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# Building a Field: Blue Shield of California Foundation's Strong Field Project Leaves a Legacy and Valuable Lessons

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*Keywords: Field-building, domestic violence, movement building, philanthropy*

## Key Points

- Relatively few comprehensive evaluations have assessed the principles, elements, and impacts of philanthropic organizations' field-building endeavors. To help fill this gap, this article shares the results of a five-year evaluation of a large-scale field-building initiative: Blue Shield of California Foundation's Strong Field Project.
- The project's goal was to strengthen the domestic violence field by equipping it with a critical mass of diverse individuals and organizations to lead a stronger movement to end domestic violence in California. Its approach aimed to strengthen field leadership and organizations, and to create vibrant collaborative networks.
- Evaluation data show that the project achieved much of its desired impact on the domestic violence field in California, in particular by challenging long-held assumptions and entrenched patterns that had stalled the development of the field. The Strong Field Project may serve as a model for field-building initiatives across the nation.

campaign, launched in 1906, to reform the field of medical education to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's drive to improve end-of-life care in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Fleishman, 2007; Patrizi, Thompson, & Spector, 2011). Despite decades of philanthropic investment, however, questions remain on how to build a field most effectively. Relatively few comprehensive evaluations exist to test the principles, elements, and impact of field building.

In recent years, some new resources have been created for funders interested in designing field-building initiatives. The Bridgespan Group's Strong Field Framework (2009) calls attention to fostering the development of key components of a field: shared identity, standards of practice, knowledge base, leadership and grassroots

## What is a Field?

A field is defined as a branch of knowledge, policy, and practice composed of a multiplicity of actors in relationship with each other. It involves both knowledge and action. Actors in a field produce facts, solutions to problems, models of good practice, and messages to help people grasp the dimensions of a problem and promote desired changes. Field actors form a community whose members play different and complementary roles in solving social problems – advocates, program developers and implementers, communicators, leaders, organizers, researchers, policymakers, funders, and others (Petrovich, 2011).

## Introduction: Philanthropy and Field Building

Although foundations have shifted toward an outcome-oriented approach to funding in recent years, philanthropy has a long history of supporting field building. Well-known philanthropic field-building efforts range from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's

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support, funding, and supporting policy. Similarly, Bernholz, Seale, & Wang (2009) offer principles for foundations interested in strategically building a field, based on a research review of the MacArthur Foundation's five-year investment in digital media and learning as well as other foundations' field-building initiatives. Many of those principles reinforce those of Bridgespan's Strong Field Framework. For example, in the area of advancing the knowledge base, Bernholz and colleagues posit the importance of establishing a research base, adopting standards, and sharing knowledge. Other principles offered by Bernholz are not present in Bridgespan's framework: recognizing philanthropic opportunities, prioritizing actors and networks, and developing a network infrastructure. The emergence of such frameworks and principles provided Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) ideas to build upon when developing the field-building strategies of its Blue Shield Against Violence (BSAV) domestic violence grantmaking program.

### **Why a Field-Building Strategy for BSCF?**

Established in 2000, Blue Shield of California Foundation has been strongly committed to ending domestic violence in California. Since 2002, its grantmaking has focused on providing core-support operating grants to more than 100 domestic violence agencies in urban and rural communities in California. Given the fiscal and organizational challenges faced by

domestic violence agencies during the 2008 economic downturn and California's budget crisis, it became apparent to the foundation that core and programmatic support were not enough.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, BSCF's commitment to large-scale social change led it to adopt a field-level lens and develop a strategy for creating the conditions in which domestic violence leaders and organizations could more effectively address the issue.

From the outset, BSCF's leaders knew that to be effective, its field-building initiative had to be firmly grounded in the realities and needs of the field, which arose more than 30 years ago as a social-change movement to reframe domestic violence as a public health issue (Lehrner & Allen, 2009). The planning process began with intensive field research in 2009, which entailed asking hard questions,<sup>2</sup> convening grantees, and determining what its Blue Shield Against Violence program could do to make a measurable difference as the biggest investor in the domestic violence field in California (Bendet, 2009). This yearlong process included commissioning several studies that surveyed and interviewed domestic violence leaders to gain insights into the state of the movement in California, including such aspects as leadership, organizational capacity, fiscal health, and collaborative efforts among domestic violence agencies. The BSAV project also reviewed promising models from other leadership and grant programs (Adefuin, Rubin, & Yu, 2010). Most significantly, it carefully listened to people actively engaged in domestic violence work in order to identify strategic opportunities and areas needing attention.

