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Moving the Needle or Spinning Our Wheels? A Framework for Long-Lasting, Equitable Change in Education

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Keywords: *Philanthropy, equity, institutionalization, postsecondary education*

Tools

Introduction

In the new age of grantmaking, referred to by different authors as disruptive, strategic, muscular, or venture philanthropy (Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Tompkins-Stange, 2016), many funders are looking to “move the needle” on persistent challenges in order to impact educational outcomes and racial inequities for years to come. In the best-case scenarios, these efforts lead to new organizational structures, metrics, or practices that have staying power beyond the term of any particular funding stream. In other words, they remake the domain, realigning political and practical pressures such that key activities become self-sustaining and no longer reliant on external support.

However, achieving this type of outcome is no small feat. Nationwide, philanthropists support many types of valuable work, including developing and disseminating priorities and ideas (focusing), designing and testing programmatic solutions (engineering), bringing together key stakeholders (brokering), and filling gaps in capacity or infrastructure (building). Yet at times, these individual efforts don’t seem to add up, leading some to characterize the continuation of existing funding structures as “spinning our wheels.” How can funders interested in achieving meaningful change select strategies that do more than exacerbate initiative fatigue (Kuh & Hutchings, 2014)?

We engage with this puzzle in the context of the growing number of today’s philanthropic organizations increasing their investments

Key Points

- In the quest for equitable and lasting reform in postsecondary education, philanthropy’s great strength is its flexibility to make use of multiple strategies. However, as most grantmakers know firsthand, not all strategy combinations lead to lasting systemic change.
- This article offers an actionable approach for designing and analyzing philanthropically funded movements in order to remake an area of educational policy or practice. It begins with a review of philanthropic literature that identifies the primary change strategies used by funders in the education sector. It then introduces a tool, rooted in organizational research, to understand and predict the circumstances under which different combinations of strategies are likely to lead to lasting change.
- These recommendations are made concrete by applying the analytical tool to two real-world examples, the movements for degree reclamation and community college data capacity, with particular attention to deepening funders’ analytic and strategic attention to dismantling educational inequities.

in postsecondary policy and outcomes, often directed at reducing persistent social inequities (Bacchetti & Ehrlich, 2007; Bushouse & Mosley, 2018; Gandara, Rippner, & Ness, 2017). The postsecondary sector faces many challenges that negatively impact students across the board, and

also cause disproportionate harm to Black and brown students, low-income students, women, and gender expansive students. Even when systems and structures are remade in ways that make them more effective overall, this may do little to reduce inequities that impact minoritized students.

In this article, we argue that funders seeking transformative change in postsecondary education and elsewhere need to develop a remaking strategy to guide and organize decisions about funding priorities, strategic collaborations, and measures of success. We put forward a framework to guide strategy developments, informed by: a) a review of existing research on philanthropic efforts towards long-lasting transformation, b) research on persistence and change drawn from the management and sociological research traditions, and c) consistent attention to the specific dynamics of inequity. We illustrate the use of the framework by analyzing two cases, and offer insights for its practical application to enhance long-lasting and equitable grantmaking outcomes.

Philanthropic Movements: What and How

Modern philanthropy is grounded in a commitment to creating long-lasting transformative change (Baltodano, 2017; Greene, 2015; Kelly & James, 2015; Kelly & McShane, 2013). We know from prior research that successful efforts at achieving systemic change involve multiple forms of influence, including formal policy and more informal transformations of practice (Hallett, 2010; Kezar, 2013). Reviewing existing research on philanthropic efforts in the education field, we have synthesized four key reform strategies frequently used by education funders: focusing, engineering, brokering, and building. Although these categories can be employed individually, they are not mutually exclusive and often emerge together in individual projects. Moreover, while any grantmaker can employ one or all of these strategies, they may or may not achieve meaningful and lasting change. This leaves many reformers frustrated when their initiatives fizzle out after funding dries up.

The postsecondary sector faces many challenges that negatively impact students across the board, and also cause disproportionate harm to Black and brown students, low-income students, women, and gender expansive students. Even when systems and structures are remade in ways that make them more effective overall, this may do little to reduce inequities that impact minoritized students.

