

# LITERATURE REVIEW



**FOUNDATION STRATEGIES TO INFORM FEDERAL POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES:**  
A Study to Support the Evaluation of the Rockefeller  
Foundation's Promoting Equitable and Sustainable  
Transportation Initiative

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The Rockefeller Foundation fosters innovative solutions to many of the world’s most pressing challenges by supporting work that strengthens resilience to acute crises and chronic stresses and promoting growth with equity so poor or vulnerable populations have more access to opportunities that improve their lives. Committed to supporting learning, accountability and performance improvements, the Evaluation Office of the Rockefeller Foundation works with staff, grantees and partners to strengthen evaluation practice and to support innovative approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning.



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Cover photos:  
LEFT: Daniel Hoherd, RIGHT Dan Burden walkable.org







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Stephen Lee Davis/Transportation for America

# Introduction

Using philanthropy as a strategy for federal policy reform in the United States is not a new concept. Yet, little has been done to assess exactly why foundations choose to engage in federal policy reform efforts, what strategies they use when doing so and, perhaps most importantly, whether any connection can be drawn between particular influencing strategies and their ensuing results in terms of federal policy change. Questions exist as to the ideal leverage that foundations can and should exercise in the policy reform space, and what forms of strategy can have the most impact across a spectrum of outcomes that range from raising awareness and knowledge levels to inciting action and, ultimately, to winning political commitments in Washington.

This scan, undertaken to draw correlations between strategies and outcomes within theories of change for policy reform, examines select examples of what has prompted foundations to invest in federal policy endeavors, what methods they have applied and what results these methods have achieved. The scan includes a review of extant published and gray literature, a review of a number of foundation websites, and interviews with a select number of foundation representatives.<sup>1</sup>

Also, as an important legal note, it should be mentioned that throughout this paper, the authors make reference to policy reform and policy influencing. These terms are used for convenience, relating to a host of efforts around informing policymakers, doing policy research, lobbying and other forms of advocacy. The authors are well aware of the legal restrictions related to lobbying within the sector and all of the case studies referenced have strong legal oversight to ensure their respective institutions adhere to the law.<sup>2</sup>

Though the focus is federal policy, many of the motivating factors and strategies explored in this scan relate to foundation activities in policy reform at any level of government, ranging from city level to the national arena. The scan examines the applicability of various grantmaking strategies to overarching policy change goals. It presents examples that illustrate how local or state reform is often integral to a federal effort and can open opportunities for broader impact based on policies proven effective on a smaller scale. Concrete evidence built at the local or state levels can drive willing funders to leverage their influence and impact by promoting nationwide adoption of evidence-based, workable solutions through expansion or scaling. Likewise, funders seeking to sustain their impact often recognize that federal policy change is needed to facilitate programs that are enacted at the state level. Several examples in this study illustrate how local or state and federal reform efforts can both drive and reinforce each other, with the state/local level often proving crucial to the federal while providing an opportunity to maximize funder impact based on proven solutions.

## Key Questions:

1. Why do foundations engage in federal policy reform efforts?
2. What strategies do foundations use in federal policy reform efforts?
3. Are there connections that can be drawn between particular influencing strategies and results in terms of federal policy change?
4. What examples exist of federal foundation policy initiatives and their results?

<sup>1</sup> When not noted explicitly otherwise, the reader can assume that specific references to foundations are derived from interviews.

<sup>2</sup> For a more thorough review of legal guidelines related to philanthropy and public policy, readers are referred to the Alliance for Justice's publications on the topic, available at [www.afj.org](http://www.afj.org).



Andrew Bossi



# 1

## Why foundations engage in federal policy reform efforts

Foundations are tasked with the broad work of enhancing the public good. Over the last 100+ years, they have employed various models of philanthropy that utilize direct and indirect methods to address social issues or opportunities. Direct methods target specific beneficiaries/opportunities while indirect methods attempt to alter the broader environment that affects the social issue/opportunity. Of the indirect methods, policy and advocacy work are among the most overt and widely used.

While foundations that engage in policy work are still considered innovators in the philanthropy field, funders are paying increased attention to advocacy work.<sup>3</sup> Though the US government restricts what foundations may do in terms of lobbying, foundations are not excluded from the policy realm as a means of bringing about change. While there has been a fair amount written about the benefits of foundations engaging in advocacy, foundations still may question its value, particularly as it relates to the intensive resources, complexity and size required to advocate at the federal level.

A review of the literature and of a broad range of examples revealed that foundations typically engage in advocacy for three key reasons:

- to achieve social mission through a critical strategy of addressing root causes of targeted issues
- to increase the social return on investment from their grant funding
- to gain leverage from partnerships or cross-sector networks, thereby spurring governmental or other investments.

This section provides greater detail on each of these reasons.

### Drive to achieve social mission through a critical strategy of addressing root causes of targeted issues

Existing outside the realm of business and government, the very formation of foundations is linked to social goals and, in fact, the policy targets of foundations stem from their overarching social missions. However, the clarity of the specific outcomes they

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.mcf.org/system/article\\_resources/0000/0669/PublicPolicy\\_Coffman.pdf](http://www.mcf.org/system/article_resources/0000/0669/PublicPolicy_Coffman.pdf).

aim to realize can vary greatly, ranging from heightened awareness or general public concern for an issue to a specific amendment to federal policy. Regardless of how narrow their planned outcomes are, foundations are driven by their social missions and often choose to enter the policy sphere to create leverage in pursuing their goals of achieving what they believe is the good of society as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

- **ESTABLISHED SOCIAL NEED.** Foundation policy actions usually follow an established social need that calls for funding, leadership or widespread support. This is outlined in the case studies included in Section IV of this report from the Smith Richardson Foundation which focuses on research to define and confirm a social need for action, and from the David & Lucile Packard Foundation, which follows a strategy of first building evidence at the state level to gain traction around a need at the federal level. The foundations have employed these tactics to establish social needs linked to the environment, education, immigration and children's health insurance, among others.
- **ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSE.** Foundations recognize that it is strategic to explore the root causes of the problem(s) they wish to address. The Joyce Foundation case, in Section IV of this report, illustrates its focus on grantees that demonstrate a strong quality research base behind their policy targets. Through addressing root causes, foundations are able to establish reform agendas that recognize the context of the social problem, helping to ensure more sustainable impact through supportive policy.