This research determined that although it had evolved into a highly professionalized, regulated, service-oriented field, it was relatively reactive, crisis-driven, and less proactive about preventing

<sup>1</sup> In 2012, Blue Shield Against Violence awarded a total of \$3.2 million in core grants to 218 domestic violence agencies, with grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$40,000.

<sup>2</sup> Questions included: Where has the domestic violence field had success and where has it fallen short? What has led it to become fragmented and under-resourced? What does the field need to become stronger? What supports does it need to collaborate or engage the community to develop a shared vision around a unified social-change and policy-advocacy agenda?

domestic violence, addressing its root causes, and empowering survivors. Domestic violence leaders acknowledged that the field had become too dependent over the years on public funding to sustain the shelter model, and shelters, as a primary strategy for mitigating the human impacts of domestic violence, could not prevent or end it. As a result of the daily crises they faced and the fiercely competitive funding environment, leaders had developed a fortress mentality that hindered cross-agency coordination and collaboration. It was also clear that the domestic violence field needed better leadership-succession planning and cultivation of diverse, culturally responsive leaders.

Nevertheless, at the heart of the field in California was a group of passionate and resourceful leaders who shared the vision of ending domestic violence. These leaders were a complementary mix of veteran founders of the domestic violence movement, who brought a social-change perspective and deep understanding of the field's history, and relative newcomers who were brimming with potential, energy, and new perspectives that could revitalize the field. Fueled by a merger in 2005 of the northern and southern California domestic violence coalitions to form a statewide coalition – the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence – the field was well positioned to collectively optimize its strengths and respond to the myriad challenges it confronted (Adefuin, et al., 2010).

### Key Components of the Strong Field Project

Blue Shield of California Foundation designed the Strong Field Project (SFP) based on the findings of its initial research on the status of the field. The SFP would be a multimillion-dollar,<sup>3</sup> four-year initiative running from 2010 to 2014 with the ultimate goal of strengthening the domestic violence field by equipping it with a

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critical mass of diverse leaders and organizations with sufficient capacity and the right support, tools, skills, and knowledge to lead a stronger movement forward to prevent and end domestic violence. To work toward this goal, the SFP would use a three-pronged approach:

1. Strengthen leadership. The Leadership Development Program, overseen by CompassPoint, would develop the leadership capacity of a critical mass of individuals (in three cohorts of 20 individuals each), giving them stronger leadership and management skills, helping them build more robust networks, and supporting them in their efforts to meet individual goals and better serve the field.
2. Build organizational capacity. The Organizational Strengthening Grants Program, overseen by the Women's Foundation of California, would provide funding for domestic violence organizations to build capacity in ways important to them and to develop and test new practices that would benefit the entire field.

<sup>3</sup> From 2010 to 2015, BSCF invested \$30.3 million in the domestic violence field: \$15.2 million in direct investments in SFP core components; \$2.7 million in complementary technical assistance (e.g., strategic restructuring/mergers, financial management, and IT); and \$12.4 million in core support grants to domestic violence agencies.

*BSCF established two critical structures to ensure that the Strong Field Project benefited from the wisdom and input of domestic violence leaders and remained responsive to the field. The 10-member advisory group of domestic violence field leaders played a critical role in developing and refining the initiative logic model, which in turn guided program development, implementation, and evaluation.*

- Expand collaborative networks and knowledge sharing. The Network Building and Knowledge Sharing strategy, jointly administered by the Jemmott Rollins Group and the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, would strengthen the networks that connect California's domestic violence organizations by convening conferences, holding trainings, and fostering a learning community dedicated to sharing new models and best practices.

