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## RESULTS

# Setting the Table for a Sustainable and Just Food System

Kien Lee, Ph.D., Community Science; Kolu Zigbi, Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation; and Marjorie Nemes, M.Sc., Community Science

### Key Points

- As consumers and producers, people of color have been affected disproportionately by systemic problems in the food system.
- This article describes the Diversifying Leadership for Sustainable Food Policy initiative, a joint effort of the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to build the capacity of organizations led by people of color to engage in policy and advocacy work.
- Grantees successfully built their capacity to engage in policy work (e.g., increased capacity to identify policy targets), increased their organizational capacity (e.g., diversified boards), improved their communities' capacity (e.g., created opportunities for dialogue and improved access to fresh foods), and impacted policies related to sustainable food (e.g., provided resources for small and new farmers).

### Introduction

As Winona LaDuke, founder of the White Earth Land Recovery Project, says, “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.” This is the reality faced by low-income people of color who have historically been on the “menu” of agriculture and food policies as laborers and consumers without having a seat at policy-making tables. This article describes the evaluation findings and lessons learned to date from the Diversifying Leadership for Sustainable Food Policy (DLSFP) Initiative funded by the Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation (“Noyes Foundation”), in partnership with the

W. K. Kellogg Foundation from January 2007 to December 2009. This initiative has sought to build the advocacy capacity of people of color (POC)-led organizations to “reset” policymaking tables to enable their participation in shaping a more socially just and sustainable food system for the nation, a system consisting of all the activities involved in growing food and bringing it to the consumer.

### Context

*A broken food system that disproportionately affects people of color.* The DLSFP initiative was established in response to two circumstances. First, our nation’s food system is broken and the consequences disproportionately affect people of color. For instance, there are policies, such as the use of high-fructose corn syrup in processed foods and the development of the partial hydrogenation process (which introduced artificial trans fats into our diet), that have contributed to rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and cardiac disease (Golan & Unnevehr, 2008). Low-income people of color have been affected disproportionately by these health conditions, in part due to their lack of access to grocery stores and farmers markets that sell high-quality, nutritious, and fresh produce at affordable prices (Morland, Wing, & Roux, 2002; PolicyLink, 2005).

People of color also are disproportionately and negatively impacted at the production end of the food system. Migrant and immigrant workers on

farms and in food processing plants are frequently exposed to harmful chemicals and dangerous working conditions, in part because farmworkers are exempt from the National Labor Relations Act and are inadequately protected by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (Oxfam America, 2004). Furthermore, increasing numbers of these workers are undocumented and therefore have little recourse for asserting their basic human rights, including the right to earn living wages (Anderson, 2008).

Due to discriminatory lending practices and spatial segregation, farm owners of color tend to have relatively small landholdings with less fertile soil. A 1999 class action lawsuit by Black farmers against the U.S. Department of Agriculture documented the lower loans and subsidies they consistently received compared with White farmers. In May 2009, President Obama announced restitution of up to \$1.25 billion to eligible Black farmers. The displacement of Native Americans from their homelands also has resulted in the loss of agrarian traditions, including heirloom varieties of corn, beans, and other foods.

*Insufficient support to build the capacity of POC-led organizations to advocate for their constituencies.* Establishment of the DLSFP Initiative also was motivated by a second circumstance — insufficient foundation support to build the capacity of POC-led organizations to advocate for their constituencies and the communities they serve. Although POC-led organizations in the food and agriculture sector should be regarded as equal partners, their capacity to be such is hindered by several factors, including the inadequate allocation of philanthropic dollars to them and their constituencies (Pittz & Sen, 2004) and limited access to flexible financial support for capacity-building assistance (Guerra, 1998; McKay, Scotchmer, Ros, & Figueroa, 2001; Wiley, in press).

Furthermore, publications about advocacy capacity building and evaluation that have emerged over the last several years in philanthropy (e.g., *The Challenge of Assessing Policy and Advocacy Activities* and *What Makes an Effective Advocacy Organization*, both sponsored by The California

Endowment; *A Guide to Measuring Policy and Advocacy*, sponsored by The Annie E. Casey Foundation; and *Build Your Advocacy Grantmaking*, sponsored by the Alliance for Justice) have paid little attention to what unique considerations may be necessary for assessing and building the advocacy capacity of POC-led organizations, due to the obstacles mentioned above. The rarity of empirical studies about the capacity-building needs of organizations that serve communities of color also limits our knowledge base (Yung et al., 2008).