## An opportunity to increase the social return on investment from grant funding

By investing in advocacy efforts for federal policy change, foundations can create a context in which the results of their grant-funded activities have a better chance of being sustainable, essentially creating “bigger bang for their buck”. Rather than investing in improving a single school or cleaning up one beach, influencing policy for education or the environment can have a more lasting effect with legal parameters to support the maintenance of targeted social conditions. Although such changes in federal policy can take a long time to come about, foundations are often equipped with financial resources that can be invested or allocated over longer periods. With respect to foundation funding for reform, the following should be kept in mind.

- **RESOURCES BEYOND THE PRIVATE SECTOR.** Foundations fill a need for financial resources beyond those of the private sector in order to attain sustainable, systemic change. Supportive public policy is often necessary to ensure adequate support systems or the continued provision of resources.<sup>5</sup>
- **INDEPENDENT FUNDING AND ALLOCATION DECISIONS.** Foundations fund campaigns based on their independent goals and missions with amounts and allocations at their own discretion. In many cases, internal decision-making around this strategic funding need not go further than consensus from the foundation's own

<sup>4</sup> Samuels, D., “Philanthropical Correctness,” *New Republic*, (1995) 213(12/13), 1-10.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.mcf.org/system/article\\_resources/0000/0669/PublicPolicy\\_Coffman.pdf](http://www.mcf.org/system/article_resources/0000/0669/PublicPolicy_Coffman.pdf)

board of directors, compared to what can be a lengthy process within government entities or publicly-held companies.

- **REFORM PROCESSES CAN BE QUITE LENGTHY BEFORE ACHIEVING THEIR PLANNED IMPACT.** Foundations that have been successful in policy reform have recognized the need to commit funding for long periods to achieve the desired change. That is the reason foundation funding is referred to as “patient capital,” which is further defined in Section II, and within the Joyce Foundation case in Section IV.

#### **THE CHANCE TO GAIN LEVERAGE FROM PARTNERSHIPS OR CROSS-SECTOR NETWORKS THEREBY SPURRING GOVERNMENTAL OR OTHER INVESTMENT**

Aside from funding power, foundations use the influence of their established reputations, relationships, and demonstrated expertise in particular subject areas. Many make use of their breadth of funding partners or their contacts outside the sector to learn more about their targeted causes and proposed policy changes, and to mobilize greater support (financial and otherwise) behind their cause.

- **CROSS-SECTOR NETWORK.** Ferris et al. (2010) note that foundations are often led by individuals who have a strong network of connections, including media, academic and governmental elites who bring cross-sectoral perspectives to targeted reform strategies.<sup>6</sup>
- **WORKING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS SECTORS.** Foundations leverage network connections to create and foster working relationships or collaboration across sectors, enabling them to leverage diverse resources (financial or otherwise) and a broad base of support behind a reform agenda.

However, even though foundations can exercise these above examples to support policy reform, relatively few have incorporated broad-scale reform activity into their grantmaking agendas. As described in “Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking” (Coffman, 2008), foundation strategies usually revolve around the types of public communication efforts and awareness-raising tactics that can frame issues and build knowledge while avoiding the perceived risk of aiming directly at decision-makers or calling for direct audience action.

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<sup>6</sup> Ferris, J. M., Sharp, M., Harmssen, H.J., “How Foundations Use Communications to Advance Their Public Policy Work,” The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy (2010). <http://cphp.usc.edu/research/FINAL-%20RP34%20-FerrisSharpHarmssen.pdf>



Seattle Department of Transportation

# 2

## Strategies foundations use in federal policy reform efforts

Foundations that work successfully within the policy reform space not only assess the degree of risk they can and are willing to assume, they also assess which strategy options for program design and implementation best align with their intended audiences and outcomes. A theory of change for policy reform can be visualized as a path that leads from inputs invested in a foundation's effort, through the specific strategies and activities in which it invests, to the short-term outputs that indicate success and the long-term outcomes signifying social change and, ultimately, to the impact a foundation aims to have within society. To create their own theories of change and identify the most suitable initiative they are positioned to implement, strategic foundations consider several factors: identify clear goals, assess resources and potential for institutional leverage, and identify the most appropriate strategic approach(es).

### Identify clear goals

**DEFINING SUCCESS.** Foundations that achieve success in policy support are those that enter a policy-reform initiative with a realistic definition of their planned success, as this informs the appropriate choice of strategies and resources. While some foundations define a successful outcome as ultimate change in federal policy, this form of achievement can often require a lengthy time commitment (described by a Joyce Foundation interviewee as “patient capital”). As Coffman (2008) explained, foundations can choose to influence target audiences in three main ways: increasing the audience's awareness, increasing its willingness to act or prompting its direct actions in support of public policy. A foundation's definition of planned success in policy reform informs the impact it aims to have on its audience.

Allowing adequate time has proven important in establishing accountability for a campaign, particularly when a planned outcome has been articulated as federal policy reform, and short-term investments can often require renewed support. Some foundations thereby aim for more narrow theories of change, describing success as the citation of their research in federal policy debates. For example, in adopting this mindset, the Smith Richardson Foundation limits its involvement in reform efforts to

issue framing and research (described further in the case studies within Section IV). Similarly, the Pew Charitable Trusts sets specific goals within the broader reform spectrum, and has carved a niche for itself that is limited to shorter-term benchmarks or “wins along the way” such as securing a target number of Congress members as signatories on a petition letter.

Having a clear definition of planned success with clear audience-influence parameters helps a foundation articulate the extent of its success or failure in its policy reform effort. This type of assessment can help inform the broader philanthropic field and other funders considering involvement in the same space.

**CHOOSING APPROPRIATE POLICY TARGETS.** In choosing targets, foundations tend to choose broad policy goals while allowing their grantees to choose specific targets. According to Coffman (2008), this can lead to risks of irrelevance or misalignment within the broader reform initiatives. However, foundations can circumvent this challenge by working with grantees on flexible options. Ensuring that a foundation and its grantees cooperate in choosing targets will help align individual grantee goals with overarching initiative goals and avoid situations in which different grantees might choose opposing targets. For example, the Packard Foundation provides five options from which grantees can choose policy targets, thereby allowing flexibility for grantee activities while avoiding contradictory or peripheral messaging within the reform agenda. The Pew Charitable Trusts is among several institutions that demonstrate a “balancing act”, calling for creating strategies that are viable for grantees while maintaining an important, collaborative role for funders.