BSCF established two critical structures to ensure that the Strong Field Project benefited from the wisdom and input of domestic violence leaders and remained responsive to the field. The 10-member advisory group of domestic violence field leaders played a critical role in developing and refining the initiative logic model, which in turn guided program development, implementation, and evaluation. (See Appendix 1.) The SFP coordinating committee, consisting of representatives from BSCF, the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, the Women's

Foundation of California, Jemmott Rollins, and CompassPoint, played a crucial role in designing, implementing, and making midcourse corrections to the initiative.

With extensive input from the advisory group and coordinating committee, BSCF developed the SFP Logic Model, which became a guiding framework for the initiative. The logic model identified key values, assumptions, inputs, strategies, goals, and outcomes that reflected the months of careful listening to and engagement with the field. The assumptions, which greatly resonated with field leaders, acknowledged the challenges the domestic violence field faced. More importantly, BSCF framed the major assumptions in terms of strengths so that they could provide a vision for pathways of change in the field:

- Stronger collaborative and individual leadership will improve the domestic violence field's impact.
- Technically and financially well-resourced organizations are needed to lead the field.
- A critical mass of respected domestic violence leaders recognizes the need and opportunity for change.

Several key aspects of the Strong Field Logic Model are important to highlight. First, because SFP leaders emphasized the importance of evaluation and documentation, BSCF engaged the evaluator, Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), to kick off the evaluation by using a highly participatory process to refine and finalize the model before the official start of the project. (See Appendix 1.) Second, the nine outcomes – both short term and long term in scope – allowed the evaluation to establish benchmarks against which multiple levels of field strengthening could be measured. Articulation of these outcomes from the beginning allowed all stakeholders to have a clear sense of the complexity of the work and to be accountable for shared outcomes. Third, the logic model was a dynamic and living document; it underwent some important

revisions in 2011 and 2012 in response to feedback from the SFP participants and the evaluator.

### Progress and Outcomes: The Legacy of the Strong Field Project

From 2010 to 2015, SPR took a mixed-methods approach to assess the progress and outcomes of the Strong Field Project, seeking to understand how it “moved the needle” on field building and to document the initiative’s long-term impact on individuals and organizations (Yu, et al., 2015). To gather data for the evaluation, the evaluation team (1) conducted semi-structured interviews with 316 SFP advisory group members, intermediaries, foundation staff members, domestic violence leaders, and other stakeholders from 2010 to 2015; (2) administered a field-wide outcome and social network survey (n = 169); (3) surveyed 24 Leadership Development Program (LDP) and Organizational Strengthening Grant Program (OSG) participants (SFP “alumni”); (4) assessed the leadership skills and working conditions of 60 field leaders before and after their participation in the LDP; (5) assessed the organizational capacity of 30 OSG grantees at the beginning and end of their grant periods using scaled survey questions; and (6) reviewed event/training evaluation forms, grantee proposals, and reports. This long-term, multipart evaluation informs the following summary of the Strong Field Project’s outcomes and impacts.

#### Strengthened Leaders

One of the most powerful legacies of the Strong Field Project is the cadre of strengthened leaders that the initiative has fostered. Leadership Development Program alumni, as well as those who have worked with these individuals, reported profound impacts from their participation. The SPR analysis of pre- and post-leadership assessments and interviews with leaders showed that the LDP had significant positive impacts on individuals’ leadership and management skills. Leaders increased their self-awareness and self-confidence and enhanced their abilities to lead in multicultural milieus, manage finances, plan for succession, manage change and conflict, and contribute to field leadership. Furthermore, at the end of their LDP participation, 67 percent of LDP