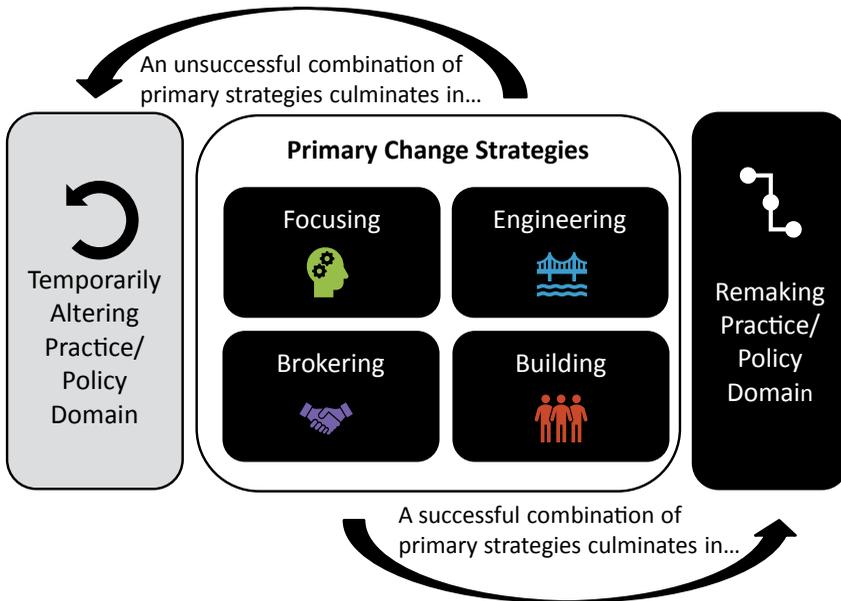
Lasting change occurs when reformers use the tools at their disposal in a way that culminates in a remaking of the field. Remaking is discussed here as a fifth category of philanthropic work — one that ultimately results from a strategic combination of the four first-level strategies. Remaking denotes the fundamental realignment of the political and practical pressures in an area of education such that lasting and meaningful social and policy changes become self-sustaining.

Whereas a grantmaker may take on any combination of the four primary strategies, only certain combinations will result in a remaking outcome for a given issue and context. (See Figure 1.) The second half of this paper is dedicated to strategizing about what combinations will result in a remade domain, and which will result only in limited or temporary change.

Focusing: Promoting Ways of Thinking

By “focusing,” often referred to as thought leadership, philanthropy sets the political agenda or

FIGURE 1 Grantmakers' Reform Strategies



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answers this question for policymakers: What matters in education right now?

This category includes efforts to influence policy and practices by cultivating new ideas or by amplifying the urgency of particular ideas through funded projects and papers, media outreach or training campaigns, and coordinated efforts using existing foundation platforms. Studies in this category indicate that philanthropic actors can play a key role in shaping the tenor and focus of knowledge production via investments in research and/or white papers from think tanks, associations, and other bodies. In this way, foundations have been shown to generate idea convergence among key actors (Bryan & Isett, 2018; Quinn, Tompkins-Stange, & Meyerson, 2014; Reckhow & Tompkins-Stange, 2018; Thümmler, 2011).

Focusing projects can occur through two primary processes. First, these investments can orchestrate and promote entirely new ways of thinking. This can take the form of promoting new languages (e.g., “equity-minded”),

developing new or different metrics (e.g., college graduation rates), or motivating issues under a new framing (e.g., college completion and the “future of work”). Second, they can keep ideas on the map by producing new content through media agencies, social media, and podcasts (La Londe, Brewer, & Lubienski, 2015; Lubienski, 2017; Lubienski, Brewer, & La Londe, 2016). For example, the Lumina Foundation has built a broad thought-leadership presence — using its own platform and providing resources for non-profit media agencies to do the same — in the field of postsecondary change around its college completion initiative, dubbed “Goal 2025.” As a focusing strategy, Goal 2025 has encouraged leaders and policymakers to reorient their work around the college completion rates of non-dominant student groups, rather than the more muddled (and well-trodden) waters surrounding college access.

Engineering: Design and Testing

By “engineering,” philanthropy influences the field by answering this question: What interventions work to achieve key education goals?

Perhaps the strategy most associated with philanthropic work is the role of foundations in launching or testing new mechanisms of social change. Foundations frequently invest in piloting and evaluating new interventions intended to solve education problems (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Saltman, 2010). The models that emerge from these investments are the raw materials with which foundations may choose to launch campaigns around particular policies or practices.