## Assess resources and potential for institutional leverage

Foundations working in the policy arena consider what resources and institutional leverage they are able to contribute to a reform initiative. Within an effective theory of change, strategies are shaped according to the resources available to support them adequately. To assess the resources that will inform its strategy choice, a foundation might ask the following questions:

- What financial resources are we able to commit to these efforts?
- How much time is needed before our planned outcomes can be realized, according to our definition of success?
- What non-financial resources, such as knowledge, access or partnerships, are needed to attain our planned outcomes, and do we have those resources available?
- What grantee criteria are necessary to select the organizations most appropriate for the success of our initiative?
- Can our available time and resources sustain this initiative through the necessary period of time, considering that federal policy change can often require lengthy time (and therefore financial) investments?
- What networks and relationships can we leverage to broaden support and/or resources for this initiative?
- How does our mission complement or enhance our efforts in this initiative, and/or vice versa?

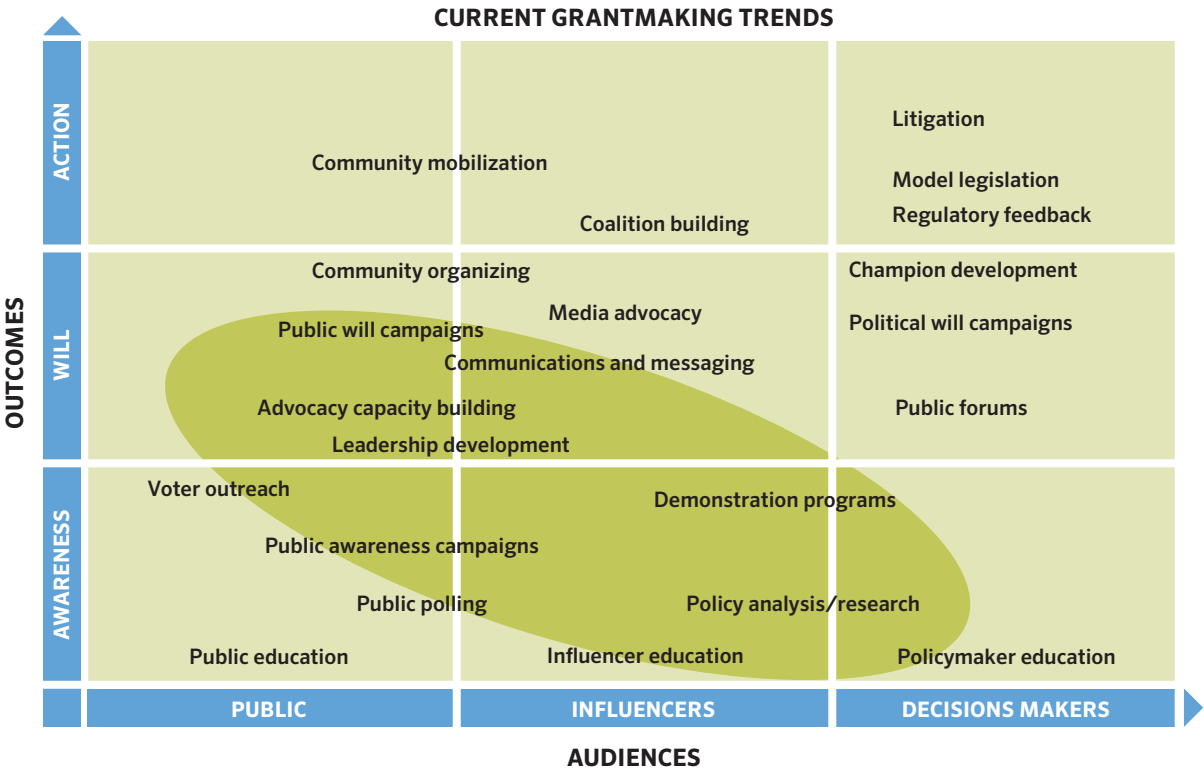
The process through which a foundation might consider these questions, and shape its reform strategies accordingly, are explored in more detail in the case studies in Section III.

### Identifying strategies

A FOUNDATION’S CHOICE OF PHILANTHROPIC STRATEGIES DEPENDS UPON THE TYPE OF AUDIENCE INFLUENCE IT AIMS TO ACHIEVE. This can be viewed according to the three levels of influencing audiences presented by Coffman (2008): raising awareness, increasing will and inciting action (see Figure 1). When attempting to raise an audience’s awareness of an issue, a foundation can engage in public education, awareness campaigns or research initiatives. After awareness is raised, the next level of influence achieved depends on will. In this case, “will” refers to increasing the importance or salience of an issue so that audiences become more willing to act in support of it.

At the next level, inciting action, foundations can introduce strategies to leverage their networks and efforts into direct action on policy issues. Figure 1 outlines these and other potential strategies for attaining the three forms of audience influence, all which could be applied alone or in combination with other strategies, depending on a foundation’s goals and resources.

FIGURE 1: **Advocacy outcomes and audiences strategy rubric**



SOURCE: Foundations and Public Policy Grantmaking, Coffman, 2008.

Regardless of strategy choice, foundations that work in policy areas must abide by specific IRS guidelines that regulate involvement in politics or policy influence though still allow several legally permissible strategies.<sup>7</sup> For example, they can lobby to educate legislators or communities about a broad social problem, provided no specific legislative proposals are cited and conversations are non-partisan. They also can fund public will campaigns or political will campaigns focused on decision makers, and undertake community organizing, issue-focused coalition building and community mobilization, all of which continue to increase in prevalence.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing from Coffman's framework above, along with several examples of foundation activity specific to the federal policy area, the following summarizes strategic approaches that have been applied in reform efforts. These approaches are not mutually exclusive – each can stand alone when appropriate or be combined within various foundation strategies. The following lists each approach, along with potential supporting strategies and the intended outcomes for which the approach may be suitable.

### 1. Issue framing

**APPROACH.** Foundations involved with federal policy work to ensure that targeted policy issues are framed clearly, in order to ensure accurate public perception and understanding. A properly framed issue can more clearly highlight the need for policy change, while a poorly framed issue has the potential to confuse the intended audience. Foundation-funded research is often the first step in collecting information needed to frame an issue effectively and responsibly in order to build a case around either the fact that a problem exists and the need to address it, or the need for a particular policy solution.