*Due to discriminatory lending practices and spatial segregation, farm owners of color tend to have relatively small landholdings with less fertile soil.*

### Theory of Change for the DLSFP Initiative

The Noyes Foundation launched the DLSFP initiative with the aforementioned circumstances and the following assumptions in mind:

- Broad-based and inclusive social movements can engender dialogue about the need for social change, mobilize a bottom-up approach to advocacy and policy development, foster a climate in which policymakers can consider new policies to support social change, and maintain change by organizing key stakeholders to hold policymakers accountable to the social change agenda.
- The best way to ensure diverse leadership for the sustainable food systems movement is to proactively build the capacity of POC-led organizations to get seats at the proverbial policymaking table and effect policy changes that respond to their constituencies' needs. Individuals empowered by the resources and the grassroots and civic network of a nonprofit organization can be powerful advocates.
- POC leadership within the public sphere historically has been, and continues to be,

inhibited to varying degrees by interrelated barriers such as language differences, lack of culturally based capacity building (Onge, Cole, & Petty, 2003), structural racism, and other financial and informational deficits. Therefore, the foundation also is committed to bringing attention to the lack of POC presence at the food and agricultural policymaking table to other funders through its active leadership in many philanthropic affinity groups, conferences, briefing calls, and its newsletters.

*The program officer worked with the evaluator to create a guide to help the grantees think about the theory of change for their advocacy efforts.*

The Noyes Foundation specified that the DLSFP initiative would only support nonprofit organizations that have:

- A history of addressing issues related to food and/or agriculture.
- People of color as a majority of their constituency and governing board and senior staff, or have plans to undertake a purposeful transition so that people of color represent a majority in these positions.
- A commitment to strengthen relationships with organizations in the regional or national sustainable agriculture and food movement.

A preliminary theory of change for the DLSFP initiative was developed by the evaluator for the initiative (Community Science) and the foundation's program officer. It was based on both the foundation's assumptions as well as a scan of the literature about the organizational capacities necessary for effective advocacy (see, for example, *The Evaluation Exchange* special issue on advocacy and policy change, The Alliance for Justice's *Advocacy Capacity Assessment Tool*). This theory was not specific to POC-led organizations, because little was known at that time about

