sessions about current research and policy related to character development. Staff from each grantee organization participated in CoPs that met during the in-person convenings, and, in some cases, met virtually between the convenings as well. There were five CoPs, and each included staff who held similar roles at their respective organizations: (1) programming and practice, (2) research and evaluation, (3) policy, (4) strategy, and (5) organizational leadership (e.g., chief executive officers).

The Foundation designed the CoPs to be an opportunity for grantees to address topics that were important to grantees in collaboration with peers who held similar roles at their respective organizations. The CoPs also allowed staff from each of the grantees to share knowledge with each other and problem-solve challenges collaboratively. The CoPs also were intended to be an opportunity to explore and initiate partnerships with each other, collaborate

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[1] http://sdbjrfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/EDU-Character-concluding-snapshot_2020Jul31.pdf

on new projects or initiatives, and think about how to bolster the work that each organization is doing to have a larger influence on the field.

Technical Assistance From Expert Partners. The Foundation provided grantees with access to expert partners who delivered content at the convenings and/or through webinars. The expert partners were intended to respond to grantees' questions and strengthen the work they sought to accomplish through their grant. They also connected grantees with other organizations or resources that could support grantees in implementing their grant. Some of these experts worked with individual grantees to help them strengthen their organizations in specific areas, such as communication and dissemination or research and evaluation. Expert partners included:

- Collaborative Communications Group—a strategic communications firm that helped grantees to develop communications plans and storytelling techniques

- Equity Meets Design—an equity advising firm that conducted equity workshops during the convenings

- Fowler Hoffman LLC—a policy strategy group that advised the California-based cohort and the policy CoP

- La Piana Consulting—an organizational development and leadership consulting firm that helped grantees establish their goals for the grants and facilitated the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) CoP

- Randel Consulting—a management consulting firm that oversaw the convenings and CoPs

3. About the Retrospective

AIR partnered with the Foundation, starting in 2019, to conduct a retrospective to capture grantees' experiences with the National Character Initiative. Specifically, the retrospective aimed to describe grantees' experiences implementing the grants and participating in the system of supports. The retrospective used four data sources:

- *Survey*—The survey, administered to all grantees and partners, asked questions about the supports that were provided through the National Character Initiative and the influence of the Initiative on grantees and the field. In total, 54 staff from 28 organizations completed the survey.

- *Interviews*—Interviews were conducted with select grantees and partners. In total, 32 staff from 23 organizations participated in the interviews. There were five interview protocols, which asked grantees and partners to speak about their experiences with the Initiative related to (1) opportunities for partnerships and collaboration; (2) DEI initiatives; (3)

organizational capacity-building initiatives; (4) the Foundation's unique approach in supporting grantees; and (5) movement in the field.

- *Observations*—AIR observed three CoP meetings during the January 2020 convening (programming and practice, policy, and strategy). During each observation, AIR took note of the level of inclusivity, opportunities for collaboration, and opportunities for grantees to provide each other with feedback.

- *Focus groups*—AIR conducted two focus groups with six staff from the evaluation CoP.[2] The focus groups discussed grantees' experiences participating in the CoP, including the level of inclusivity, opportunities for collaboration, opportunities for grantees to provide each other with feedback, and the influence of the CoPs on organizations.

Appendix A provides a full description of the methods that were used for the retrospective. Throughout this report, we present survey data in the form of counts and percentages,[3] supplemented with examples provided through the open-ended response items and through illustrative responses shared during the interviews and focus groups.

4. Findings

In this section, we describe the findings from the surveys and interviews. The findings are organized into six sections: (1) objectives of the multiyear grants, (2) key transformation elements, (3) benefits of the supports, (4) influence of the Initiative, (5) future of grantees and the field, and (6) barriers or areas for growth.

4.a. Objectives of the Multiyear Grants

The Foundation intended for the multiyear grants to address two aims. The first aim was to support high-quality adult practices by conducting research to understand what approaches are effective, and then using that research to enhance training and professional development for youth-serving practitioners. The Foundation's second aim was to increase organizations' reach and impact by helping them to scale up proven models and build internal infrastructure to grow as an organization (S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, 2019).

At the onset of each grant, the grantee reported what their organization planned to achieve with the money they received (within the aims that the Foundation had outlined). These reported goals included the following:

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[2] AIR was unable to observe the evaluation CoP during the convening and, therefore, conducted a focus group with members to capture their perceptions of the CoPs and how they worked together.

[3] Closed-ended questions are indicated with percentages. Open-ended questions are indicated with number of respondents (*N*s). The denominators for these questions vary across items because some survey respondents did not respond to all questions.

- Strengthen professional development and training opportunities for practitioners within their organization (41%, 11 organizations)

- Improve the quality of programming or services (34%, eight organizations)

- Build their internal capacity for research and evaluation (31%, five organizations)

- Serve more youth (21%, five organizations)

- Build learning management systems (17%, five organizations)

We describe the outcomes of these grants and the influence they had on organizations in section 4.d.2.

4.b. Key Transformation Elements

Foundation staff identified three key transformational elements of the Initiative that they believed were integral to grantees' success: (1) responsiveness to needs, (2) a culture of feedback, and (3) opportunities for partnerships. AIR asked grantees and partners about their experiences with each of these elements and how the Foundation integrated each of them into supports (program officers and other Foundation staff, CoPs, and expert partners) that were provided to grantees.

4.b.1. Responsiveness to Needs

The Foundation aimed to support grantees in addressing their organizational priorities to promote organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

Program officers were responsive to grantees' needs by getting to know grantees, being transparent, being flexible, and helping grantees address challenges with their grants. Grantees believed that the supports that were provided to them were responsive in a variety of ways. First, all grantees agreed that the Foundation staff helped them respond to challenges that arose during grant implementation (100%) and that Foundation staff took the time to understand their organization's specific context (e.g., priorities, structure; 100%). All grantees also agreed that the Foundation staff were committed to being transparent and accountable (100%) and that they provided timely responses to grantees' requests and questions (100%).

Grantees also described the Foundation staff as flexible and accommodating in allowing grantees to pivot priorities (*n* = 9). For example, staff from Camp Fire explained that they had originally planned to conduct a market analysis with 20 of their councils, but halfway through the process

"They were showing up to learn, and showing up with humility, and showing up with grace, and showing up with just genuine interest in both the good and the ugly, the bad of the work." – Omar Guessous, Boys and Girls Clubs of America

realized that number was too ambitious and decided to scale back to 10–12 councils instead. They noted that having a flexible program officer who allowed them to make this change was key to the successful implementation of their grant. In addition, staff from the California AfterSchool Network mentioned that at the onset of COVID-19, the Foundation allowed all grantees to redirect some of their funding to address organizational needs related to the pandemic, which helped them to avoid some layoffs that would have otherwise occurred.