**SPECIFIC STRATEGIES.** Work to frame issues may include supporting strategies for educating the public about the issue such as starting a media campaign that presents the issue in a certain light or linking a grassroots movement to more institutionalized organizations (Bartley, 2007).<sup>9</sup> Producing or making available evidence that validates an issue or its potential benefits, e.g. through a small-scale trial or merely through gathering supporting data, can help frame an argument for potential reform in the eyes of key stakeholders – either supporters or the ultimate decision-makers.

**POTENTIAL OUTCOMES.** Properly framing the issue can lead to a more sympathetic public portrayal. For example, the framing of cases ranging from opposition to public school segregation to voter qualification during the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, was fueled by philanthropic dollars, resulting in successes such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Framing the goals of the US civil right movement as a movement for cultural

<sup>7</sup> A foundation designated as a 501(c)(3) cannot engage in lobbying: neither direct lobbying (talking directly with legislators about a particular piece of legislation) nor grassroots lobbying (talking with members of a voting community about a particular issue on the ballot). Readers are referred to the Alliance for Justice's publications on the topic, available at [www.afj.org](http://www.afj.org).

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.mcf.org/system/article\\_resources/0000/0669/PublicPolicy\\_Coffman.pdf](http://www.mcf.org/system/article_resources/0000/0669/PublicPolicy_Coffman.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Bartley, T., "How foundations shape social movements: The construction of an organizational field and the rise of forest certification. *Social Problems*, (2007) 54(3), 229-255.



advancement led to increased funding and policy change (Brulle and Jenkins, 2005).<sup>10</sup> In this way, funders who perceived race-based or human rights issues as socially risky or radical were likely convinced to lend support only when the issues were framed in a broader light of cultural advancement, an issue interpreted to have a more identifiable link to the greater good.

## 2. Knowledge building

**APPROACH.** Knowledge building focuses on providing the background information that can be influential in changing policy. Knowledge building can be a helpful foundational approach any time political change necessitates increased public and political knowledge.

**SPECIFIC STRATEGIES.** Knowledge building strategies include supporting data collection, systems analysis and fiscal analysis, all of which may be needed to make a case for why policies should change. Knowledge building may also include funding for public and political education, forecasting analyses of alternative policies, disseminating information and publishing information about political candidates and their positions on issues.

**POTENTIAL OUTCOMES.** By taking the time to create a thoroughly researched picture of the current and future policy, foundations are better able to show objectively why policies should change. The Annenberg Foundation funds the Annenberg Public Policy Center, a center of information on media influence that is accessible to “policymakers, journalists, scholars, constituent groups and the general public” increasing knowledge of the nation.<sup>11</sup> Its database informs policy reform efforts, by providing evidence-based solutions that are, or are not, workable, thereby strengthening arguments for relevant reform. Similarly, the Annie E. Casey Foundation started its highly successful Kids Count program as a way to start collecting, organizing and analyzing quality data related to the well-being of children in the United States. The project, operating nationally, has become a recognized and reliable source of information that is used to advocate for children’s issues at the local, state and federal levels.

## 3. Funder collaboration

**APPROACH.** Funding collaborations can increase the amount of funding available, increase the visibility of the issue at hand, and increase the efficiency and targeting of funding. Funder collaboratives can support a potentially diverse, yet complementary, set of strategies needed for policy change without diluting any one foundation’s focus area or its grantmaking strategies.

**SPECIFIC STRATEGIES.** Several strategies may be used to support creation of partnerships or allegiances among funders. Funder networks can sponsor convenings or more informal peer meetings among government officials, funders, advocates

<sup>10</sup> Brulle, Robert J. and J. Craig Jenkins, “Foundations and the Environmental Movement: Priorities, Strategies, and Impact,” *Foundations for Social Change: Critical Perspectives on Philanthropy and Popular Movements*, edited by Daniel Faber and Debra McCarthy. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. (2005) Pp. 151-73.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/AreaDetails.aspx?myId=3>

or practitioners and can increase grantee collaboration through special grantmaking programs. Sometimes, funders will set up a dedicated fund through an intermediary through which they all contribute and collaborate on decision-making.

**POTENTIAL OUTCOMES.** The potential results of funder collaboratives include building a trusting and effective network of diverse players, sharing and leveraging best practices, and increased coordination and connection. For example, the funding collaborative, Convergence Partnership, was formed in 2006 to work toward federal policy and environmental change that fosters “healthy people in healthy places” (Convergence Partnership, 2012).<sup>12</sup> Today, it regularly shares Executive Memos with key policymakers on behalf of the fund, with specific recommendations related to policy development and implementation.

#### 4. Grantee communication networks

**APPROACH.** This approach calls for foundation efforts to create a community of grantees focused on a common initiative or that targets audiences using communications as a primary tool. Foundations wishing to emphasize or influence a particular subject or outcome can channel funding across a network of diverse, but complementary, grantees engaged in communications campaigns. By supporting initiatives in grantee organizations and by coordinating grantee strategies, foundations can influence the policy debate and, simultaneously, build grantee advocacy capacity.

**SPECIFIC STRATEGIES.** Strategies in grantee communication networks can include supporting grantee capacity and communications infrastructure, providing grantees with common strategies and message development, and producing content or tools to facilitate grantee networks and connections with targeted audiences such as interactive websites, social networks or blogs. Foundations may support communications campaigns, and create or maintain dynamic online information hubs or communication infrastructure that allow organizations to mobilize and build their public support base.

**POTENTIAL OUTCOMES.** Grantee coalitions may implement coordinated communication campaigns that are extremely focused and targeted in their approach and goals (Oliver and Gerson, 2003).<sup>13</sup> Grantee groups can also advocate for policy changes as a result of the foundation’s support. For example, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation supported the National Leadership Coalition on Health Care in its effort to design and implement a campaign on the importance of establishing a national policy to assure access to appropriate, affordable, high quality health care (Oliver and Gerson, 2003).<sup>14</sup> The Liberty Hill Foundation supports its advocacy grantees by providing media outreach training, on-call media assistance and up-to-date press lists to support effective communications campaigns.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.convergencepartnership.org/site/c.fhLOK6PELmF/b.6136239/k.C925/About\\_Us.htm](http://www.convergencepartnership.org/site/c.fhLOK6PELmF/b.6136239/k.C925/About_Us.htm)

<sup>13</sup> Oliver, T. & Gerson, J., “The Role of Foundation in Shaping Health Policy; Lessons from Efforts to Expand and Preserve Health Insurance Coverage,” The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy (2003). <http://cpp.usc.edu/doc/RP15.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Oliver, T. & Gerson, J., “The Role of Foundation in Shaping Health Policy; Lessons from Efforts to Expand and Preserve Health Insurance Coverage,” The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy (2003). <http://cpp.usc.edu/doc/RP15.pdf>

## 5. Advocacy capacity building

**APPROACH.** Foundations may build organizational advocacy capacity in a variety of areas including policy advocacy, civic engagement, organizational sustainability, strategic communications, community organizing and evaluation. Capacity for this purpose is defined as the internal factors that help strengthen organizational productivity or success, such as human resources, leadership support, functional knowledge or training, or effective internal systems and processes.