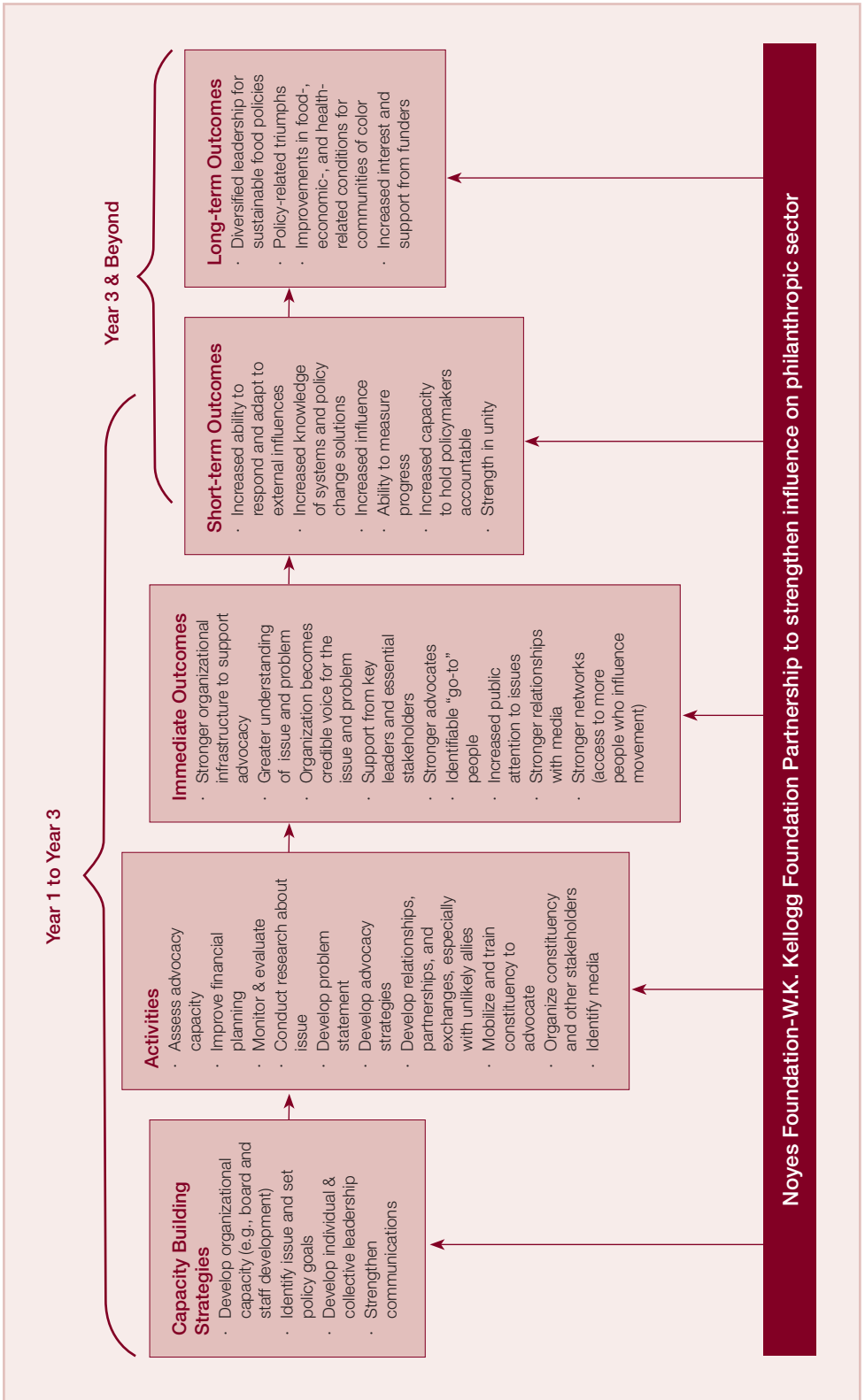
what unique considerations may be necessary for building and assessing the advocacy capacity of these organizations, as mentioned before.

The preliminary theory of change helped the Noyes Foundation broaden its expectations of advocacy outcomes to include "any written agreement" that changed the rules governing relationships between institutions and individuals (e.g., the U.S. Department of Agriculture and farmers), institutions and institutions (e.g., a small nonprofit and a larger association or school), or between individuals (e.g., client and service provider). This expectation supports the assertion by some advocacy evaluators that outcomes beyond policy changes are important to document (see, for example, Coffman, 2007). The preliminary theory of change also informed the program officer's criteria for grant selection by clarifying the importance of funding certain nonprofits that had little to no pre-existing advocacy capacity but were located in communities where there were sustainable agriculture and food issues, as well as nonprofits with a grassroots constituency that could provide a base for leadership development and a broader movement.

The theory was shared with the 10 grantees at the first grantee meeting to solicit their input and to provide an opportunity for everyone to re-examine their assumptions about the components that would lead to change and what was "testable" and, therefore, what the evaluation intended to "measure." Such use of the theory of change has been shown to be helpful in correcting any misunderstandings early on in the process, particularly for capacity building and advocacy initiatives and the evaluation of such initiatives (Auspos & Kubisch, 2004; Coffman, 2007; Guthrie, Louie, David, & Foster, 2005; Guthrie, Louie, & Foster, 2006). The grantees' recommendations, which further clarified the immediate and short-term outcomes they expected to achieve, were incorporated into the final theory of change (shown in Figure 1).

The final theory of change was subsequently used to guide grantees' development of their own logic models. The program officer worked with the evaluator to create a guide to help the grantees

FIGURE 1 Theory of change



think about the theory of change for their advocacy efforts. The program officer then reviewed the logic models and helped some of the grantees hone their goals, strategies, and anticipated outcomes. Most of the grantees found this exercise helpful; one of them told the program officer that she used the guide with her partners.