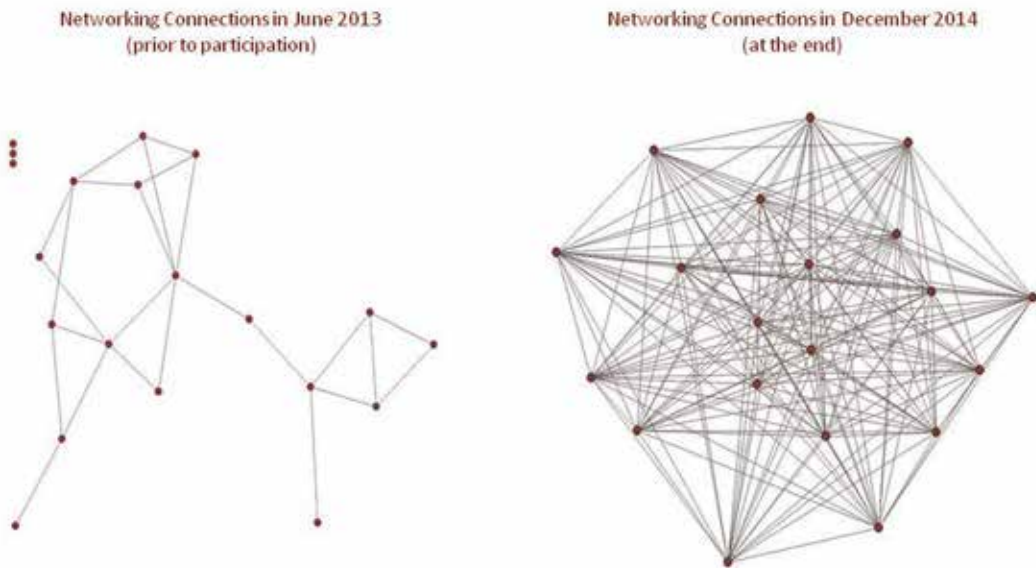
**FIGURE 1** Pre- and Post-LDP Involvement in Local, Regional, and State Leadership Activities

	Pre-LDP (%)	Post-LDP (%)	Increase/Decrease	Percentage Change
<b>Local &amp; Regional Leadership</b>				
Cohort I	65%	80%	↑	15%
Cohort II	70%	85%	↑	15%
Cohort III	60%	79%	↑	19%
<b>State Leadership</b>				
Cohort I	20%	40%	↑	20%
Cohort II	40%	55%	↑	15%
Cohort III	20%	63%	↑	43%

alumni reported holding leadership positions in local, regional, and statewide domestic violence networks. Indicative of the persistence of difficult working conditions, self-care and work-life balance continue to be areas of challenge for leaders in the domestic violence field and showed the least effect from LDP participation.

In general, the LDP has fostered leaders who are not only empowered and re-energized, but also well positioned to become more effective field and movement leaders. Some cohort members already had local and statewide leadership roles. (See Figure 1.) But participation in the LDP served to greatly increase their sense of connection to the field and movement, their interest in applying what they learned, and their courage to raise issues critical to the future of the broader field and its relevance to ending domestic violence. The pre- and post-LDP results show a strong increase in field and network leadership. Specifically, Cohort I’s level of participation in state-level leadership doubled by the end of the LDP (from 20 percent to 40 percent) and Cohort III’s increased from 20 percent to 63 percent (a 43 percent increase). Overall, all the cohorts made significant gains in local and state leadership, reporting increased activities in many different roles.



**FIGURE 2** Cohort III Networking Pre- and Post-SFP

Disparate groups and individuals with few or no interpersonal connections into a dense and highly interconnected network.

### *Strengthened Organizations*

The Strong Field Project strengthened domestic violence organizations through multiple channels. Twenty-seven OSG grantees were funded to build capacity in various priority areas. Key outcomes for the first cohort of grantees included the implementation of transformative organizational models, such as shared leadership models and domestic violence program models that integrated community organizing and family trauma services. The most valuable outcomes for the second cohort of grantees were the building of solid foundations for improved infrastructure and systems and shifts in organizational culture.

The OSG grantees reported increases in capacity in two areas that were the weakest at baseline: using systems to manage and coordinate goals and activities, and using monitoring and evaluation data. They also reported better interdepartmental collaboration, positive shifts in the philosophy-guiding service provision, expansion of services, increases in service capacity, more co-location of services, and development of more partnerships. A broad group of OSG grantees reported fund-development-related strengthening as a result of their OSG work. These grantees

made changes to their approach to fundraising and increased their organizational capacity to engage with potential funders.