**SPECIFIC STRATEGIES.** Foundations can provide capacity-building support to organizations that are new to, or already engaging in, policy-change work. This will often call for connecting complementary organizations. Funding also can support effective collaboration processes, information exchanges and ongoing strategy development within organizations. Funders who support grassroots and base-building efforts in their work to effect policy change may also provide general capacity-building support that helps ensure the effective functioning and sustainability of smaller organizations.

**POTENTIAL OUTCOMES.** Building capacity for advocacy work could be considered both a long-term offensive strategy that assumes a longer timeframe and a short-term offensive/defensive strategy to keep the policy at the public forefront. The Ms. Foundation for Women has a unique fund dedicated to providing capacity-building support for organizations whose efforts are currently at a tipping point in changing policy. The time-sensitive funding is meant to ensure that organizations have enough fluid capital to devote to a specific, and likely, policy win. The Ford Foundation's Arts Education Partnership is a coalition of organizations that functions as a technical assistance provider to Ford's National Arts Education Initiative. The Partnership provides peer-to-peer assistance and assistance from specialists to grantees, and it hosts various knowledge-building meetings and retreats to build the grantees' capacities to address the Initiative's policy goals.

## 6. Place-based changes or demonstration projects

**APPROACH.** Foundations using this approach target their investments in specific geographic locations, often as a test ground for making the case for federal policies that can effect similar changes in many locations. These "demonstration projects" are often seen as the building blocks, proof of concept or necessary models that can create change in a particular community or region, but also can inform scaling efforts.

**SPECIFIC STRATEGIES.** Strategies include identifying policy areas in which geographically important communities or states can have a national influence and, then, providing funding for organizations working in those communities. This may be done with an eye on what policies are working well locally or in states, but are not working well nationally. By launching a demonstration in a smaller or more restricted geographic zone, a funder can more easily identify the supporting factors that lead to success of a concept and, then, use the results to make an evidence-based case in support of potential application at the federal level.

**POTENTIAL OUTCOMES.** By demonstrating positive results of ideas tested in certain locations, foundations may be able to influence national policy by modeling. For example, Head Start, a prominent pre-schooling program, was initially publicly funded as a demonstration project. When results of the pilot implementation were a proven success, state-level pilots were launched with the engagement of major research institutions to collect data and assess the program's true value. Policy was eventually changed based on proven results and Head Start became a federal program only when it was clear that the program truly made a difference and the data could not be disputed (Samuels, 1995).<sup>15</sup>

## 7. Implementation monitoring

**APPROACH.** Often, foundations find a strategic opening for potential influence after policy already has been adopted and is in the implementation phase.

**SPECIFIC STRATEGIES.** Strategies may include funding policy studies to examine the effects of policies, supporting work to design or carry out the policy implementation processes in different states, funding evaluations of policy implementation and potentially recommending refinements; building stakeholder partnerships and collaborations to address implementation gaps, or providing funds for technical assistance during policy implementation.

**POTENTIAL OUTCOMES.** As explained by Oliver and Gerson (2003), foundations can simply give grantees money to raise awareness around a policy target, or they can go beyond this initial step and support, for example, administrative oversight throughout implementation of funded programs. Foundation involvement in a monitoring role can help to leverage the foundation's knowledge or resources through relevant technical assistance such as skill building or troubleshooting to increase effectiveness and circumvent stumbling-blocks. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation is an example of an institution that provides assistance throughout policy implementation, convening grantees for strategy sessions in order to refine plans as needed and articulate shared direction.

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<sup>15</sup> Samuels, D., "Philanthropical Correctness," *New Republic*, (1995) 213(12/13), 1-10.

# 3

## Connections that can be drawn between particular influencing strategies and results in terms of federal policy change

Drawing from the above data, cases and additional research on foundation activity on federal policy agendas, potential correlations to success can be summarized through the following promising approaches, all of which can be applied through the various strategy combinations described above.

- **CULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT.** The Kellogg Foundation notes that, “the most effective actions for policy reforms are grounded in the experiences and knowledge of our community partners” and that, “whenever possible, community voices should be prevalent in the policy debates, particularly the voices of those who have not had access to the policy process in the past.”<sup>16</sup> Mobilization and participation at the grassroots level can help to instill this concept. Thus, the Kellogg Foundation’s Community Voices Initiative works to make health care access and quality a part of the national debate by engaging community-level voices and helping them to partner with the US Surgeon General to advance important action agendas based on community experience.
- **FUNDING RESEARCH AND DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS TO FORM AN EVIDENCE BASE AND “MAKE THE CASE”.** As outlined through several examples in this study, many foundations in the policy-reform arena view local or state-level success as pilot cases to build a convincing argument for change at the broader federal level. The Head Start Program, as mentioned above, was funded initially as a demonstration project and the results of its successful pilot implementation were used as a case for broader adoption. Additional piloting sites and the engagement of major research institutions in data collection and assessment helped to assess

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/sociology/\\_files/pdfs/PolicyTools.pdf](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/sociology/_files/pdfs/PolicyTools.pdf)

the program's true value, thereby making a case for policy change. Head Start became a federal program when it was clear that the program truly made a difference and the data could not be disputed (Samuels, 1997). As also noted throughout the case study interviews undertaken for this report, solidly researched data is a crucial ingredient for a successful reform agenda.