Each grantee received \$80,000 in general operating support funds over three years, as well as up to \$22,500 for technical assistance. The 10 grantees are diverse not only in terms of the race and ethnicity of the constituencies they serve, but also in terms of geography, issues addressed, and organizational life cycle. One organization received its nonprofit status during the first year of the initiative, whereas another's nonprofit status was almost three decades old. Distributed across the U.S., they work with different communities of color, from Harlemites to Hmong farmers in northern California, and from fourth-generation Mississippi farmers to first-generation Mvskoke gardeners in Oklahoma. Representing farmers, farmworkers, food micro-entrepreneurs, and environmental justice activists, these 10 grantees are addressing issues such as seed sovereignty, healthy school lunches, land rights, and safe workplaces.

### Evaluation of the DLSFP Initiative

#### *Selection of evaluator and evaluation questions.*

Because the organizations funded by this initiative are POC-led, the Noyes Foundation felt it was important to look for qualified consultants of color who shared its values around civic engagement, focused on contributing to the success of grantees' work rather than on after-the-fact "grading" exercises, and who were experienced in working with diverse groups of grassroots leaders. With these attributes in mind, the Noyes Foundation selected Community Science (formerly the Association for the Study and Development of Community) to conduct the evaluation. It was decided by the foundation that the evaluation would provide a "pathway to learning" (Woodwell, 2005) about:

1. The extent to which grantees achieved what they set out to achieve and the strategies that contributed to their success.

2. The extent to which grantees built their capacity to affect policies and what capacities were built.
3. Factors that affected the grantees' ability to influence agriculture and food policies and other related changes.
4. Added value of the Noyes Foundation-W. K. Kellogg Foundation partnership to the grantees' capacities and outcomes. (This question is not addressed here because it is beyond the scope of this article.)

#### *Development of data collection tools and methods.*

The theory of change guided the development of two primary data collection tools: an advocacy capacity assessment form and an annual progress reporting form. To develop the capacity assessment form, the evaluator consulted with an expert in the sustainable agriculture and food sector and reviewed advocacy assessment materials from the Alliance for Justice and The Praxis Project, two organizations that build the advocacy capacity of organizations. The final assessment form examined the grantees' capacities in the following areas: development of advocacy agenda, board and staff capacity, financial capacity, monitoring of benchmarks, internal and external communications, networks and relationships, mobilization of constituents and grassroots organizing, and media relations.

To develop the grantee progress reporting form, the evaluator worked with the program officer to ensure that the form gathered information that met the foundation's reporting requirements and covered the activities and immediate and short-term outcomes identified in the theory of change. The form consisted of open-ended questions to allow the grantees to tailor their responses based on their respective goals, strategies, and anticipated outcomes. The form also included a question that asked grantees to revisit their logic models to determine if and how the course of their efforts may have changed.

The advocacy capacity assessment was conducted at the beginning of the initiative (baseline) to guide the planning for technical assistance. It will be administered again before the end of the

initiative. Grantees were encouraged to complete the assessment with their organization's leadership and staff who were responsible for the DLSFP-related work. The evaluator followed up by telephone to get missing information or clarify contradicting responses.

Progress reports were collected from grantees at the end of each year. Because some of the grantees had limited evaluation experience and struggled with conveying their accomplishments and challenges, the evaluator followed up by telephone to get more detailed responses. The evaluator also conducted interviews with up to three key stakeholders and constituents of each grantee organization to fill in information gaps and/or verify the outcomes reported.

*Relationship between the evaluator, the program officer, and grantees.* Community Science believed in working closely with the program officer and grantees to implement the evaluation. Their exchanges during data collection, solicitation of feedback on the evaluation process and instruments, and presentation of evaluation findings helped make the evaluation a natural element of the initiative. Grantees were given the opportunity to comment on a draft of this article and give their permission to have their organizations identified. These exchanges furthered the foundation's desire to create a supportive learning environment and debunked the stereotype of evaluation as threatening or punitive.

Feedback was solicited before each round of data collection to ensure that the questions, instruments, methods, and timing were appropriate to the developmental process of the grantees' work. For example, after the end of the first year, a major adjustment was made to the grantees' progress reporting form in response to their concern that the reporting mechanism was not sufficient for them to tell the story of their trials and tribulations, especially the unanticipated challenges they encountered. The different contexts in which each grantee operated also had to be captured in more depth, because they shaped any changes in the grantees' plans. As such, the evaluator revised the progress reporting form to reflect an outline that

tells the grantee's story. The evaluator conducted conference calls with grantees one month before their second progress reports were due to review the revised questions and to offer any technical assistance in completing their reports. The evaluator worked closely with one grantee (National Hmong-American Farmers [NHAF]) to elaborate on its responses in order to tell a clear and complete story.