CoPs were driven by the interests and needs of grantees. Grantees also believed that the CoPs were implemented in a way that was responsive to their needs. For example, all of the survey respondents (100%) said that the topics that were discussed during the CoPs were of interest to the participants. Interviewees from the evaluation CoP described how their shared interest in using a social and emotional measure from Hello Insight led them to invite the organization's director to present to the CoP. This experience then informed the CoP's future meetings, during which members discussed how their organization used the measure and how it was relevant to each of them.

The support from expert partners was targeted to grantees and will have lasting value to them. Grantees indicated that the expert partners provided by the Foundation played an integral role in responding to their needs and helping them to implement their grants. Most grantees who responded to the survey (74%) agreed that the support provided by the expert partners was of lasting value to their organization. Specifically, CEOs who responded to the survey and CEOs who participated in interviews identified La Piana Consulting as a helpful partner that helped their organizations with strategic planning and establishing plans for sustainability. In addition, a staff member from the Boy Scouts of America described how the Collaborative Communications Group helped them to rebrand and worked with them to develop messaging targeted toward their key stakeholders.

4.b.2. Culture of Feedback and Learning

The Foundation hoped to promote a culture of feedback and learning for grantees that was data driven and actionable. To do this, they provided individualized supports for people serving in different roles at respective organizations (e.g., research and evaluation directors), grounded in the idea of learning together.

Foundation staff were collaborative and provided grantees with valuable feedback. All of the survey respondents agreed that the Foundation staff were deeply committed to maintaining a collaborative relationship (100%). Almost all grantees agreed that Foundation staff helped their organization assess how well they were accomplishing their goals (98%) and that Foundation staff provided useful feedback on how to optimize the grant money (95%). A representative from Big Brothers Big Sisters of America explained that their program officer "made … sure we

thought everything through … she would ask really good questions. … Sometimes we'd say, 'Well, we hadn't really thought about that.' Or 'That's really a good idea.' I think she made us a better organization." A representative from the YMCA of the USA explained that their program officer conducted site visits to observe program delivery, which allowed the program officer to more effectively advise them on how to implement their grant.

> "The team created space for exploration of better ways to not only use the funding but leverage it with other partners. … They were responsive while holding the integrity and spirit of the work." – Tiffany Gipson, California AfterSchool Network

CoPs provided grantees with opportunities to learn and solicit feedback from their peers. For example, almost all grantees (96%) agreed that their CoP motivated them to share work-related knowledge with other members of the CoP, and most (89%) agreed that their fellow CoP members provided them with feedback that helped them reflect on their work. Staff from the National 4-H Council described conversations that they had with peers about the challenges of operating within a federated structure. Through the CoPs, they were able to learn from their peers (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs of America, YMCA) and establish practical strategies suitable for federated systems.

Expert partners provided feedback to grantees on how to implement the grants. In addition, most grantees (75%) agreed that the expert partners bolstered conversations within their organization about how to best address the needs of their staff or the youth that they serve, and that the expert partners helped their organization establish goals and plans for how to use the grant money (70%). For example, a representative from Temescal Associates described how, after attending sessions conducted by Equity Meets Design at the convenings, their organization embedded equity into their policies, procedures, and practices to ensure that they are including equitable practices throughout their design and implementation.

4.b.3. Opportunities for Partnership

The Foundation intended to provide opportunities for grantees to discuss the commonalities in their work and to partner on specific projects or initiatives through Foundation staff, CoPs, and expert partners.

Foundation staff connected grantees with others in the field. Almost all of the grantees who responded to the survey (97%) agreed that Foundation staff helped them build relationships and networks with others in the field. One staff member from Playworks described how the Foundation connected them with AIR, which helped them conduct a study about the quality of practitioners and how that relates to quality implementation of the Playworks model.

Ultimately, this partnership allowed Playworks to better understand how they can select and support practitioners, with the goal of creating a high-quality experience for all youth.

CoPs allowed grantees to share resources, collaborate with peers, and establish relationships with peers. All grantees agreed that the CoPs give them an opportunity to share resources with staff from other organizations. When asked to describe the resources they shared, survey respondents discussed resources related to human capital (e.g., hiring, training; *n* = 12), research and evaluation (e.g., data collection tools, research articles; *n* = 11), DEI (e.g., best practice guides, books, or articles; *n* = 11), policy (e.g., policy statements, support letters; *n* = 6), and dissemination (e.g., messaging language, examples of presentations; *n* = 6).[4]

Almost all grantees agreed that the CoPs helped them to build relationships with others who have a similar role to them (96%), and most agreed that the CoPs provided them with opportunities to collaborate on projects and initiatives (89%). They explained that the convenings and CoPs allowed grantees to learn about what other organizations are doing and what their priorities are. This brought to light the many similarities across organizations and highlighted opportunities for partnership. Exhibit 1 shows illustrative examples of partnerships that were built through the CoPs.

"Within [the cohorts] … [they connected] the dots across the whole constellation of a dozen-plus of the national organizations."
– Michael Randel, Randel Consulting

"Realizing that there are other organizations out there doing very similar things—even though we're using different mediums, different timelines, different types of practices—[was helpful]." – Penny Jeffers, Outward Bound USA

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[4] These replies were in response to a short-answer survey item. In total, 40 respondents answered this question.

Exhibit 1. Partnerships Between Community of Practice Members

Conference Presentations or Publications (*n* = 9)

Staff from Outward Bound, the Student Conservation Association, and NatureBridge copresented at conferences, such as the 2019 Children and Nature Network International Conference, about how to integrate social and emotional learning into youth programs that target environmental stewardship and nature.

Policy Initiatives (*n* = 7)

Staff from the Afterschool Alliance and the Forum for Youth Investment partnered on whole-child policy projects. This partnership was a yearlong effort that initially focused on developing the Character Coalition to identify funding streams for youth organizations. The collaboration resulted in the Character Development Policy Workgroup, where similarly situated policy organizations strategized together.

Equity Task Force (*n* = 6)

Some members of the program CoP formed an equity task force that redesigned their respective programs to embed equity, develop equity statements, and conduct equity workshops.

Public Relations (*n* = 6)

Some grantees collaborated on a communications project with Spitfire Strategies that focused on promoting social and emotional learning and positive youth development.

Tool Development (*n* = 5)

Some grantees in the evaluation CoP developed measures and instruments that could be used for program evaluation, and grantees in the program CoP worked together to develop tools to aid their programs' transitions to virtual formats in response to the pandemic.

Note: These replies were in response to a short-answer survey item. In total, 40 respondents answered this question.