- **INFUSING THE DEBATE WITH SPECIFIC EXPERTISE.** Ferris and Harmssen (2009) note that foundations in their initial forms were headed by governmental and academic experts from various fields. Having leaders with expertise allowed foundations' money to be used wisely, because they had "real world" experience and could properly evaluate a variety of initiatives through an academic or governmental lens to see what policy changes were needed and were likely to work. As seen in the case study examples in Section IV, the expertise required to make thoughtful assessments of advocacy options and strategies can be viewed as issue specific or it can refer to general intelligence, but it is significant either way.
- **LEVERAGING THE FOUNDATION'S REPUTATION AND NETWORK.** Beyond simply funding grantees, foundations can leverage their own political and social capital to create change. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation, originally headed by John D. Rockefeller Sr. and run by influential leaders from politics, academia, and the media, continues to leverage senior leaders and the foundation's reputation to address large, complex global problems. Leaders speak publicly, consult with key stakeholders individually, and try to leverage their influence and resources, such as with the use of their respected Bellagio Center conferences and residency programs. When a foundation's network is strong, it can relay its messages more easily, because it is connected to key leaders and constituents (Ferris and Harmssen, 2009).
- **MAINTAINING A LONG-TERM FOCUS.** Greater success comes when foundations and advocacy managers maintain awareness that changing policy is a slow process that may take many years, with an end result that may not be as forceful as the foundation desires. Organizations that can account for this without losing their focus and motivation will be more likely to succeed in enacting policy change (Ferris and Harmssen, 2009). As noted earlier, the concept of "patient capital" must be understood and planned for, and foundations should allow adequate time for their targeted success in order to build accountability for their actions.
- **UTILIZING EXECUTIVE ADVOCACY.** The majority of advocacy initiatives in the philanthropic sphere are directed at putting an issue on the public agenda and/or altering policy through legislative means. Although executive advocacy is used less frequently, it is quite effective, be it working with executive officials in designing or proposing legislative policy and executive orders, or developing policy implementation guidelines. Further, foundations that appear most successful in converting policy change to actual impact follow policy at least through the rule-making process of executive implementation, if not throughout the full implementation of the policy, and evaluation of the policy's effects. As Tom Novick, a highly successful advocacy evaluator, strategist and former policymaker tells

his clients, “the other side knows how to win the loss,” referring to using the executive process to alter policy after the legislative victory or loss.

- **HAVING A STRONG SUPPORTING STATE ENVIRONMENT.** Many of the federal policy initiatives we found emerged from state work or leveraged state change to influence federal change. This came in the form of demonstration projects (see the Packard Foundation case study in Section IV, which illustrates the power of gaining traction at the federal level via evidence of impact at the state level), pilot legislation or building a grassroots advocacy movement with the credibility and capacity to target specific federal lawmakers. While there did not appear to be any one state strategy more prevalent than any other, state-level engagement almost always preceded or supported federal efforts.

It is important to keep in mind that chosen strategies must align with intended outcomes, and foundations should enter the reform arena only when they have a clear and realistic understanding of what their targeted success looks like, along with a willingness and ability to commit the necessary time and resources to attain that goal. This understanding should inform their choice of strategies. Effective reform initiatives should carefully address the many contributing factors of a policy-change agenda, including the identification of appropriate target audiences, the planned influence the foundation aims to create among the audience, the activities proven effective to realize that influence and the strategic choice of roles, scope and policy targets for both the grantees and the funder.





# 4

## Examples of federal foundation policy initiatives and their results

Foundations aiming for federal policy reform have used diverse strategies to attain success and, as noted above, strategies can be applied and combined in many different ways. Table 1 depicts snapshot examples of federal reform initiatives of major foundations that led to success, and a list of the various strategies that supported such results.

Our analysis shows that federal policy initiatives are often led by larger national foundations or those with a state-level focus.<sup>17</sup> This is linked to the fact that these foundations have missions that encompass broader constituencies or they have access to greater resources that can be stretched over longer time commitments or can mobilize and act within bigger networks. An assessment of active foundations that have engaged in policy reform found that more have focused on public education and awareness-building than on direction action.

The policy initiatives themselves have targeted a range of social issues from smoking prevention to climate change, and cover a spectrum of impacts from the individual, such as access to healthcare, to the good of society, such as campaign finance reform. Success in most of these cases was defined as an ultimate change in federal policy, such as the introduction or reauthorization of law. However, successes were also noted through scholarship, publications and state-based law adoption.

The strategies range in their targeted influence across awareness, will and action, with each applying a combination of the different tactics assessed in the prior section. The impact of clear issue framing and knowledge development is evident through the success of the Hewlett Foundation with the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, the Joyce Foundation on campaign finance reform issues, and the Open Society Institute for its work in abolishing the death penalty. The utility of network building is also demonstrated through the impact of the Ford Foundation on immigration reform, and the John M. Olin Foundation in its creation of conservative-based institutions

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, [http://www.mcf.org/system/article\\_resources/0000/0669/PublicPolicy\\_Coffman.pdf](http://www.mcf.org/system/article_resources/0000/0669/PublicPolicy_Coffman.pdf).

to support policy reform. Finally, the effectiveness of action at the grassroots level helped the Open Society Institute, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and Second Amendment Foundation attain target policy outcomes in death penalty reform, re-authorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program, and the overturning of anti-gun policies.

TABLE 1: **Foundation reform initiatives: strategies for success**

FOUNDATION	TARGETED FEDERAL POLICY REFORM	STRATEGIES USED	STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS THAT SUPPORTED SUCCESS	RESULTS
<b>Ford Foundation</b>	Immigration reform	Funds advocacy, litigation and reform; program learning; capacity building and technical assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Utilization of network</b> (building the network through grantmaking)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America’s Security and Prosperity Act introduced in Congress, 2009</li> <li>• DREAM Act legislation introduced in Congress, May 2011</li> </ul>
<b>Hewlett Foundation</b>	Influence the debate on climate change	Collaborations with other funders, grantmaking to help create ideal policies, funding research and scientific analysis, policy briefing, capacity building in grantee advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Emphasis on research and knowledge of the issue</b> to inform and support policy goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy Independence and Security Act, 2007</li> </ul>
<b>John M. Olin Foundation</b>	Increase the social presence of conservative ideas in law and economics	Funding of legal associations, think tanks, advocacy groups, scholarship program, media outreach program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Emphasis on research</b> to inform and support policy goals</li> <li>• <b>Utilization of the network</b></li> <li>• <b>Long-term focus</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of the Heritage Foundation, and the Manhattan Institute</li> <li>• Support of the nascent Federalist Society, now seen as one of the most influential groups in American jurisprudence</li> <li>• Influencing the school of economics of University of Chicago</li> </ul>
<b>Joyce Foundation</b>	Federal campaign finance reform	Policy-related research and advocacy, public education, litigation, media outreach, capacity building for grantees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Emphasis on research</b> to inform and support policy goals</li> <li>• <b>Influence of policy</b> through a grassroots movement</li> <li>• <b>Utilization of the network</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2010 opinion poll found 80% of Americans in opposition to the recent Supreme Court campaign finance ruling</li> </ul>
<b>Kaiser Foundation</b>	Increase awareness of health policy in the US	Educational information, analysis and research, partnership with major media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Utilizing the network</b></li> <li>• <b>Knowledge of the issue at hand</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is signed into law, March 2010</li> </ul>
<b>Open Society Institute</b>	Death penalty reform or abolition	Strategic litigation Research National public education State-level grassroots organizing Coalition building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Rigorous research</b></li> <li>• <b>Grassroots efforts</b> (through public education)</li> <li>• <b>Utilizing the network</b> (coalition building)</li> <li>• <b>Knowledge of the issue at hand</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moratorium on death penalty, Illinois and Maryland</li> <li>• Abolishing the execution of the mentally disabled</li> </ul>