### *Strengthened Field and Collaborative Networks*

The Strong Field Project has been strongly guided by the value of collaboration as well as by long-term objectives to strengthen statewide and local coalitions and other means of networking and mutual support. The final analysis of the SFP showed increased professional connections among LDP and SFP participants.

Over the course of its members' participation, LDP Cohort III transformed itself from a collection of disparate groups and individuals with few or no interpersonal connections into a dense and highly interconnected network. (See Figure 2.) Prior to joining the LDP, several cohort members had no previous connections with any other members, even at the networking level. Within the first six months of the program connections among cohort members proliferated, and by the end of the program all members reported interactions and connections with each other. Other LDP cohorts likely experienced similar increases in network interconnections, but we lack the

pre- and post-participation networking data needed to make such conclusions.

At the end of the SFP, there is evidence that strong relationships and supports are in place among cohort members. Participants frequently check in with one another via phone calls, texts, and email to discuss personal and professional challenges and accomplishments. Cohort III has put in place a resilient support system to sustain its relationships and facilitate further growth. Cohort III has also begun organizing around specific projects, such as collaborating on Blue Shield Against Violence Cultural Competency grants and serving on the board of the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence.

In terms of connections to the broader field, as of the end of the SFP, representatives from all LDP cohorts occupied central roles in the statewide network, reflecting a high level of interconnectivity with other key leaders in the field. Cross-cohort LDP connections have played a key role in improved collaboration on a regional level and in the development of the Domestic Violence Information Resource Center, an online collaborative community for domestic violence agencies. LDP participants from different cohorts have joined the partnership's board, co-facilitated capacity-building trainings, and partnered to apply for grant funding from Blue Shield and other sources.

The SFP participants and alumni noted several important ways in which the project has made a positive impact:

- The field has stronger networks and there is less of a sense of isolation. The SFP has played an important role in bringing leaders together, providing the space for connecting and building the capacity of leaders to network.
- The SFP has allowed for critical conversations and infused the field with new life and momentum. The project has provided the space, motivation, and safety needed to discuss topics and issues that have historically been too risky or scary to address or acknowledge.

*From their participation in the Leadership Development Program, regional institutes, and SFP institutes, staff members and leaders in domestic violence agencies all over California have learned about LDP “gems”: strengths-based leadership tools, multicultural leadership principles, and adaptive leadership models.*

- The field has become more diverse and made progress toward bringing in new leaders, nontraditional partners, and innovative ideas. Largely due to the SFP, the field has become more diverse since 2010 and is more open to new individuals, new approaches (e.g., trauma-informed care, leaders of color, cultural competence), geographic diversity, and inclusion of individuals from rural organizations.
- The field has made progress toward developing a shared language and a shared vision. Although the field has not been fully united around a shared vision, there is evidence of an emerging shared language and set of values. In addition, many leaders in the field are reaching agreement on the topics that need to be addressed for a common vision and agenda to be fully fleshed out.

#### *Strengthened Knowledge Base*

From their participation in the Leadership Development Program, regional institutes, and SFP institutes, staff members and leaders in domestic violence agencies all over California have learned about LDP “gems”: strengths-based



leadership tools, multicultural leadership principles, and adaptive leadership models. These powerful ideas and concepts are gaining critical mass within many organizations as multiple participants from the same domestic violence organizations take part in the LDP, and as LDP alumni effectively share valuable knowledge with those who have not been part of the SFP.

The Organizational Strengthening Grants Program has helped many domestic violence agencies learn invaluable lessons during the course of their organizational development work. Particularly rich knowledge was gleaned in the areas of fund development, theories of change, mergers and holistic service delivery, shared leadership models, and leadership development/policy advocacy.

#### *Momentum for Sustained Field Building*

To demonstrate its long-term partnership with the field as the initiative drew to a close, BSCF made several large grants to support leaders' expressed desire to self-organize to continue the field-building work. To sustain momentum, energy, and focus, the foundation provided support in three key areas: the development of a thought innovation lab, the creation of a movement and mobilization institute, and continued collaboration and networking activities. (See Figure 3.) BSCF laid the groundwork to transfer capacity-building tools and knowledge management structures to the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, the statewide domestic violence coalition. The foundation also invested in the creation of the SFP Legacy website to communicate successes, challenges, and lessons, and to ensure that new knowledge, tools, and resources would remain broadly available to others within and outside of the domestic violence field.