Almost all grantees believed that the CoPs provide an environment that allowed members to build trusting relationships (98%) and feel a sense of belongingness in the group (96%). Specifically, members of the evaluation CoP explained that they developed strong bonds with each other and that they felt "understood" by their peers. They explained that their CoP gave them an opportunity to have deep conversations with "wise crowds" and problem-solve issues that they were all facing. They also said that having the opportunity to be together in the same

location and share meals and other informal gatherings bolstered the relationships that were developed. Interviewees also noted that several organizations that were represented within the evaluation CoP had existing partnerships that were strengthened or deepened through the Initiative.

Expert partners fostered collaboration among grantees. Most grantees said that expert partners guided them on how their organization could collaborate with other youth development or character development organizations (79%). Specifically, Randel Consulting organized

"[Randel] brought a lot of value in the way that he's structured it being so participatory … [with an] almost open-space approach, where people are really sharing, and learning together."
– David La Piana, La Piana Consulting

the convenings in ways that provided opportunities for grantees to get to know each other and collaborate both during formal sessions (e.g., breakout groups) and informal gatherings (e.g., unstructured dinners), and structured sessions in ways that put the needs of grantees at the forefront.

4.c. Benefits of Supports

AIR asked survey respondents which of the Foundation's supports were most helpful to them. Although grantees noted that each support played an important role, nearly half of the grantees (45%) said **the convenings were the most helpful support**, explaining that the convenings allowed organizations with similar goals to spend an extended amount of time together and forge relationships that would not have existed otherwise. A third of grantees (34%) named the CoP as the most helpful support. These grantees explained that the CoPs provided them with opportunities for deeper conversations with others in similar roles. Some grantees (21%) said that the Foundation staff and program officers were most helpful to them because they were thought partners who helped grantees to reflect on their achievements and navigate challenges. None of the respondents listed the expert partners as the most helpful support provided by the Foundation.

4.d. Influence of the National Character Initiative

When establishing the Initiative, the Foundation aimed to have a lasting influence on grantees' organizational capacity for high-quality programming as well as on the field more broadly, both through grant funding and associated supports (e.g., convenings, CoPs).

4.d.1. Influence of Grants

Grantees described how the multiyear grants influenced their organization. As shown in Exhibit 2, grantees identified six different ways that the multiyear grants influenced their organization.

Exhibit 2. Influence of Multiyear Grants on Grantees
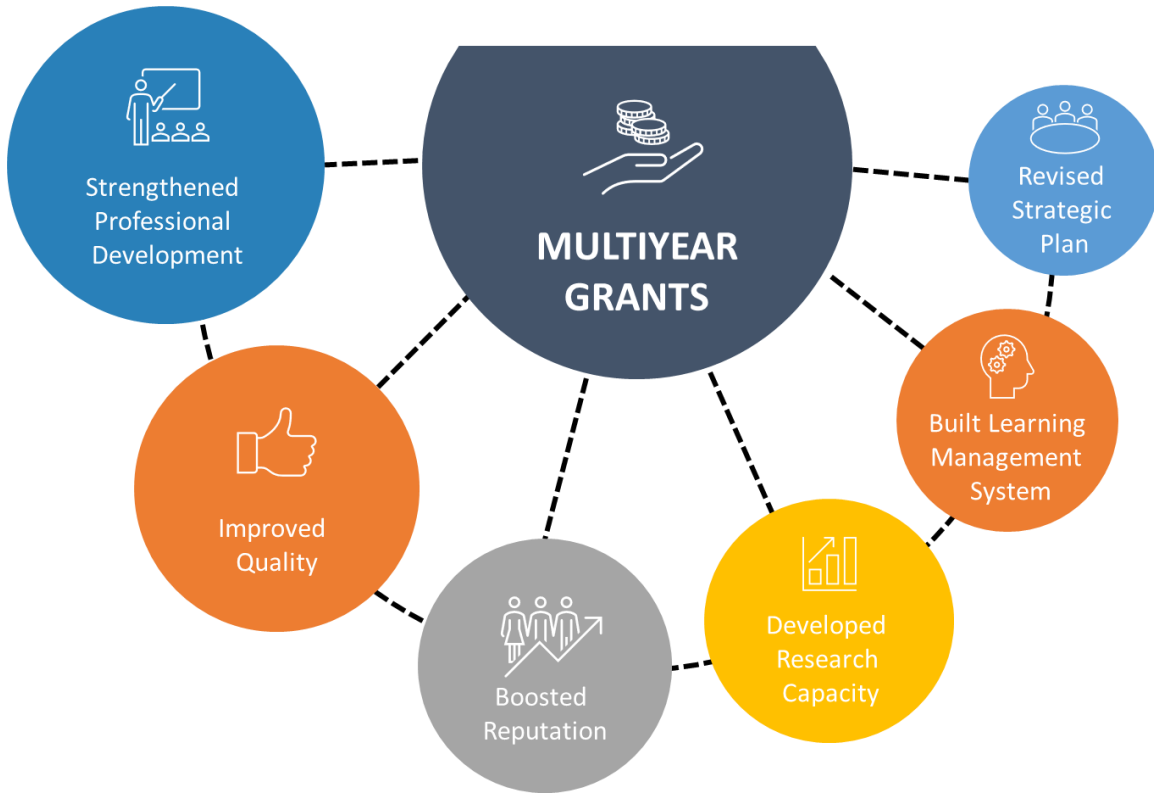
Grantees described the following examples of outcomes of the multiyear grants:

Strengthened professional development and training opportunities (96%, 23 organizations). All of the grantees who listed professional development and training as an objective at the onset of the grant agreed that their multiyear grant helped them to achieve this goal. A staff member from Coaching Corps described how their organization developed content intended to strengthen the social-emotional and character skills of the coaches who work with youth in underserved communities. Using the grant, Coaching Corps developed trainings and a learning management system that allowed practitioners to access resources and engage with one another on these topics.

Improved the quality of programming or services (95%, 22 organizations). All grantees who indicated improving quality of programming or services agreed that they achieved this goal through their grant. Staff from the Boys and Girls Clubs of America explained how their organization used the grant to make core updates to their continuous quality improvement system. The ultimate goal of this undertaking was to create a high-quality

"Without the strong foundation of quality in clubs, it's hard to help young people thrive, and grow, and learn, and develop." - Omar Guessous, Boys and Girls Clubs of America

experience for all clubs, which they accomplished by first building internal capacity and establishing quality networks within the organization, and then by building a suite of professional development resources that can be used by staff in all roles (e.g., CEOs, operations, frontline staff).

Boosted their reputation or image (93%, 23 organizations). Although none of the grantees indicated that they went into their grant with the goal of boosting their reputation or image, most respondents indicated that it was an outcome of the grant. This was an unanticipated benefit of the Initiative. A representative from the Boys and Girls Clubs of America explained how the support from the Foundation helped them to improve their reputation among other funders, attributing this improvement not only to the actual money provided by the Foundation but also to support that the Foundation provided.