FOUNDATION	TARGETED FEDERAL POLICY REFORM	STRATEGIES USED	STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS THAT SUPPORTED SUCCESS	RESULTS
<b>David &amp; Lucile Packard Foundation</b>	Ensuring adequate health care to all children in the U.S.	Funding advocacy groups, technical assistance programs for state program directors and policymakers, peer to peer exchanges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Utilizing the network</b></li> <li>• <b>Knowledge of the issue at hand</b></li> <li>• Influencing policy through a <b>grassroots movement</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Children’s Health Insurance Program reauthorized by the Obama administration in 2009</li> <li>• Nearly halving the rate of uninsured children from 1997 to 2011</li> <li>• Half of states with “Finish Line” guarantees having child uninsured rates at or below 5% in 2010</li> </ul>
<b>Robert Wood Johnson Foundation</b>	Prevention and decrease of tobacco use	Communications activities to increase the awareness among media, policymakers and national thought leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Utilizing the network</b></li> <li>• <b>Knowledge of the issue at hand</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No-smoking law passed in CA, 2002, and now 25 states have laws restricting smoking in public areas</li> <li>• The Obama administration enacted a law that allows the FDA to regulate tobacco</li> </ul>
<b>Second Amendment Foundation</b>	Supporting the individual’s right to bear arms	Litigation, peer convenings, conferences, public and political education, publications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Knowledge of the issue at hand</b></li> <li>• <b>Grassroots movement</b></li> <li>• Influencing policy</li> <li>• <b>Cultural competency</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SAF has influenced the overturning of numerous anti-gun laws</li> <li>• Created 4 major gun rights publications</li> </ul>
<b>Tides Foundation</b>	Abolishing the death penalty	United with a 501(c)(4) to fund lobbying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Greater lobbying ability</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several bills proposed to reform the death penalty in states across the country.</li> <li>• Public support for the death penalty is lowest in 40 years(2011 Gallup Poll)</li> </ul>

While it is generally difficult to attribute policy changes directly to a foundation’s influencing efforts and strategies (given the other advocates that exist in the private or public sectors, along with pre-existing political support systems or other external conditions), this small sample set suggests that two factors can potentially lead to successful policy change at the federal level:

- a strategy that combines different tools across a spectrum of research and framing, public education, communications or cross-sector partnerships
- an approach that targets a combination (but not necessarily all of) awareness, will and action.

The following case studies delve deeper into this hypothesis, summarizing examples of funder experiences gleaned from interviews conducted for this study. The cases



outline the strategies employed by the foundations for program design and strategy, the reasoning behind their choices, particularly their efforts at the federal level, and the unique signature approaches to reform efforts maintained by each of their institutions.

## CASE: Smith Richardson Foundation

### Strategies employed for policy reform

The Smith Richardson Foundation's (SRF) mission is to "contribute to important public debates and to help address serious public policy challenges facing the United States."<sup>18</sup> Under this mission, the SRF primarily applies the strategy of issue framing to support its targeted policies, specifically through research and analysis efforts or evaluation studies that compile evidence of policy effectiveness and that quantify the proposed costs and benefits to make a convincing case for reform. Publications are sometimes funded as a complementary effort. To strengthen its relevance as a supporter of sound research to reinforce targeted policy reform, the SRF makes a concerted effort to recruit board members who are policy experts and therefore knowledgeable in the SRF's chosen issue space. Grantee selection is based largely on the quality of their proposed research design. If the grantee's funded research will be funneled into reports or publications, the grants are coupled with separate grants to more communications-skilled entities.

### The case for a federal position

The SRF has tackled national policy issues touching the environment, education, public finance, immigration, and clean air and water, among others. With respect to the choices it makes to address federal-specific policy reform, the Foundation believes that efforts enacted at the national level can be an effective solution through which to leverage already-proven working models. Essentially, while acknowledging that federal efforts are more difficult, the SRF posits that ultimate change in national policy can stem from the scaling or replication of successful local structures, thereby expanding the impact of what has already worked, as based on collected evidence.

### Signature approach

Abiding by its overarching goal of helping others make informed choices, the SRF is explicit in only framing issues and supporting research to make issues better understood, rather than implementing advocacy efforts or campaigns that push a specific reform agenda. To enact policy change, the SRF focuses its resources on strategic data collection, research and targeted evaluation to form convincing bases of evidence of what works. At the federal level, this focuses on informing the debates in Washington-based think tanks with well-funded research and data. After such framing, the SRF believes its role in the reform process should end.

While a broad theory of change for policy change could run a long-term spectrum across building knowledge, will and action as outlined earlier through Coffman's theory, the SRF chooses to focus on a specific scope within this spectrum: issue

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.srf.org/mission/>

framing to build knowledge. The application of this knowledge through will and action is outside the SRF's scope. With a budget that is on the smaller side for a national foundation (approximately \$9 million), the SRF believes that the specificity of its efforts will align with deeper impact and ultimate success, rather than stretching its limited resources across several strategies with less funding for each. Looking beyond concise issue-framing, wide-scale public education initiatives can often grow costly, and the SRF thereby avoids such efforts in recognition of what it can realistically support.

The SRF has honed an acute awareness of its own capacity and restricts itself to a specific theory of change niche, effectively leveraging its key resources and maintaining a scope that is narrow enough for measurable impact. Success is not necessarily interpreted as an ultimate change in policy, but can be signified by acknowledgment of the funded research, such as the citation of studies in debates or invitations for testimonials that attest to the role of the funded work in the broader reform agenda.