#### **Challenges**

As a time-limited initiative with finite resources, the Strong Field Project was not able to fully achieve its many ambitious goals and desired outcomes. The evaluation showed limited progress in increasing the diversity and cultural competency of the domestic violence field. Due

in part to the long-term nature of the endeavor, the SFP was limited in its ability to build a full-fledged pipeline that would diversify the leadership of the domestic violence field for the future. The foundation also came to the conclusion that it needed to be more explicit in building the cultural responsiveness of domestic violence service providers. (In 2013, BSCF launched a separate initiative exclusively devoted to incubating and disseminating innovative approaches to providing culturally responsive domestic violence services.)

The SFP also encountered challenges in engaging leaders to shape and coordinate a domestic violence policy-advocacy agenda and strengthening local and statewide coalitions that promote collaboration and support and sustain the domestic violence field in California. The foundation learned that in order for positive change to be sustainable, the field needed to self-organize; in particular, the state coalition needed to lead the effort to develop a shared and coordinated policy-advocacy agenda. For this to come about, it was necessary for the foundation and state coalition to clarify leadership roles and responsibilities within the Strong Field Project and beyond.

#### **Lessons on Field Building**

The SFP provided valuable lessons in designing, implementing, and exiting field-building initiatives. These lessons apply not only to philanthropic organizations, but also to organizations promoting social change through collaboration, direct organizing, advocacy, and service provision (Yu, Henderson-Frakes, & Nash, 2015).

#### *Lessons on Designing Field-Building Initiatives*

*Learn by listening to those working in the field.* The yearlong information-gathering, or listening, process that identified several key areas where the SFP should focus its efforts was critical to the success of the initiative. It meant that BSCF's efforts would go toward solving the most relevant problems and ensured that most participants in the initiative felt ownership of the project.

*Develop a field-building logic model through a thoughtful, participatory process.* When careful thinking and the perspectives of all stakeholders

go into the creation of a logic model for an initiative, goals and assumptions are made explicit; this allows the model to serve as an important reference point for ensuring initiative impacts.

*A strengths-based approach is an effective tool for building a field.* Rather than approaching field building as an effort to fix problems, those developing an initiative should affirm characteristics that can be the foundation for positive change. The SFP's strengths-based approach allowed for re-examining entrenched habits and behaviors rooted in a scarcity mindset and for reimagining the possibilities of a stronger field with new will and commitment. A strengths-based approach can also support collaboration, networking, and the creation of new and powerful narratives.

*Logic models should be treated as living documents.* While fidelity to a logic model facilitates the evaluation process and the integration of project components, the logic model itself should remain flexible to allow for nimble midcourse corrections.

*Collaborative, participatory leadership generates buy-in and a sense of common purpose.* Throughout the SFP, the coordinating committee and advisory group brought together leaders and partner organizations from both inside and outside the domestic violence field to collaboratively shape the course of the project. Similar leadership structures may be critical to the success of broad initiatives like the SFP.

*Involving leaders from outside the field can help spur innovation.* An important outcome of the SFP was the realization that while this field is well established, there is high value in engaging new partners around a shared vision to end domestic violence. Involving leaders from related fields and expertise spurs innovation and more holistic and longer-term solutions for domestic violence survivors.

*Lessons on Implementing Initiative Components*  
The more strategic the thinking behind a logic model, the better the model can integrate the main programmatic components of an initiative and facilitate synergy and cross-program impact. Throughout the implementation of the SFP, the strategic

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framework articulated in the logic model pushed the SFP coordinating committee members to think outside their respective areas of responsibility. They actively checked for tendencies to become siloed and searched for opportunities to integrate and cross-fertilize so that the individual SFP strategies could interact synergistically to strengthen the field as a whole.