"My thank you note to the Foundation, that we are now in a place where we are rebuilding... we are going to be able to restart at a different place because when we have new staff hired in, we will have a consistent set of training that staff can participate in."- Elizabeth Fowlkes, Boys and Girls Clubs of America

Developed their capacity for research or evaluation (90%, 20 organizations). All but one grantee who listed capacity for research and evaluation as a grant objective agreed that the multiyear grants influenced their capacity in this area. The National 4-H Council described in detail how they used their grant to build capacity and strategy for evaluation. As part of this effort, the organization (1) created a cadre of instruments that could be used by local programs to measure outcomes; (2) trained local programs on how data can be used in program development, implementation, and transformation; and (3) developed reporting processes that could be used by local programs to disseminate findings to their stakeholders. The Learning Policy Institute was the only grantee that listed research and evaluation as a goal but not an outcome.

Built learning management systems (78%, 16 organizations). All grantees who named building learning management systems as a grant objective indicated achieving this goal through their grant. For example, Playworks used the grant to develop a learning management system that was informed by research on how organizations train and support adults to effectively work with youth. The learning management system was designed for adult practitioners who work directly with youth, including Playworks staff as well as school staff not employed by Playworks. Their approach took sustainability into consideration, by ensuring that schools could implement the system without direct coaching support from Playworks.

Revised their strategic plan to advance their mission (68%, 17 organizations). All grantees who listed revising their strategic plan as an objective reported achieving this outcome. For example, staff from Camp Fire mentioned revising their strategic plan to include DEI, stating that this would not have happened without the push from the Foundation to invest in this area.

4.d.2. Influence of DEI Grants

Grantees described the ways that the *Working Towards Equity* grants influenced their organization. As shown in Exhibit 3, grantees identified four different ways that the *Working Towards Equity* grants influenced their organization.

Exhibit 3. Influence of *Working Towards Equity* Grants on Grantees
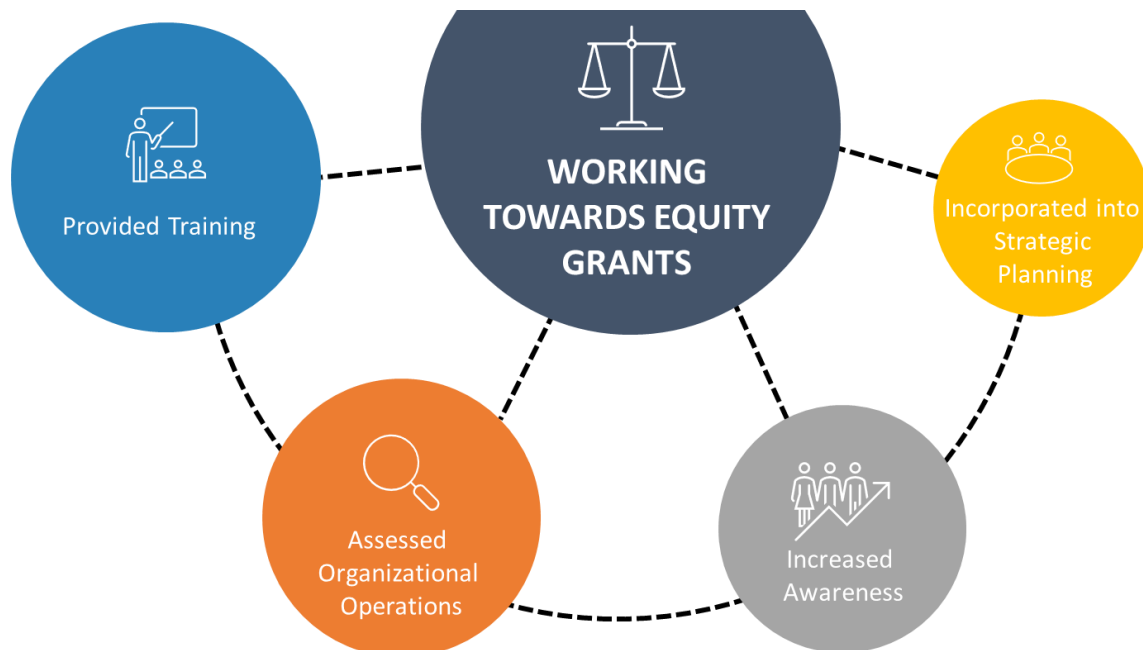
Grantees described the following examples of outcomes of the *Working Towards Equity* grants:

- **Provided training about equity and access to national staff, board members, and practitioners** (59%, 12 organizations). For example, Coaching Corps used the Working Towards Equity funding to develop DEI trainings for national, regional, and onboarding staff on mitigating implicit bias. They also revised the supports for volunteer coaches to incorporate an equity lens.

- **Assessed organizational operations related to equity** (51%, 14 organizations). For example, with the help of external vendor Thrive Paradigm, Camp Fire conducted an audit on cultural appropriation in their practices, especially from Native American or indigenous cultures

(e.g., patch and emblem designs). The audit resulted in a report and list of action steps for the organization.

- **Increased awareness of equity issues among national staff, board members, and direct staff practitioners** (41%, 11 organizations). For example, a representative from the YMCA of the USA discussed increasing awareness by developing cross-functional implementation teams, participating in organizational assessments of DEI and cultural competence, and collaborating with other national partners that address DEI issues.

- **Incorporated equity into strategic planning** (38%, 12 organizations). For example, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America implemented a systemwide approach to address issues of equity within their organization. A staff member from the organization listed generating shared definitions of DEI, assessing the current state of diversity within their organization, looking at employee data and organizational policies, and developing a long-term strategy to sustain DEI initiatives as some of the actions that resulted from the *Working Towards Equity* grant funding and supports.

4.d.3. Influence of Supports

Grantees described the ways that the various supports influenced them or their organization. Exhibit 4 illustrates the supports that most commonly influenced grantees.

Exhibit 4. Influence of Supports on Grantees

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Note: Bubble size corresponds to frequency of response, with larger bubbles indicating a larger number of respondents who cited influence.

Grantees described the following examples of outcomes of the supports:

- **Provided them with opportunities to learn about evidence-based practices** (100%). For example, respondents explained that through the convenings, they learned about the science of learning and development (SoLD) and how the best practices established through SoLD can be incorporated into their youth programming. Staff from the Afterschool Alliance highlighted the opportunities to have conversations with individuals in the K–12 space and those who are influential in SoLD to help grantees learn about research in the field that they would not otherwise have been exposed to.

> "The foundation was really attentive to … what was going on in the field and making sure those were largely focused [during the convenings]."
> – Dan Gilbert, Afterschool Alliance

- **Provided them with opportunities to learn new information** (100%). Grantees noted that the convenings gave them an opportunity to learn more about broader initiatives in the field (e.g., research, policy, equity) and bring that knowledge back to their organizations.