Furthermore, evaluation findings were consistently shared and discussed with the program officer and grantees to ensure their accurate interpretation and to encourage collective and individual reflection. The evaluator participated in the planning of annual grantee meetings to help determine when presentations about the evaluation should occur on the agenda and how to use the findings to strengthen the grantees' work.

*A deliberate strategy for peer learning and support has been shown to be effective in philanthropy.*

For instance, results of grantees' baseline capacity assessments were shared within a month and a half of their completion with the program officer to help shape the first grantee meeting agenda. The results were subsequently presented at the meeting to inform the foundation and grantees' planning for technical assistance, to create a sense of community and peer support among grantees by showing that they shared a similar mission as well as challenges, and to emphasize the Noyes Foundation's value for collective learning and reflection. A deliberate strategy for peer learning and support has been shown to be effective in philanthropy (Procello & Nelson, 2002; Woodwell, 2005).

In another instance, the evaluator presented the grantees' relationships in a pictorial form to show their areas of success as well as gaps in their networking. This presentation in year one prompted one grantee to reconsider the types of partner-

ships sought in order to achieve its advocacy goals.

### Key Findings

As mentioned before, this article reflects the evaluator's findings based on an analysis of grantees' capacity assessments, progress reports, and interviews to date. The findings are organized according to the three types of changes that grantees were able to effect: their organization's capacity, their community's ability to discuss and act on agriculture- and food-related issues, and policies related to sustainable agriculture and food.

*The progress report's instructions intentionally did not specify what was meant by leadership development; instead, grantees were given the opportunity to describe what it meant in the context of their goals and constituencies.*

### Key Findings About Changes in Grantees' Organizational Capacity

Evaluation findings suggest that the grantees built their advocacy capacity primarily in three broad areas: development and refinement of their policy agendas to promote sustainable agriculture and food systems, development of new leaders of color, and expansion of networks and relationships within and outside the agriculture and food sectors. These were areas that most of the grantees indicated in their baseline capacity assessments needed improvement. These also were capacities considered critical by advocacy capacity builders.

#### *Development and refinement of policy agendas.*

Each grantee developed a policy agenda at the beginning of its participation in the DLSFP initiative based on its mission, its constituents' needs, the current policy environment, and its anticipated advocacy capacity. At the end of each year, grantees were asked in their progress reports to

self-rate the extent to which they made progress toward their goals. On a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*completely*), grantees' average self-ratings in year one and year two were 7.4 and 6.8, respectively. A decrease in five grantees' self-ratings lowered the average score in year two; these five grantees had encountered major policy and capacity challenges in their second year.

What nine of the 10 grantees developed as they became more immersed in their work was a deeper understanding about the policy environment in which they were operating and the additional organizational capacities that were required to achieve their goals — an important and desired capacity outcome. These nine grantees had to modify or refine their goals to advance their mission and to respond to the complexities they encountered. The 10th grantee (Comité de Apoyo a los Trabajadores Agrícolas [CATA]) kept its original goals and objectives, perhaps because it had set goals that were very specific and within reach.

The evaluator's data analysis revealed a set of common factors that influenced the modifications and refinements:

- Additional research that provided more insights into the policy landscape.
- Issues that emerged along the advocacy path that served as obstacles to or opportunities for achieving the grantees' goals due to the issues' intersecting nature with food justice (e.g., immigration policy).
- Improved understanding on the part of the grantee staff of the capacity of their organizations and/or their constituents to advocate for policy change.
- New opportunities that allowed for broader support to advocate for policy changes as a result of contextual changes at the national, state, and local levels.
- Failed or passed bills that subsequently changed the grantee organizations' functions in the past year and for the remaining grant period.

The grantees' modifications and refinements to their policy agendas were expected and, in fact,



necessary. They support theories about how social change occurs in neither a linear nor orderly manner, and even when an issue has captured sufficient policy attention, the path to actual change, implementation, and enforcement continues to meander in a nonlinear and sometimes chaotic fashion (see for example, Kingdon, 1984).