Many key movements have been first launched as pilot and evaluation programs using philanthropic dollars, only to evolve into full-blown policy movements or templates. For example, research and piloting projects that redesigned developmental education were foundation funded, a project that ultimately spun off into state-by-state policy reform efforts.

Brokering: Catalyzing Policy Diffusion and Policy Learning

By “brokering,” philanthropy influences the field by connecting decision-makers with best practices and partners who have already made progress on relevant issues.

Philanthropic actors have the power to bridge contexts — from industry to schools, from one district or region to the next — as they take interventions or policy designs and aid in their diffusion across networks (Gandara et al., 2017). This occurs as grantmakers orchestrate connections and knowledge sharing, and encourage the adoption of best practices in a systematic manner (Bushouse & Mosley, 2018; Haddad & Reckhow, 2018; Hwang & Young, 2019; Suárez, Husted, & Casas, 2018; Zeichner & Pena-Sandoval, 2015). Grantmakers can engage in brokering work by creating cross-sector or cross-region networks (e.g., via convenings, institutes, etc.) through funded projects intended to “scale” a particular model to multiple contexts. This can often take the form of leveraging philanthropic convening power, wherein stakeholders who would normally not interact are brought together in the hopes that ideas will spread.

Funders can also act as intermediaries by investing in the creation of template policies

and toolkits to lower barriers to adoption and facilitate the spread of ideas, including offering incentives to do so (Anderson & Donchik, 2016). For example, foundations were central in the creation of Complete College America (CCA), which played a crucial role in the diffusion of performance-based postsecondary funding models as a policy tool through the creation of networking opportunities, as well as the provision of technical assistance and policy templates carrying the legitimacy of being a CCA “Game Changer” strategy.

Building: Capacity and Coalitions

By “building,” philanthropy invests in talent infrastructure to fulfill new policy demands or bring together networks needed for collective learning toward new goals.

Similar to but distinct from brokering, philanthropic actors can contribute to the spread and stick of new policies or practices by building infrastructure to implement a proposed change or building coalitions dedicated to an issue (Bryan & Isett, 2018; Hwang & Young, 2019; Saltman, 2010). Building is about creating the technical, material, and social capacity needed to bring an idea to reality at scale. It is a process of sustained collective learning.

For example, grantmakers have engaged in both capacity- and coalition-building efforts in the area of universal prekindergarten, which have yielded demonstrable results. In this instance, funders have invested in community capacity via partnerships and programs intended to increase program quality and prevalence. Funders also built long-term partnerships among membership organizations of public officials and researchers, which created a complex network of proponents who could apply policy pressure at multiple levels with mutually reinforcing messaging about the economic and social benefits of universal pre-K (Lubienski et al., 2016).

Remaking: Creating New Normative and Political Pressures

By “remaking,” philanthropic actors use their primary reform tools to build new and durable

Philanthropic actors can remake educational policy environments by embedding new standards, metrics, or organizations into the political and organizational environment in ways that change the terms of future engagements. Remaking creates new interests and new measures of legitimacy that outlive active grants.

constituencies, meanings, and beliefs that can carry on mobilization for a particular goal beyond the terms of their investment.

Philanthropic actors can remake educational policy environments by embedding new standards, metrics, or organizations into the political and organizational environment in ways that change the terms of future engagements. Remaking creates new interests and new measures of legitimacy that outlive active grants (E. Anderson & Colyvas, 2020; Colyvas & Jonsson, 2011; Greene, 2015). For example, grantmakers for CCA used focusing, building, and brokering to create new best practice pressures in the field. As CCA drew attention to states with poor graduation rates, it created an incentive for states and colleges to formally affiliate with the college completion movement, requiring adherence to CCA's preferred systemic strategies. While contentious, this pressure to be a CCA alliance member created interests above and beyond (although affiliated with) grant dollars, to adopt and sustain new practices.

This example highlights how durable changes can be achieved through a combination of focusing, engineering, brokering, and/or building

strategies. Of course, these successes cannot be divorced from the opportunities afforded by specific political and social moments (Kingdon, 2013). The critical question then is, how can grantmakers know which strategies will ultimately remake an issue?

Change, Equity, and Self-Sustaining Structures

How can funders interested in achieving meaningful change select strategies that work? To answer this question, we pull from scholarship on what makes policies or practices persist and what makes them change (E. Anderson & Colyvas, 2020; Scott, 2013).