- **Helped them achieve better results in the work that they do** (100%). Staff from Coaching Corps emphasized that "the work only got better as a result of either individual meetings with [the program officers] or the community gatherings throughout the different spots in the country. You always come home with something valuable from those that make the work better."

- **Helped them strategize about specific policies and initiatives** (95%). A member of the policy CoP stated that participating in the CoP provided grantees with "more specific and deliberate time to strategize together and come together. It also gave all of the organizations that did have a federal policy team an opportunity to share out what they were working on at the federal level with some of these smaller organizations that don't necessarily have those teams."

- **Helped their organization address inequity issues within their organizational culture** (88%). A representative from the YMCA noted that the supports provided by Equity Meets Design resulted in a "revelation around organizational commitment" to DEI that has "called to question the action behind the words." In addition, staff from Girls Inc. described the importance of the equity discussions that took place during the

> "4-H's approach to equity was forever changed for the better because of the Foundation's example, bold leadership and targeted investments. The Foundation made it an important priority and that really challenged us to think differently. "
> – Jennifer Sirangelo, National 4-H Council

convenings and explained that discussions about equity were uncommon prior to the Initiative, particularly at the executive level.

- **Helped their organization address inequity issues within the services they provide** (86%). Grantees described using the information provided during the convenings to reevaluate the ways that they provide services to communities and to increase the emphasis on an equity lens.

- **Helped their organization develop continuous quality improvement systems** (79%). For example, staff from the National 4-H Council emphasized that the support of Foundation staff encouraged them to believe in the importance of evaluation and to implement continuous improvement cycles.

- **Helped their organization use data when making decisions** (76%). Grantees described learning how to select and track relevant data or measures that allowed them to both improve and assess their impact on the communities they serve. For example, a representative from the Positive Coaching Alliance noted that conversations with their fellow evaluation CoP members resulted in organizing a data walk, which helped them to make strategic, data-driven decisions about their programming.

4.d.4. Influence on the Field

The survey asked grantees about the ways the National Character Initiative influenced the fields of character and youth development more broadly. Respondents most commonly agreed that the Initiative influenced the field in the following ways:

- **Established a national collective of organizations** (100%). Staff from the YMCA of the USA described how the work allowed everyone, regardless of role, the opportunity to connect with people from other organizations and establish partnerships that will improve the field of youth development, beyond the boundaries of individual organizations.

- **Created connections between research, policy, and practice** (100%). A representative from the Boy Scouts of America reflected on how the publications that grantees partnered on highlighted the benefits of afterschool time and youth development, resulting in policy shifts as well as increased funding opportunities for youth development organizations.

- **Created opportunities for organizations to work together toward a common goal** (100%). For example, a member of the policy CoP mentioned how working with other organizations allowed them to establish a cohesive approach to policy development, which translated into being more aligned and impactful when it comes to organizational and national policy.

- **Elevated the importance of the fields of character and youth development** (100%). For example, members of the evaluation CoP believed that the field was made stronger by the opportunities that they had to work, present, and publish together—"even just having big

ideas together." They explained that the spirit of their CoP was to work together for the good of the youth development field.

- **Redefined the funder-grantee relationship as one that is more collaborative** (96%). Staff from the National 4-H Council perceived the Foundation as a true partner that was involved throughout the design and implementation process. They claimed that the Foundation pioneered this approach and said they can see other foundations, and even some corporate partners, moving in this direction.

"In the world we're moving into, more and more, whether you're a foundation or whether you're corporate, you're much more interested in helping plan and being involved in the strategy. I would say [the Foundation] was one of the early, early adopters, though, for this … the first one that I worked with … that wanted to be this engaged." – Beth Birnstihl, National 4-H Council

- **Established character and youth development as priorities among policymakers** (79%). For example, staff from the Forum for Youth Investment reported seeing shifts at the state policy level, with more funds being allocated for programs supporting social and emotional learning, and they noted that these types of programs are growing and being valued.

- **Garnered interest in the fields of character and youth development from other funders** (77%). For example, staff from the Forum for Youth Investment explained that more funders have been involved in this work since Bechtel "has been at the table." Specifically, groups such as Grantmakers for Thriving Youth and Grantmakers for Education are working toward strengthening youth development organizations to increase their capacity at the national level. As they put it: "People are ripe for it, and this is the time to do it."

4.e. Future of Grantees and the Field

AIR asked grantees and partners about what they expect for the future, both for their own organizations and for the field overall.

4.e.1. Grantees' Future Plans

The survey asked grantees about their organization's future plans related to character and youth development work. Almost all grantees agreed that they **plan to address inequity issues both within the services that they provide** (95%) **and within their organization** (92%). A representative from Girls Inc. discussed how they aim to continue expanding on the DEI work they started during the Initiative, and reported that their staff also expressed an increased desire to continue integrating DEI into their work. They attributed the organization's ability to integrate DEI into their 5-year strategic plan to the Initiative, and they emphasized the importance and relevance of DEI work in the current climate.

Almost all of the grantees (92%) agreed that they **plan to expand character development practices throughout organizational polices, practices, and programs**. For example, staff from the Boys and Girls Clubs of America are planning to restructure the continuous quality improvement work done through the initiative to accommodate a virtual environment.

Most grantees agreed that they would **build internal capacity in their organization** by expanding training and professional development for staff (92%), developing continuous quality improvement systems (82%), and developing or expanding on their research and evaluation agenda (80%). The California AfterSchool Network, for example, developed a set of guiding principles on the intersection of equity, quality, and continuous improvement systems with the help of Equity Meets Design. Moving forward, they are working to create a framework based on these initial principles. Coaching Corps staff also said that they plan to develop a mirroring platform that will allow them to conduct the trainings that they developed with the Initiative grant in a virtual environment so that they can continue to train staff during the pandemic.

4.e.2. Future of the Field

The survey also asked grantees about where they see the broader field going after the National Character Initiative. Almost all grantees (98%) believe that **organizations will continue to be innovative in using research to inform policy and practice related to character and youth development**. A representative from the Forum for Youth Investment explained that within K–12 and out-of-school time, providers are focused on integrating research about social and emotional learning and practitioner–child relationships into programming and policies. In addition, staff from the Boy Scouts of America discussed how the pandemic introduced an opportunity for future research. Because youth are home and not able to participate in character development programs in person, researchers will be able to better understand the impact that removing these opportunities or offering these opportunities virtually has on youth.

Almost all grantees (96%) agreed that **organizations will continue to collaborate with each other on specific initiatives**. For example, the California AfterSchool Network plans to continue the work that came about as a result of the Character Development Policy Workgroup with colleagues at the Forum for Youth Investment and AIR. They plan to invite other organizations and develop a vision for the group as well as create new policies based on the group's previous work.