*Development of new leaders of color.* Grantees were asked to indicate in their progress reports any leadership development activities undertaken to influence agriculture and food policies and whose leadership skills these activities strengthened. The progress report's instructions intentionally did not specify what was meant by leadership development; instead, grantees were given the opportunity to describe what it meant in the context of their goals and constituencies.

Grantees' responses referred a lot to activities intended to develop basic civic knowledge and skills (e.g., how laws get made; how to communicate with influential people, including elected officials and media representatives). Others described building staff and board capacity to engage in basic organizational development processes such as strategic planning. In short, grantees considered the civic and organizational abilities of an individual as critical functions of a leader.

In the second year, grantees continued to engage in similar civic and organizational development skill-building activities. Three grantees also engaged in leadership development activities unique to their situations. NHAf, for instance, worked with local Hmong nonprofit organizations and leaders in order to build a national advocacy infrastructure for the Hmong population. It also was apparent in the second year that grantees' leadership development activities focused more on a smaller group of people who could become spokespersons and opinion shapers for sustainable agriculture and food issues. The development of such individuals is an important outcome for advocacy and POC-organizational capacity building efforts (Coffman, 2007; Guerra, 1998).

*Characteristics of a leader.* Grantees were asked to describe who they considered a "leader" in

their effort and what knowledge and skills they expected their leaders to have.

The grantees' responses specified that the leaders had to be farmers, immigrants, tribal members, and residents of low-income communities — in short, people who were most affected by unjust agriculture and food policies. The capacity of these individuals to advocate for themselves and their communities had to be built, because, as members of historically marginalized communities, they were typically unfamiliar with policy development and legislative processes and the language used in the policy development arena. In addition, many had experienced other people speaking for them due to their limited capacity to sit at the table. Not having access to the "language" of institutions with power is not an unusual challenge faced by communities of color (Guerra, 1998).

Some grantees also had the added task of helping certain immigrant groups recognize inequities within the U.S. food system, because the type of resources they have available in this country were perceived either as better than what they left behind in their countries of origin or as too precarious to put at risk by engaging in advocacy. Consequently, one grantee (AnewAmerica Community Corporation) had to reframe its problem statement in order to engage the low-income immigrants with whom it worked. Fear of deportation further complicates the engagement of undocumented immigrants in advocacy; consequently, a spokesperson who understands the issue sometimes has to represent them without putting them in risky situations.

Grantees spent a lot of time and resources building the basic civic capacity of the people with whom they worked, as a means of empowering their communities. This is why developing the advocacy capacity of organizations that are led and staffed by people of color and/or are working closely with marginalized groups requires significant time. It involves not only building organizational capacity, but also individuals' civic capacity so that they can become better advocates for themselves (Ranghelli, 2005). Funders, evaluators, and technical assistance providers must be

deliberate in recognizing that building the advocacy capacity of POC-led organizations requires a simultaneous focus on organizational planning, leadership development, and community civic engagement, in addition to policy changes.

*Readiness of non-POC-led leaders and organizations to receive and accept leaders of color.* Six grantees also observed and encountered another challenge unique to POC-led organizations — the readiness of advocacy organizations and policymakers (who are predominantly White) in the agriculture and food policy arenas to recognize and accept leaders of color. Two grantees, Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative (MFSI) and West Harlem Environmental Action, Inc. (WE ACT), raised the issue of tokenism in their reports, describing how their presence was often encouraged but their opinions dismissed. These grantees' experiences suggest another layer of complexity that relates to the capacity building of POC-led organizations. POC-led organizations have to prepare their leaders, staff, and constituencies for reactions to their presence at policymaking tables. These reactions range from superficial acceptance (resulting in tokenism) to genuine inclusiveness (resulting in a demand for their presence at every table, causing them to be overstrained and sometimes distracted from their original goals). Some leaders, staff, and constituencies of color may need assistance to process these reactions and to seize the opportunity to educate and elevate their presence without becoming discouraged and burned out.

In order for POC-led organizations to be successful in their efforts, a simultaneous and complementary strategy is needed to help increase the cultural competency of predominantly White-led organizations and White policymakers to work with leaders from different racial, ethnic, cultural backgrounds. This is where foundations can be helpful in using their influence to leverage change in mainstream institutions and systems.