Decades worth of studies in this area have demonstrated that when policies, practices, or beliefs remain in place across long periods of time and wide expanses of geography, they are typically supported by durable beliefs, norms, power structures, or other stable systems (Colyvas & Jonsson, 2011; Colyvas & Maroulis, 2015; Jepperson, 1991). These durable orders are difficult to change precisely because they reproduce themselves by determining the rules, norms, and standards deemed legitimate in a field (Zucker, 1987). We refer to these sources of support as self-sustaining structures.

Self-sustaining structures are the forces reproducing the status quo that reformers, like grantmakers, seek to change. In order to produce change, reform strategies should reduce or replace the self-sustaining structures that create persistent problematic and inequitable outcomes. We can think of a portfolio of funded projects that seeks to do this as pursuing a remaking strategy — that is, a set of funding strategies selected to remake persistent practices and outcomes.

A Road Map for Lasting Change

In order to support the development of remaking strategies, we have assembled an analytic tool that can be used both to analyze existing philanthropic efforts and plan for future steps. We illustrate this approach with two highly visible, philanthropically funded postsecondary

FIGURE 2 Components of an Equity-Oriented Remaking Strategy



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movements linked to the push for college completion: advocacy for degree reclamation and advocacy for community college data capacity. For each case, we derived case histories by analyzing contemporary news accounts, white papers, and peer-reviewed literature, and member checking with identifiable leaders.

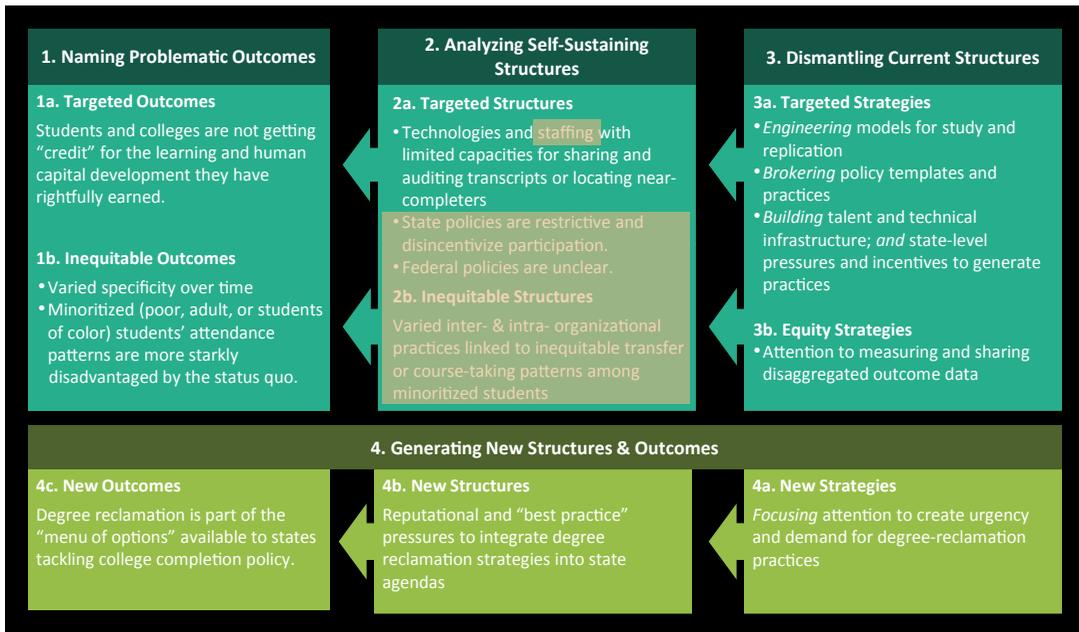
This tool provides a road map for the analysis and/or development of a remaking strategy with an explicit focus on equity. (See Figure 2.) The arrows indicate relationships of influence. Reading from right to left, funded strategies — represented in the far-right column — are intended to influence self-sustaining structures which, in turn, influence targeted outcomes. In order to use this road map for purposes of developing a remaking strategy, we suggest working in a clockwise manner, following the order of the numbers (indicated in parentheses).

The process begins with naming the problematic outcomes (1). This means both specifying the outcome that remaking is targeting for change (1a), and looking intentionally for ways that the status quo may be disproportionately affecting minoritized populations (1b). Having identified

the problem, the next step is to analyze what self-sustaining structures are causing the problem to persist (2). This includes both structures reproducing the outcome overall (2a), and specific attention processes exacerbating the issue for marginalized groups (2b). Decisions about funding potential focusing, engineering, brokering, and building strategies (3a) can then be evaluated based on their ability to dismantle current self-sustaining structures (3), particularly those responsible for inequitable outcomes (3b). Funded projects can also be designed intentionally to create new systems and incentives (4a) that build new self-sustaining structures (4b), which would in turn support more equitable outcomes (4c). We represent each case below.