The large majority of respondents (91%) agreed that **organizations will continue to invest in DEI initiatives** in ways that will elevate the field as a whole. For example, staff from the California School-Age Consortium said that they plan to continue to work with other California-based out-of-school-time providers to establish a shared vision for equity and inclusion and to develop resources that can be implemented by all providers within California out-of-school-

time systems. They explained that the investment from the Foundation was integral to this future work because it brought California-based providers together and allowed them to collaborate in ways they never had before.

Most grantees (89%) agreed **that other foundations will continue to invest in character and youth development organizations**. For example, the YMCA of the USA plans to work with other foundations to quadruple the resources that Bechtel provided to continue to invest in *My Brother's Keeper,* which aims to support boys and young men of color who are traditionally disadvantaged and ensure that they have opportunities for future success.

Most respondents (80%) agreed **that policymakers will advocate for organizations that leverage youth development and character development** in the future. Staff from the Learning Policy Institute discussed the shift they have seen in the narrative on youth development with policymakers, stating that not only does it go beyond afterschool activities but there also is growing interest in wraparound services, community schools, and coordinated efforts.

4.f. Barriers and Areas for Growth

The survey also asked grantees about the barriers they experienced in carrying out their grants and the areas where they feel there is room for growth. The most common barriers were:[5]

- **Sustainable funding** (*n* = 8). Grantees explained that without continued funding, it will be difficult to continue to operationalize their goals beyond the grant period. They mentioned that it has been difficult to find funders who are willing to continue to fund the work. They also explained that resources are even more restricted since the start of the pandemic.

- **Leadership and organizational structure** (*n* = 7). Some grantees mentioned that their organization underwent transitions in leadership where the new leaders did not always prioritize the objectives of the grant. Others explained that their organizational structure (e.g., a federated model) limited their ability to implement certain strategies consistently. Still others stated that their organization did not have the infrastructure or bandwidth to carry out a large grant in the same way as other grantee organizations.

- **Pandemic** (*n* = 5). Some respondents cited the pandemic as a barrier to certain goals (e.g., training staff, implementing program improvements) due to the inability to meet in person and the reduction in resources. In addition, other organizations had to reallocate their grant funding to sustain staff positions through the pandemic. Furthermore, some grantees discussed shifts in priorities from the grant objectives (e.g., equity) to being more responsive to the immediate needs of the pandemic.

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[5] These replies were in response to a short-answer survey item. In total, 32 respondents answered this question.

5. Recommendations for Other Grantmakers

Based on the findings from the survey and interviews with grantees and partners, AIR makes the following recommendations to other grantmakers:

- **Get to know the grantees.** Grantees suggested that prior to giving the grants, foundations should spend time getting to know the grantees and learning about their priorities and readiness to take on these types of initiatives. One way to do this is by offering multiyear grants.

- **Provide peer-learning opportunities.** Grantees emphasized that peer-learning opportunities (e.g., convenings, CoPs) are critical to the success of an initiative like this. They acknowledged that youth-serving organizations do not typically have opportunities to connect in such a manner. Peer-learning opportunities help to build relationships among organizations and allow grantees to collaborate on specific endeavors. They encourage organizations to work synchronously toward the intended goals of the initiative. Furthermore, they are essential to creating positive momentum and encouraging organizations to work together beyond the grant period.

- **Foster trusting, collaborative relationships between the grantee and the foundation.** Respondents emphasized that foundations should value their grantee organizations' expertise and take that into consideration when deciding upon their initiatives' priorities. Foundations should intentionally break down power dynamics between themselves and their grantees to foster trust and honest conversations. Furthermore, foundations should work collaboratively with grantees to develop partnerships to ensure that the work is sustained beyond any one specific initiative.

- **Be flexible**. Foundations should be somewhat flexible in how they set up and manage their grants. One grantee explained that it would be more beneficial to fund broad categories and allow the grantees to decide how they will use the funding, rather than focusing on narrower subcategories that make it more difficult for grantees to manage. Grantees also suggested that foundations should be flexible in allowing them to pivot funds if priorities or needs shift.

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Appendix A. Retrospective Methods

Surveys

Data Collection Procedures

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) used an online platform (Illume/DatStat) to administer the survey to grantees and partners who had participated in the convenings and communities of practice (CoPs). Survey data collection took place over an 8-week period (May 19, 2020, through July 17, 2020). The study team sent e-mail invitations to grantees and partners with intermittent reminders to complete the survey.

The overall response rate was 56% (54 of 97), with 60% of grantees completing the survey (49 of 82) and 33% (5 of 15) of partners completing the survey.

Analysis

The survey consisted of 47 questions (23 open-ended questions and 24 closed-ended questions). AIR descriptively analyzed the closed-ended questions and computed frequency counts and percentages for each item. AIR qualitatively coded the open-ended questions, noting the prevalence of different responses.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Data Collection Procedures

AIR conducted 25 interviews with 30 grantees and two partners (of 38 who were invited). Interviews were selected by examining survey data responses and soliciting suggestions from Foundation staff. Interviews were conducted from July 28, 2020, to September 15, 2020.

There were five interview protocols, which asked grantees and partners to speak about their experiences with the National Character Initiative, related to the following:

- Partnerships/collaborations developed between organizations (e.g., between members of CoPs or between organizations within a cohort)
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (e.g., work accomplished within organizations as a result of the equity grants)
- Organizational capacity-building initiatives (e.g., development of frameworks for education and youth development)
- The Foundation's role and approach in supporting grantees (e.g., grantees were seen as partners, which differs from the regular top-down approach)
- Development of knowledge and movement in the field (e.g., adult learning practices, adolescent development, out-of-school time, science of learning and development)

AIR also conducted two focus groups with a total of six grantees who were members of the evaluation CoP. The focus groups asked questions about the environment and structure of CoP meetings, the opportunities for collaboration provided by the CoP, the culture of feedback fostered within the CoP, and the sustainability and impact of the group.

Analysis

AIR audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews and focus groups. The AIR team used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program, to code transcripts using key analytical categories, allowing for systemic categorization of data. Analysis included noting the prevalence of different responses and associations among responses.

Appendix B. Building Capacity Within National Character Initiative Grantees

The National Character Initiative (NCI) sought to bolster youth-serving organizations in supporting character development in youth and to advance the practices of adults who work with young people. The Foundation did so by investing in the organizational capacity of youth-serving organizations, with a focus on improving program quality and organizational infrastructure. Following, we describe how three organizations used funds and support from the NCI to develop capacity in supporting the workforce, improving program quality, and expanding research capacity.