## CASE: David and Lucile Packard Foundation

### Strategies employed for policy reform

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation is larger than the SRF, with respect to financial and human resources. It works to achieve its vision of supporting “leaders and institutions working to achieve a biologically rich, sustainable world where all families can plan for their children and all children reach their potential.”<sup>19</sup> As such, children’s health insurance has been a target of its policy reform efforts for roughly the past decade. The Foundation enhances its relevance in the policy arena by maintaining a focus on attracting the “extraordinary” through staff recruitment. By building human resources of “smart people with perspectives” rather than legislation-specific positions, the Foundation positions itself as an institution that can listen thoughtfully to its targeted issues, and offer intelligent, diverse grantmaking solutions.

While the Packard Foundation recognizes that grantees within a policy reform effort may not agree on all goals, or may have overarching interests that vary from those of the Foundation (i.e. low-income populations versus children, both which are nonetheless relevant to children’s health insurance), it is very specific about the permissible intent of grant funds. To clarify outcomes and strategies, the Foundation offers options from which grantees may choose a focus, thereby ensuring alignment with the reform initiative’s overarching priorities and theory of change. Grants are not extended for general purposes or operating support. From the list of strategy options outlined earlier in this report, the Foundation combines complementary tactics that include the formation of funder and grantee coalitions to frame issues and create a groundswell of support, and also convenes grantees for strategy sessions to ensure alignment and direction of the initiative’s efforts. The Foundation also remains engaged throughout the implementation, and sometimes expansion, of grant-funded reform efforts in contrast to the SRF, which terminates its roles after the point of issue-framing by grantees. The Packard Foundation remains involved and provides

<sup>19</sup> [www.packard.org/what-we-fund/](http://www.packard.org/what-we-fund/)

support while grantees participate in coalitions, mobilize support and disseminate their findings in support of their reform case.

### **The case for a federal position**

Similar to aforementioned examples in this study, the Packard Foundation aims to attain federal level reform by first gaining traction within individual states. It believes that states are essentially, according to an interviewee, “where you can tell your story”– compiling evidence of, and a convincing case for, what can work on a broader federal scale. State implementation is the crucial root of the foundation’s overarching federal strategies. With the Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act in 2009, passed after four years of grant-funded activity by Packard, the federal policy passage trickled down to facilitate the success of much-needed enhancements within state programs.

### **Signature approach**

From the strategy combination outlined above, the Packard Foundation prides itself on the influence it has had by mobilizing other funders. Rather than communicating its efforts to the public, the Foundation promotes its work within the funding community, demonstrating the need for support and the ease of its proposed reform solutions. Its messaging to other funders focuses not on the severity of the problems needing policy reform, but on the ease of their proposed solutions.

The Packard Foundation believes that one of its most influential efforts has been supporting the mobilization of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Cover the Uninsured Week. The Packard Foundation engages the co-funding of other foundations by convening groups through Grantmakers in Health, holding breakfast meetings, and talking to funders in targeted states about the case and solutions for policy reform. This not only attracts a greater pool of funding for their targeted policy change, it also leverages the skills, network and other resources that additional funding partners can offer.



## **CASE: Joyce Foundation**

### **Strategies employed for policy reform**

Guided by its mission to improve the quality of life in the Great Lakes region of the United States, the Joyce Foundation engages in policy reform efforts with the belief that philanthropic dollars can have the most leverage when applied to the strengthening of public policy. Policy change is perceived to lead to the improved allocation of public dollars and regulations for longer-term, systemic change in a way that standalone funded activities cannot (i.e. beach clean-ups for environmental impact or school-based activity for educational improvement).

The Foundation has tackled policy issues such as the environment, employment and education, taking a “layered approach” that encompasses city and state-level work with opportunities to inform federal level debates. The Foundation enhances its ability to play a policy reform support role by supplementing its program dollars with specific

staff expertise, often hiring individuals who have experience in working on the targeted issues themselves. This is in contrast to the human resource strategy of the Packard Foundation, which leans away from the recruitment of issue-based experts.

Policy reform grantees of the Foundation are selected based on the quality of the research base behind their policy targets and their demonstrated track records of impact on policy conversation. The Foundation works in concert with grantees to identify specific policy targets, thereby ensuring that grants within a program do not contradict each other. The Foundation and its grantees are very clear on targets, but allow for the decision-making to be led by both the funder and the grantee. Similar to the other foundations examined through this study, the Joyce Foundation also combines a variety of strategies to attain policy reform including issue framing through research and evaluation funding, communication efforts through public education, the provision of technical assistance to policymakers, and the building of coalitions. In choosing the strategy tools most appropriate to a targeted reform issue, the Foundation first examines the barriers to change in the issue space – for example, lack of awareness, lack of knowledge on the issue, or lack of knowledge to implement change. Reform initiatives begin with a landscape analysis to first ensure that barriers to be addressed through the grant funds are solidly understood. Reform initiatives are also approached with the understanding that efforts are “patient capital”, as the opportunity point for reform efforts to impact policy can often take many years to materialize.

### **The case for a federal position**

While the Joyce Foundation believes that federal policy change can represent strong impact of its philanthropic dollars, it also recognizes that reform can be more difficult at the federal level given the broader map of players involved and the increased presence or complexity of barriers to change. The foundation continually monitors and refines its grant-funded activities throughout implementation, and sometimes shifts to the state level when federal reform efforts are not gaining traction. This can be seen in its reform efforts around money and politics. After finance reforms were passed by Congress after the McCain-Feingold campaign and a basic groundwork for change appeared to be in place, Congress was perceived to be inhospitable to further reform. Thus, the Foundation interpreted the timing for its federal reform efforts as suboptimal, and shifted its focus to the state level. This shift in focus allowed the Foundation to push for change on smaller scales to first strengthen its body of evidence for its proposed reform and then, later, to move the issue up to the national agenda.

### **Signature approach**

As demonstrated by its undertaking of a landscape analysis prior to tackling a policy issue, the Joyce Foundation upholds the value of research as a guide in its grantmaking. Policy targets are always informed by clear data, helping to specify the barriers to reform that a theory of change must overcome and, in parallel, grantees are given priority when their proposed strategies are research-based. Research is acknowledged as a supporting factor for influence, first at the local level to develop evidence, and then later (when suitable) within a federal agenda.

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Gretchen Crosby Sims, Vice President of Programs, Joyce Foundation.

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