In the case of degree reclamation, we demonstrate the substantial progress and central role of engineering and brokering to alleviating barriers toward advancing degree-reclamation practices. We also argue that degree-reclamation proponents are still striving to build the type of coalitional base and incentive structures necessary to remake the domain of practice after funding ends. By contrast, in the community college data-capacity movement, leaders have

FIGURE 3 Degree Reclamation Goals, Structures, and Strategies



Note: Content highlighted in orange represents self-sustaining structures in need of further strategic attention.

been able to create discursive, political, and professional changes in the field that have become self-sustaining and durable. In other words, the domain has been remade. However, the movement continues to evolve to address central concerns about how to connect its theory of action more explicitly both to questions of educational equity and to processes of educational responsiveness.

The Degree Reclamation Movement

As the college completion era emerged in the mid- to late 2000s, multiple grantmakers — ranging from the Helios Education Foundation to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation — turned their attention to initiatives designed to catch the “low hanging fruit” in the postsecondary field. (See Figure 3.)

The problem targeted was simple: How can states and colleges recognize all students for the learning they have fully or nearly completed (1)? The logic behind such an initiative is that if we

can convert amassed credits to degrees or reenroll students just a few credits shy of completion, we can see a big boost in college completion with relatively little resource commitment or costly institutional change (Taylor, 2016).

Funders ranging from collaboratives among regional and national philanthropies to local community funders took up this issue at a relatively rapid pace. Analyzing historical reports and concurrent accounts, many strategies designed to dismantle existing obstacles emerge (3a).¹ Primary among these were engineering models for degree reclamation that could be studied and replicated; brokering and incentivizing evolving policies and models across institutions and states to encourage adoption; building capacity through professional development and subsidizing labor and infrastructure development to facilitate degree-reclamation processes — e.g., data sharing across institutions, degree audit systems, and processes for identifying and reenrolling near-completers. Funders

¹ The authors also conducted direct member checking of this account with funders and evaluators associated with this movement.

also supported focusing on and disseminating information that motivated tactics like reverse transfer in the realm of policy and practice (4a).

The movement for degree reclamation is ongoing and ever-changing as it strives to meet its goals. However, there is much to be learned in asking of its early and intermediate stages: What self-sustaining structures did the movement change or weaken (2), and what new structures, if any, did it create (4b)? In doing so we get a clearer picture of the possible road ahead for this movement. In this spirit, we offer a few observations.

First, this initiative to date has done some crucial work in the ways it legitimized, established, and tested intra-institutional processes (e.g., transitioning to an opt-out process allowing institutions to more freely share student records for the purpose of degree completion),² interinstitutional sharing agreements, and state policy environments (e.g., funding formulas that reward institutions for degree conferrals) conducive to recognizing and rewarding students' diverse learning pathways (Robinson, 2015; Taylor, 2016; Wheatle, Taylor, Bragg, & Ajinkya, 2017).³ It has also generated informed conversations among researchers, policymakers, and students about the real value in the achievement of an associate degree in terms of educational and labor market rewards and in the reenrollment of near-completers, which has had an important legitimizing effect critical to sustained practice. And finally, this work has advanced new technological infrastructures for connecting and analyzing student records that are crucial if robust degree reclamation processes are to become the status quo (Bragg & McCambly, in press).

We posit that this movement is still evolving on at least three fronts crucial to remaking this domain. First, relevant data sharing and degree auditing processes are prohibitively labor intensive, which prevents their elevation

to self-sustaining structures at many colleges and universities. Leading voices in this domain have traced this difficulty, in part, to the need for a centralized student data system (a role the National Student Clearinghouse could fill but has not yet), automated degree audit technologies, and federal guidelines that clarify Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act restrictions and alleviate fears of noncompliance that sustain ineffective accumulation of student learning records. To this end, some institutions participating in degree-reclamation projects have not been able to allocate hard money to continue the labor-intensive work started by grant-funded staff. If these responsibilities are not optimized or embedded in a permanent, funded position in the college, they cannot self-sustain.