Supporting the Workforce

The Foundation recognized that the youth development workforce plays an integral role in developing character in youth. They supported grantees in advancing knowledge about effective adult practices and transferring that knowledge to practitioners through professional development and training opportunities.

COACHING CORPS

Coaching Corps recruits, trains, and supports coaches who work in afterschool programs in underserved communities across the country. They used the NCI grant to develop a multi-tiered coach training system that improves adult practice in afterschool sports programs to foster youth character development.

Developing Coaching for Character

The Coaching for Character training prepares coaches to build social and emotional skills in youth and focuses on four character attributes—persistence, optimism, self-regulation, and empathy. Initially, Coaching for Character was developed to be implemented in-person but an online version was created, which was pivotal to expanding their reach to more regions nationally.

Coaching Corps piloted the training and solicited feedback from the pilot coaches. In response to that feedback, they developed the Coaching with Empathy training, which teaches coaches about how to create an empathetic environment and develop strong relationships with youth. Recognizing that successfully implementing a training system requires support beyond the initial training, Coaching Corps also built a virtual platform that allows coaches to get ongoing support, including more advanced resources and the opportunity to connect with other coaches.

What's Next?

Because Coaching Corps' strategic plan emphasizes scaling, they continue to work toward developing resources that can be used virtually. They plan to develop an online version of the Coaching with Empathy training and offer a wide range of services to regions beyond where they have staff. They plan to use to platform that they developed with the NCI grant as a springboard to develop another platform where coaches can independently access trainings and resources to strengthen their youth development skills.

Improving Program Quality

The Foundation sought to boost program quality by enhancing grantees' ability to collect and use data and then translate findings from data into practice. Grantees used the grants to develop continuous quality improvement processes that have been sustained in their organizations today.

BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF AMERICA

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) operates more than 4,000 clubs across the country that aim to provide youth with a high-quality club experience, in which they feel safe, make connections with adults, enjoy new experiences, have fun, and feel a sense of belonging. BGCA began the National Youth Outcomes Initiative survey in 2011—a measure that captures youth outcomes and perceptions of the club experience. Data from this measure indicated that youth who have high-quality experiences achieve better academic, character, and health outcomes. Therefore, BGCA used their NCI grant to enhance their continuous quality improvement (CQI) system—using research and evaluation to inform the development of professional development opportunities that improve adult practices.

Developing and Implementing the Continuous Quality Improvement Process

First, BGCA raised awareness to create a culture of CQI amongst clubs—they held town hall meetings with clubs, conducted data walks with clubs about how to use and interpret data, and released research briefs.

BGCA then used the grant to build a suite of professional developments and trainings that target program quality, including:

- *Program Basics Guidebook*—a suite of resources, including tools to help clubs be outcome-driven and planners that allow clubs to develop program plans and schedules.[1]

- *Youth Development Toolbox*—an app with tips and activities that clubs can use to promote quality programming, including training opportunities.

- *Quality Networks*—a selection of clubs went through a CQI cycle—assess, plan, improve—with intensive coaching and technical assistance from BGCA.

BGCA staff saw increases in the percentage of youth who reported a high-quality club experience for the first time in 2019 and they attributed those gains, in part, to the work that they accomplished with their NCI grant.

What's Next?

BGCA plans to continue the CQI work in several areas. First, in response to the pandemic, they plan to establish a quality improvement process that can be implemented within a virtual setting. Second, they plan to focus on how to incorporate equity into the quality improvement process. Third, they plan to move toward a trauma-informed approach in their programming and will need to incorporate that into their quality improvement process.

Expanding Research Capacity

The Foundation understood that research and evaluation is integral to improving quality and supporting character development in youth. They aimed to help grantees establish a culture of learning that is grounded in data-driven improvement and bridges the gap between research and practice.

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NATIONAL 4-H COUNCIL

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The 4-H Council implements programs in more than 100 land-grant universities (LGUs), which requires a universal evaluation system that produces meaningful data to drive change. Common Measures is a system that LGUs can use to assess and report upon their outcomes, and to provide resources to stakeholders that can be used to plan for and conduct evaluations.

Developing and Implementing Common Measures

With support from the multiyear grant, the 4-H Council was able to expand upon the Common Measures by developing:

- *Survey tools*—six evaluation survey tools (Citizenship, Healthy Living, College-Career Readiness, Science, Universal Positive Youth Development, overall 4-H Experience) were developed in collaboration with staff at the 4-H Council, experts in the field, and staff from the LGUs and underwent rigorous psychometric testing.

- *Reporting process*—allows LGUs to enter data into a system and generate survey summaries and reports that LGUs share with donors and other key stakeholders and that LGUs can use to improve the development and implementation of programming.

- *Training system*—supports staff with implementation of Common Measures. A Lesson Study, a professional development peer-to-peer learning tool, allows staff to learn from each other's experiences in implementing the Common Measures.

The 4-H Council also used the grant to implement Common Measures in historically black colleges and universities and provide targeted coaching about how to implement Common Measures and use the data to inform program implementation.

As of August 2020, 60 of 76 LGUs within the 4-H Council are using the Common Measures to support their evaluation efforts. The Common Measures allows the 4-H Council to describe the impact of 4-H and write impact statements that garner buy-in from the universities they partner with and helps them expand fundraising into new donors.

What's Next?

The 4-H Council will push out a National Call for Data to inform continuous improvement of the Common Measures system. They also plan to develop additional survey tools, including measures of social and emotional learning, equity, and positive youth development. Lastly, the 4-H Council will develop an online learning system for the Common Measures.

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Reflections

Grantees noted that the grantmaking approach that the Foundation used was unique in that the Foundation was interested in contributing to organizations' overall growth in terms of capacity, whereas other funders tend to think of growth in terms of reach. Grantees explained that this approach allowed their organizations to "learn, shift, and adapt based on what [they] learned," and the growth they made throughout the NCI could be sustained after the funding period ended.

Appendix C. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Within the National Character Initiative

Starting in 2018, the Foundation prioritized diversity, equity, and inclusion in its convenings with grantees and later with grantmaking. The Foundation provided supports to grantees to build grantees' capacity related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Specifically, they hired a consultant, Equity Meets Design, to provide technical assistance to and they allocated $2 million for *Working Towards Equity* grants that grantees used to build capacity toward addressing issues of equity.

This document describes the role of Equity Meets Design in facilitating equity work, highlights how grantees used the *Working Towards Equity* grants, and the influence of the grant on individuals and organizations.

Support From Equity Meets Design

Equity Meets Design facilitated professional development sessions within the convenings that discussed the ways in which inequities are built into organizational design, and how organizations can develop solutions to address equity problems. Grantees described that these workshops:

- provided an opportunity to have conversations and listen to diverse perspectives that informed thinking and understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion; and

- engaged staff in all roles, including CEOs, which was integral because equity is built into all aspects of an organization and conversations should start from the top down.