*Developing the capacities of diverse and emerging leaders in a field is a "high impact" investment.* The success of the Leadership Development Program – regarded by many as the engine for change in building the field – demonstrates that preparing veteran as well as emerging domestic violence leaders to be catalysts for change generates significant dividends. As more and more alumni of the LDP brought new content, skills, and frameworks

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back to their organizations, the LDP's influence on the domestic violence field expanded, building critical mass for positive change.

*Leadership development is about more than skill development.* The LDP demonstrated that the context and processes of leadership development are as important as its content. Leaders respond when they experience optimal conditions for learning and building trust, connection with other participants, and validation of their roles and experience.<sup>4</sup> Tools and frameworks such as strengths-based leadership, adaptive leadership, peer-coaching circles, and focused attention to mission-driven decision making proved effective in growing the kinds of leaders a field needs to have maximal impact.

*Focusing on the practice of adaptive leadership, rather than short-term technical fixes, leaves a field better able to manage change and confront challenges.* Many fields are subject to sudden funding drop-offs in a fluctuating economy, changes in the public visibility of the field's core issues depending on local

and national media coverage, and shifts in demographics. In an uncertain environment, leaders must be able to adapt and take on entirely new challenges. Leaders trained in the skills of adaptive leadership are more likely to experiment, take risks, embrace failure as an opportunity for learning, and mobilize others to solve problems.

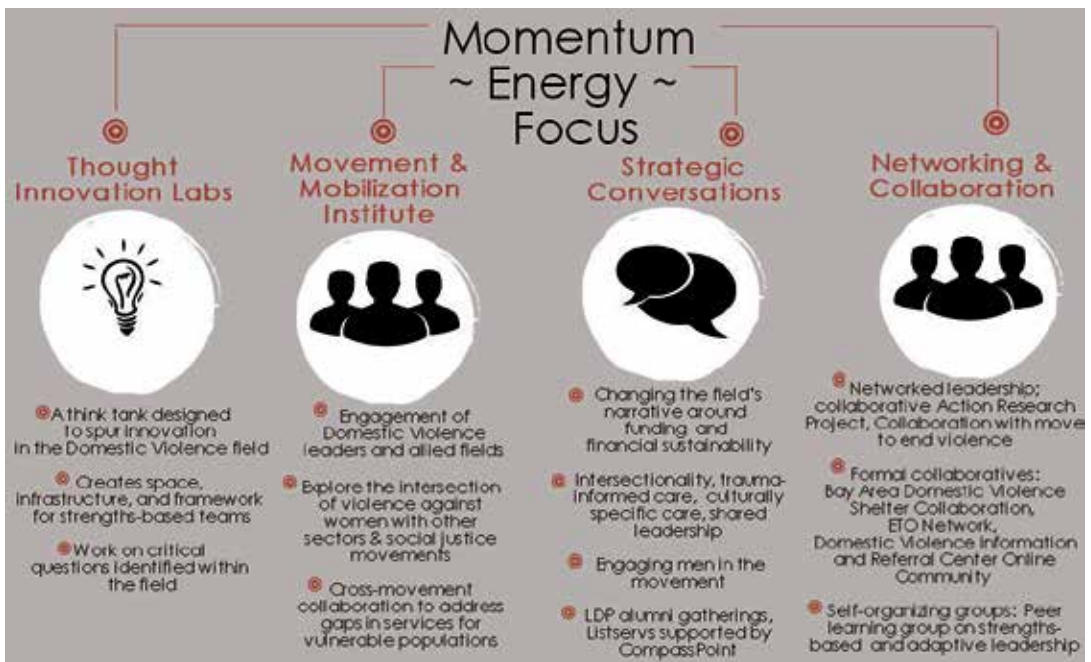
*Financial support of organizations' capacity-building efforts achieves its greatest impact when it encourages networking and sharing among organizations.* The OSG demonstrated that the growth experienced within separate organizations can be spread outward into the field when there are opportunities for peer learning and exchange. The OSG created such opportunities by bringing grantees together in regular convenings and by making Peer Exchange Learning Fund grants after the end of the OSG II grant period.