Second, few states were able to permanently address the imbalance in incentives and rewards that make this work mission optional rather than mission central. For example, when it comes to reverse transfer — transferring credits earned at four-year institutions toward reclamation of associate degrees from two-year colleges — many four-year institutions may find that the labor required to collaborate on this work brings little reward or recognition. In fact, we could argue that even in a state with performance-based funding, if the funding pool is a zero-sum game, helping two-year colleges confer more degrees could cost four-year colleges some degree of funding over time.

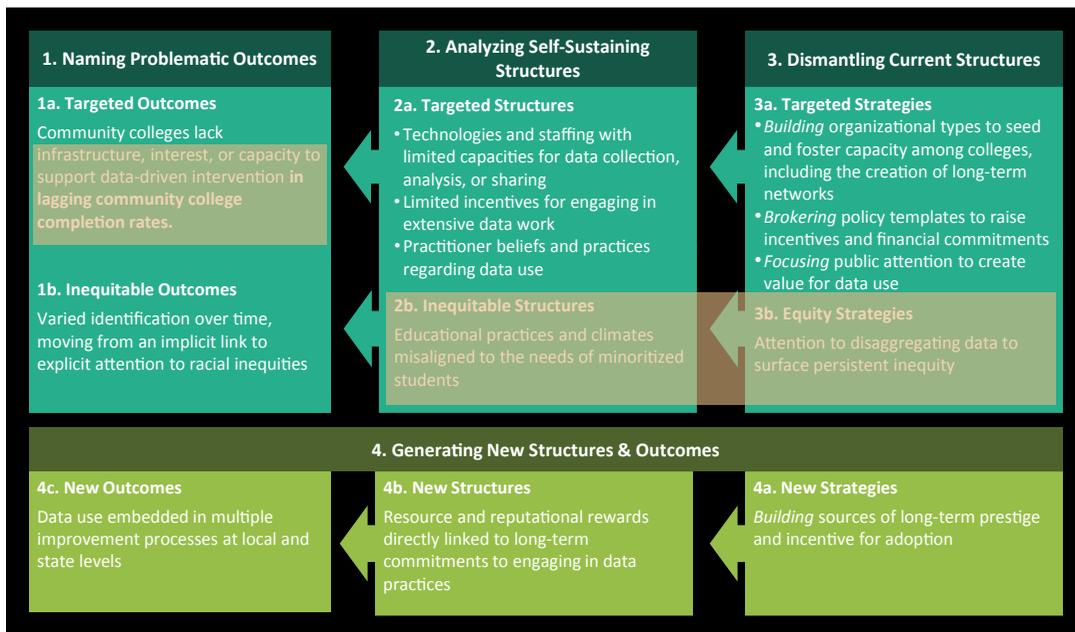
Finally, this initiative, which has gained an emphasis on equity over time, is still in the process of cementing its contribution to this end by explicitly identifying and responding to the self-sustaining structures by which inequities are built into this broad policy problem.

Degree reclamation as a movement continues to evolve as its leaders take stock and set a course toward transitioning from building models and capacity toward achieving sustainability.

² For some specific examples, review Bragg & Taylor's *Optimizing Reverse Transfer Policies and Processes* report here: <https://www.voiced.edu.au/content/ngv:70295>, and Adelman's *Project Win-Win at the Finish Line* here: <http://www.ihep.org/research/publications/project-win-win-finish-line>.

³ See, for example, the Education Commission for the States' *50-State Comparison of "reverse transfer" policies*: <http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/MBquest3RTA?Rep=TR1804>

FIGURE 4 Data-Capacity Goals, Structures, and Strategies



Note: Content highlighted in orange represents self-sustaining structures in need of further strategic attention.

The extensive capacity building, analysis, and experimentation afforded by this movement has brought the disjunctures in student record management and credentialing systems fully into the light. This story highlights the iterative nature and long-term commitment, modeled by this movement’s funders and partners, necessary to achieving significant education reform, and indeed some of the next steps identified in our brief analysis are embedded in the emergent work of current major initiatives.