Ultimately, staff took the learnings from the workshops back to their organizations, incorporating them into their work.

Working Towards Equity Grants

This section highlights work that four grantees (California School-Age Consortium [CalSAC], Campfire, Girls Inc., and YMCA of the USA [YMCA]) accomplished with the *Working Towards Equity* grants.

YMCA—SCALED UP PROMISING PRACTICES

The YMCA implemented Boys and Young Men of Color (BYMOC) in 10 pilot Ys in their first year. This program forms a coalition with other organizations committed to improving outcomes for boys and young men of color. Each of the pilot Ys (1) tested frameworks and tools that support boys and young men of color; (2) developed cross-functional implementation teams; (3) participated in organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion assessments using the Intercultural Development Inventory; and (4) collaborated with My Brother's Keeper Alliance and other national partners. In their second year, the YMCA launched the BYMOC in 20 other Ys who are working on identifying programs, practices, or policies that influence and connect with young men of color and their ambassadors.

YMCA plans to undertake a fundraising initiative that quadruples the resources that the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation provided and allows them to expand the BYMOC initiative into other cities. They also plan to refine some of their foundational trainings in response to input that they got from Equity Meets Design.

CALSAC—FORMED DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION ALLIANCE

CalSAC, in partnership with the California cohort, established a strategic alliance across organizations. This alliance identified equity needs across California out-of-school time providers and established a common strategy to address them. The organizations (1) explored systems of power, privilege, and oppression; (2) studied counter dominant and authentic equity-driven leadership models and practices; (3) assessed organizational policies, practices, and culture to strengthen capacity to advance equity; (4) determined a plan for addressing equity policy, practice, and culture gaps within each organization; and (5) worked collaboratively to address any equity gaps across organizations.

Within the alliance, CalSAC responded to oppression and anti-blackness that was embedded in their programs and curricula and looked more deeply into racial justice within the program. At the organizational level, they examined their organizational policies and practices to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion is built into their design.

CalSAC plans to find additional funding to continue to work with other organizations within the California cohort around diversity, equity, and inclusion. They also plan to conduct trainings with afterschool trainers about how to have conversations around equity. Finally, they plan to establish a group of trainers who will lead sessions about social and racial justice and anti-oppressive practices.

GIRLS INC.—INCORPORATED EQUITY INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING

Girls Inc.'s goal was for diversity, equity, and inclusion to permeate throughout all aspects of their organization, including the national office and the 79 Girls Inc. affiliates. To do so, they (1) revised their strategic plan and objectives to include diversity, equity, and inclusion components; (2) created permanent positions focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion; (3) developed an organization-wide diversity task force; (4) developed a diversity, equity, and inclusion plan for the affiliate network using a SWOT analysis; and (5) conducted diversity, equity, and inclusion workshops with affiliates during the annual conferences.

Girls Inc. plans to continue diversity, equity, and inclusion work within their organization by hiring a chief diversity officer who will help them develop a framework to shape their diversity, equity, and inclusion approach. Girls Inc. also plans to ensure that more diversity exists across roles within their organization to ensure that people of color are represented across all aspects of the work.

CAMPFIRE—AUDITED PRACTICES

Campfire hired Thrive Paradigm, a consultant focused on equity in youth-serving organizations that supported them with a diversity, equity, and inclusion audit. Specifically, Thrive Paradigm provided an audit tool to identify and correct problematic organizational practices related to cultural appropriation.

Following Thrive Paradigm's advice, Campfire assembled a task force to participate in a series of trainings about cultural appropriation. Campfire staff noted that the consultants were important to the success of the diversity, equity, and inclusion work because they provided an outside perspective that allowed them to have more candid conversations.

Campfire plans to undertake an initiative that makes their overnight camps more accessible and inclusive and described that the *Working Towards Equity* grant was pivotal in this effort because it allowed them to do work at the organizational level that will trickle down to the programmatic level.

Influence of National Character Initiative on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Influence of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative on organizations

The Foundation's diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative influenced organizations by motivating staff to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion into their own roles and establishing a statewide collective on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Staff from Girls Inc. and the YMCA explained that the Foundation's investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion motivated staff to spearhead other informal initiatives that increase awareness of diversity, equity, and inclusion (e.g., book club, speakers).

> *"But there's really been this sense of, we want more, we really want to learn about this. I also think it was a result of staff members stepping up saying, 'Look, what are we going to say about this [2020 civil unrest]? What [are we] going to do about this?'" – Grantee*

Staff from CalSAC said that the *Working Toward Equity* grants helped the California cohort form a meaningful coalition around diversity, equity, and inclusion and stimulated conversations within the cohort about common strategies that they could develop to address inequities across the California out-of-school time system.

> *"I feel like all six of the partners really have clarity on this is what this means, and people are doing individual learning and unlearning, and that's been really profound."– Grantee*

Influence on individuals understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion

Grantees noted that the investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion advanced their knowledge and understanding of the topic. Grantees also said that the investment in diversity, equity, and inclusion helped them be more conscious about all aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their day-to-day work and experiences. They could identify how well-intended policies weren't beneficial for everyone because of the different populations each branch caters to (e.g., rural vs. urban), or how those decisions were sometimes influenced by more vocal stakeholders and were necessarily equitable.

> *"I've certainly spent more time thinking about it and learning multiple perspectives on it…and inspired me to learn more" – Grantee*

Facilitators and barriers to sustainability of diversity, equity, and inclusion

Grantees noted that the primary facilitators to sustainability of diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organizations include:

- *Buy-in from staff*—strong staff buy-in is integral to ensuring that staff are having candid conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion and these conversations are integral to successful implementation.

- *Organizational audits*—a diversity, equity, and inclusion audit helps organizations reflect on their narrative and identify problematic behaviors to correct.

- *Alignment across organizations*—the *Working Towards Equity* grant allowed California out-of-school time providers to form a strategic alliance and share resources, and ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion is cohesive across the California out-of-school time system.

- *National attention on diversity, equity, and inclusion*—current events and the Black Lives Matter movement brought issues of equity to the forefront nationally, and organizations are able to leverage this visibility to emphasize the importance of addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion internally.

Grantees also explained that some barriers hinder the sustainability of diversity, equity, and inclusion:

- *COVID-19 pandemic*—shrinking budgets mean that organizations may have to shift funds away from diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to support direct programming or operational costs.

- *Focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion at the program-level*—traditionally, diversity, equity, and inclusion activities are program driven, which can be responsive in the short term but not the long term. To ensure sustainability, organizations need to address diversity, equity, and inclusion through collective action and mobilization—to understand the political and institutional barriers that organizations need to overcome to truly be equitable.

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