*Some important forms of organizational strengthening are not quantifiable.* The OSG grantees realized critical changes in culture, infrastructure, and practices. Furthermore, a subgroup of grantees emerged with tremendous potential for bringing positive change to the larger domestic violence field by disseminating the models and tools they developed under the OSG Program.

*Building networks and sharing knowledge is an important component of any field-building initiative.* Webinars, institutes, convenings, and other knowledge-sharing opportunities help those working in a field build skills, relationships, and connections, and to engage in critical conversations. Knowledge sharing also helps break down isolation, increase the accessibility of best and promising practices, and leverage the effects of the other initiative components through the sharing of programmatic "gems." The regional institutes showed promise as a means of exposing members of the field to field-strengthening activities, such as strengths-based leadership training.

*Creating a safe and vital space where leaders in a field can reflect and have conversations about sensitive issues may be a prerequisite for positive change.* In the domestic violence field, meaningful change could not occur without leaders asking hard questions about power, privilege, diversity, and

<sup>4</sup>It is important to note that long-term leadership development makes a qualitative difference, in addition to a quantitative one, for the domestic violence field. The long duration of the LDP experience – 18 months per cohort – allowed time for participants to build a strong community and a foundation of trust.

**FIGURE 3** Building Field Leader-Driven Momentum

staff turnover. These frank discussions were made possible, in turn, by the foundation's explicit efforts to ensure that field leaders felt safe talking about their challenges and grievances and sharing their ideas for moving forward.

*It is possible to mitigate the effects of leadership turnover by insuring the continuity of key factors.* Leadership turnover is inevitable, and it can compromise the effectiveness of an initiative due to the loss of the knowledge, skills, and relationships gained through initiative activities. In the SFP, the effects of leadership turnover were mitigated by engaging multiple individuals from the same grantee organization, allowing leaders who left their organizations but stayed in the domestic violence field to continue as SFP participants, maintaining a consistent group of intermediary organizations, and institutionalizing the initiative's key learnings.

*Lessons on Exiting From a Field-Building Initiative* A graceful exit from a large-scale field-building initiative requires early planning and the maintenance of transparency throughout. Blue Shield of California Foundation was mindful of the importance of

planning a respectful and responsible exit from the SFP. The foundation began planning its exit strategy early (midway through the five years of the project), and resolved to be transparent and firm about the sunset date of the initiative and never give mixed messages about its transition out of the funding role. These strategies should prove effective for any field-building initiative.

*Respectful exits entail carefully listening to field leaders to sustain field-initiated momentum.* To sustain the momentum, energy, and focus of field-building efforts, the foundation supported the development of a thought innovation lab, a movement and mobilization institute, and continued collaboration and networking activities. BSCF also laid the groundwork to transfer capacity-building tools and knowledge-management structures to the statewide domestic violence coalition. Steps such as these ensured that new knowledge, tools, and resources would remain broadly available to others within and outside of the field.

*Exiting a field-building initiative does not mean exiting the field.* The exit strategy can include efforts

to encourage and facilitate leadership within the field, to sustain the outcomes achieved by the initiative, and to continue a role as an effective partner, active learner, and willing leader in the field. For its part, for example, BSCF continues to make strategic grants to domestic violence agencies to advance its mission to end domestic violence. Grantee partners need to hear a clear message from the foundation about its continued commitment to the issue and presence in the field.

## Conclusion

By strategically engaging leaders and organizations as partners in program design, the feedback process, and creating powerful spaces for new ways of thinking and leading through the SFP, Blue Shield of California Foundation tested long-held assumptions and entrenched patterns that have stalled the development of the domestic violence field. Overall, the SFP achieved much of its desired impact on the domestic violence field in California using a collaborative approach that meaningfully engaged leaders in the field. The insights on leadership, collaboration, and capacity building that the project has generated will continue to help strengthen the domestic violence field in California for the foreseeable future. It has justifiably captured the interest of domestic violence coalitions, leaders, and funders across the U.S. and may serve as a model for field-building initiatives across the nation.

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**APPENDIX** Strong Fields Logic Model