Community College Data-Capacity Advocacy

Just prior to the degree-reclamation campaign, the notion of “data driven” decision-making became a centerpiece of the college completion movement (Morest & Jenkins, 2007; Mayer et al., 2014). This is particularly true with regard to community colleges, which up until the mid-2000s had historically had limited data collection and analytic capacities, and were simultaneously known to have the lowest degree completion rates in the postsecondary domain (Wilson &

Bower, 2016; Goomas & Isbell, 2015; Zachry Rutschow et al., 2011). Multiple initiatives and calls emerged to enhance, reward, and generally “move the needle” on community college data capacity at the national level as a prime lever for advancing a college completion agenda by changing the nature of the information we have about where and how we are losing students (1). (See Figure 4.)

As in the previous case, multiple foundations — ranging from C.S. Mott to Kresge among at least a dozen others — began funding, together and separately, a variety of projects designed to advance the data-capacity movement. Analyzing a variety of retrospective and concurrent accounts, several key strategies emerged to dismantle existing structures (3).⁴ Primary among these were building organizations with long-term commitments to seeding and incentivizing the cultivation of capacity in terms of talent and technological infrastructure at colleges; focusing attention via white papers and public

⁴The authors also conducted direct member checking of this account with funders and evaluators associated with this movement.

engagement to raise the profile of the power and potential of data capacity for transforming student outcomes; and brokering best practices through online hubs, national professional development convenings, exemplar model dissemination, and sharing or even incentivizing state policy models that create policy pressures or diminish old policy constraints. Funding strategies also included building ongoing incentives for participation via the prestige⁵ associated with joining the movement and encouraging other resource custodians in the field (e.g., think tanks producing policy frameworks, associations, foundations, etc.) to make data capacity a precursor to inclusion (4a).⁶

The movement for data capacity is alive, well, and adapting to its own successes and shortcomings. We can look to this movement, now at least in its adolescence, to ask: if most philanthropic funding for this movement ceased today, what shifts in self-sustaining structures could sustain organizational commitment to data capacity? Based on the strategies employed above, we believe that not only was baseline capacity achieved as a result of substantial funder investment, but structures were altered (2) and added (4b) that would maintain positive pressure to this end.

First among these is the combination of shifts in practice norms and the development of new prestige-conferring fixtures in the postsecondary domain. Given their multiple and locally oriented missions, community colleges as a sector largely lack the sources of relative prestige (e.g., ranking, awards, selectivity) that incentivize the competition common among four-year colleges and universities (Ayers, 2015; Dowd, 2013). Funders not only created a public dialogue about data practice, but connected this dialogue to multiple types of incentives, including induction into valued networks, inclusion in high-profile prize

competitions, and even consideration for future grant-funded projects. While opting into this movement could, on one hand, be seen as admitting your college has a completion problem, funded campaigns framed this work as a marker of quality and innovation, which developed into a form of capital or prestige distinct from that associated from other postsecondary genres. Other critical shifts to self-sustaining structures included key state policy wins to alleviate constraints;⁷ the creation of dedicated, ongoing positions and funding lines for dedicated data staff; and the data-informed changes to student data management systems to lower barriers to analytic practice.

In addition to the gains already achieved, the remaining work of this movement stems from some early oversights baked into the movement's theory of change. First, the primacy of equity in this movement has evolved over time (1b). While the connection was always implicit given the populations served by community colleges, the connection between data capacity and "equity gaps" was tenuous for some time. At moments this emphasis has been more explicit, with the belief that making equity gaps visible to a larger group of stakeholders would itself elicit change. What we don't see, and what the current iteration of the movement is taking up quite intentionally, is careful attention to the question: By what self-sustaining structures does a lack of data use or capacity differentially affect minoritized communities (2b)? This is similar to a broader challenge facing this movement — which is the need to expand available resources to be responsive to data-driven revelations. While knowledge of student patterns and equity gaps may heighten urgency or precision, without expanded capacity to respond, even the strongest movement could still result in at least a few spinning wheels. In this movement's current

⁵ See, for example, the positive regard associated with being selected as an Achieving the Dream college or, more exclusively, receiving an Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence.

⁶ See, for example, the American Association of Community Colleges' Voluntary Framework for Accountability, the Center for Law and Social Policy's Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework, or the Complete College American Game Changer Strategies.

⁷ See, for example, Dougherty & Kerrigan's (2007) *Fifty States of Achieving the Dream: State Policies to Enhance Access to and Success in Community Colleges Across the United States*: <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8VX0R1N>.

One of the great strengths of the philanthropic community that emerges in this review is its ability to attend to multiple sources of persistence and change at once to remake an area of social policy or practice, including issues of focusing attention, engineering programs, brokering across networks, and capacity or coalition building.

iteration, we see leaders actively taking up both equity and theory-of-change gaps.