*Networking and relationship building within and beyond the agriculture and food sectors.* A total of 118 relationships were developed and strengthened by the grantees in year one. An

illustration of the relationships reported after year one showed the apparent gaps in some of the grantees' relationship building; this prompted several grantees to increase their networking and relationship building efforts in year two. As a result, three grantees increased their percentage of relationships by slightly more than 100 percent in the second year. This finding suggests that the grantees made significant progress toward developing networks and relationships, a critical advocacy capacity.

After the first year, grantees also gained more knowledge about working with organizations that had different agendas and values, both in and outside the agriculture and food sectors. In year two, the number of relationships developed within and outside the food movement were 48 and 36, respectively. The relatively small difference of 12 relationships suggests that grantees were working hard to engage organizations both within and outside the movement (which typically includes unlikely allies) to expand their influence. According to some grantees, the most beneficial relationships with other food justice groups occurred not when they shared similar goals, but when their representatives were from the same racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds as the grantee organization. This echoed the importance of leaders directly representing the constituent community and the value placed on the ability to connect policy issues to the lives of their constituents.

Organizations outside of the agriculture and food sectors, which addressed the intersecting issues mentioned above, played the role of allies or collaborators. Three grantees reported that their relationship-building efforts with these organizations required them to sharpen their communication, negotiation, and diplomacy skills to help these organizations connect to their agendas.

*Other organizational capacities.* Aside from strengthening their leadership development and networking capacities, grantees also made other organizational changes to improve their overall ability to advocate for sustainable agriculture and food policies. Most frequent changes were hiring new staff with specific expertise (usually legal

knowledge), modifying staff functions to focus on food justice, and developing bylaws and other protocols to enhance their operations and commitment to food justice (e.g., a policy to purchase locally grown food for all of the organization's activities and events).

Another critical change also was observed whereby two grantees (the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association [ALBA] and the Land Loss Prevention Project) diversified their boards to become more representative of their constituents and/or community. ALBA spent the last two years developing an advisory committee composed of farmers in order to create an avenue for farmers to have a voice in the organization's operations. This grantee also allocated two board positions for farmers. An unintended by-product of this change was a new organizational policy that would eliminate conflicts of interest among staff members (i.e., no staff member shall have a financial interest in a farm business being operated on the organization's land).

### **Key Findings About Changes in Communities' Ability to Discuss and Act**

The 10 grantees' efforts have affected the communities in which they work in various ways. In general, they all elevated the voices of people of color and developed new ways for people of color to begin to address injustice in the agriculture and food sectors.

*Provided space for dialogue and action.* In six of the 10 communities, the grantees' work provided space for constituents (including farmers and farmworkers), residents, and elected leaders (including the tribal leaders of the Mvskoke community) to have, for the first time, dialogues about issues related to sustainable agriculture and food systems. "Naming the issue" is part of social change, and creating a space to help people do this is critical (Puntenney, 2002). These dialogues have increased the participants' appreciation for locally grown produce, as well as the farming and food traditions of their ancestors, and have deepened their understanding of food justice issues. As a result, some grantees have observed different changes in their communities, including increased sales of

fresh produce at local markets in one community, increased distribution of native seeds in the two Native communities, and creation and revitalization of farmers markets in two communities.

By providing a space to discuss sustainable agriculture and food issues, these grantees' work also gave project participants an avenue to act on their concerns. For example, CATA facilitated the submission of applications by three farmworker organizations to join the new Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA); in doing so, they increased the likelihood that farmworkers' concerns will be included in DFTA's agenda.

*The most beneficial relationships with other food justice groups occurred not when they shared similar goals, but when their representatives were from the same racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds as the grantee organization.*

*Contributed to building community capacity.* Five grantees' efforts strengthened the ability of their constituents to talk to other people in their communities about sustainable agriculture and food issues. In doing so, they contributed to building community capacities such as the development of local Hmong leaders to participate in the agriculture and food-policy landscape, mobilization of spokespersons of color to advocate for standards for supermarkets in New York City that receive government subsidies and other incentives, and creation of a resource center to assist African American families with land issues.

*Increased access to fresh produce.* Two grantees, Mississippi Association of Cooperatives (MAC) and ALBA, helped make fresh produce more accessible to low-income families by increasing the

participation of farmers in local markets and a grocery store.

### Key Findings About Policy Changes

Using the Foundation's definition of policy (i.e., any written agreement that changed the rules governing relationships between institutions and individuals, institutions and institutions, or between individuals), grantees were able to effect policy changes in the following ways.