Implications and Conclusion

One of the great strengths of the philanthropic community that emerges in this review is its ability to attend to multiple sources of persistence and change at once to remake an area of social policy or practice, including issues of focusing attention, engineering programs, brokering across networks, and capacity or coalition building. Grantmakers have the freedom to employ their resources — be that financial and/or their public platforms — to attend holistically to the pressures that both prevent and create change. However, identifying the right targets and strategies for effective reform often remains elusive.

We argue that using the model presented in this article may help to address three challenges common to philanthropy-led reform movements:

- *Connecting educational outcomes to structures.* Some movements accomplish their target goal — for example, a state legislature passes a new bill — only to find that while this policy changes a practice, that practice

is not substantively linked to the education problem itself. In other words, not all changes interrupt the processes by which problematic outcomes are reproduced. Our approach prioritizes naming the problematic outcome and linking outcomes to their self-sustaining structures as early steps in developing a remaking strategy.

- *Targeting structures that are self-sustaining.* Similarly, many funded reform initiatives produce immediate changes by temporarily producing special attention or effort toward a given problem. But as soon as these temporary pressures subside, so too do the altered outcomes. This occurs because the funded projects neither dismantle existing self-sustaining structures nor create durable new self-sustaining structures. A remaking approach ensures that change is long-lasting by specifically targeting both existing and new self-sustaining structures.
- *Identifying structured inequities within generalized problems.* Many leading voices in education change movements regularly and rightly remind us that if we do not design for equity in our educational initiatives, strategic plans, etc., then it is nearly impossible to achieve equity by accident. Working in postsecondary (or any) education spaces means that we are constantly working in domains historically structured for white supremacy and racial inequality (Ray, 2019; Smith, 2016). In other words, the patterns of difference between white, middle class and poor or minoritized students that we have come to expect are rarely driven only by the self-sustaining structures that prop up the distribution around the mean.

We can use the need for higher-quality, higher-touch advising systems as a case in point. Low-touch, high-case load advisement processes in colleges and universities lead to lower completion rates, on average, across populations. These negative effects are greater for students of color. It is possible to motivate advisement redesign under the premise that advisement is implicitly and inherently an equity issue. However, this

is the type of trap many change movements fall into on a regular basis. If grantmakers fail to recognize the specific mechanisms by which inequities occur, then they cannot target their strategies to diminish those conditions. Without this focus, we posit that, even in the best-case scenario, grantmakers will achieve a level shift in average outcomes but ultimately maintain racial inequities rather than disrupt them (Cox, 2016; Dorsey, Bradach, & Kim, 2020). For this reason, in the road map we draw out explicit attention at each analytical point to surface and respond to the self-sustaining structures that (re)produce inequity over time above and beyond the mean distribution of the problem.

In order to reap these benefits, we argue that grantmakers may consider embedding an equity-oriented remaking strategy into planning future work. We consider it the priority to use this framework to look inward, within the walls of the foundation, to think about the role of multiple grants or portfolios over time in reducing or replacing the constellation of self-sustaining structures supporting extant and often racialized problems. For example, if models already exist to support better outcomes in a particular domain, then engineering projects may offer less traction toward remaking than focusing or building projects that create new self-sustaining beliefs or pressures needed for implementing models in a long-term way. Most crucially, we urge funders to attend to equity problems throughout each stage of the planning and evaluation process, engaging specifically with structures that produce differential racial disadvantage rather than positioning equity as an implicit part of a generalized problem.

We can also think of this approach as a tool for supporting the sustainability of individual grant-funded projects. While many funders already ask their grantees to speak to how their projects will be sustainable, this step can easily become symbolic without significant meaning in practice. Thoughtfully incorporating prompts or exercises into application and review procedures could promote valuable reflection by all parties to target projects toward new or existing self-sustaining structures. Many funders already

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engaged in reform efforts routinely attend to the alignment between education problems, strategies, and solutions. We recommend that funders interested in maximizing their impact additionally look carefully at how their strategies dismantle self-sustaining structures that support the status quo — particularly those leading to inequitable outcomes — and how new structures can be created to sustainably reproduce new, equitable outcomes instead. The complexity of this work further highlights the value of long-term and iterative funder commitments, coordinated cross-portfolio work, and multi-funder collaboratives for “moving the needle” on systemic change.

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