*New agreements between providers (farmers, farmworkers) and consumers (food service companies, schools).* Three grantees, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), MFSI, and MAC persuaded local businesses or other food purchasers in their communities (including the largest dairy operation in Oregon, Loyola University, several Mississippi school districts, and the nutrition service for older persons and the diabetes program in the Mvskoke community) to buy local produce.

*This experience suggests the importance of crafting a clear message that emphasizes the benefits of locally grown produce for community health and economic well-being.*

*Legislative changes.* Five grantees succeeded in influencing local, state, and federal legislation, including the farm bill, to include benefits for small and beginning farmers as well as limited-resource farmers (i.e., women and minorities), a statewide policy to enable a public agency to specify geographic preferences in its bidding contractors with food distributors, and a decision by state legislators to commission a study about land trust issues as part of an amendment to partition statute reform.

*Changes in priorities and practices of professional associations and coalitions.* Two grantees, CATA

and WE ACT, had a direct impact on the professional associations and coalitions of which they were a part. Through its active participation as a steering committee member for the DFTA, CATA strengthened the farmworker voice within the association and helped develop a tool to assess public claims of fairness or justice for food and agricultural products. CATA also campaigned for and succeeded in electing new leadership into the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement's World Board in 2008; this new leadership was more willing to address issues about workers' rights and conditions of the agriculture workplace. WE ACT, through its participation in a working group, helped persuade the working group members who were part of a national professional association that ensures all children's access to healthful school meals and nutrition education to include "additional reimbursement for special needs meals" in its policy priorities. The addition of this "special needs" category opens the possibility for future federal reimbursements for alternatives to dairy in school food programs, which could benefit the significant percentage of children of color who are lactose intolerant or allergic to dairy.

*Changes in grantees' organizational policies.* As mentioned before, the Land Loss Prevention Project and ALBA restructured their organizations to become more racially diverse, such that their policies and future directions will be informed by a broader constituency.

### Discussion

All 10 grantees participating in the DLSFP initiative made tremendous progress in building the capacity of their organizations and communities to advocate for sustainable agriculture and food policies. Most of them even succeeded in changing some of these policies; however, the path was not always a smooth one. They discovered many internal (e.g., organizational capacity) and external (e.g., lack of support from policymakers) forces along the way that affected their efforts, and together with the Noyes Foundation, developed new insights into what it takes to set the table for a sustainable and just food system.

*Support (or lack of) from policymakers and powerful industries within and outside the agriculture and food sectors.* Some grantees (e.g., MAC and MFSI) succeeded in changing important policies because they were able to convince the leadership about the benefits of supporting local farmers and using fresh produce, especially in situations where there were no additional costs. This experience suggests the importance of crafting a clear message that emphasizes the benefits of locally grown produce for community health and economic well-being.

On the other hand, four grantees encountered resistance or unhelpfulness from policymakers because the issues for which they were advocating were not priorities for the policymakers. In one grantee's (New Mexico Food and Seed Sovereignty Alliance [NMFSSA]) situation, state funding was made available to a local university to conduct research to genetically engineer chile, something NMFSSA was advocating against; NMFSSA, however, did not have the capacity to oppose the leaders and institutions that participated in the decision. Lack of comprehensive immigration reform also was a huge issue that affected those grantees that worked with immigrant agricultural workers. These grantees' experiences reflect what Kingdon (1984) described as complex, chaotic, nonlinear, and disorderly.

*Multiple roles grantees have to play.* The policy context within which the grantees operated was obviously complex and many issues were intertwined at the national, state, and local levels, as well as across different sectors, from education to immigration. This complex intertwining of issues required grantees to develop relationships with a wide variety of organizations, some of which shared their vision at times, others of which had competing agendas. The broad range of relationships, both within and outside the food movement, exposed the grantees to different perceptions of an issue, which then deepened their analyses.

Like most nonprofits, POC-led organizations in the food and agriculture sector wished to build relationships and participate in networks that

helped advance their advocacy goals. At the same time, building such relationships took a lot of time, because POC-led organizations have the added responsibility of educating groups within and outside the food movement differently. The grantees in the DLSFP initiative had to help other organizations within the same agriculture and food sectors understand issues specific to communities of color; for those organizations outside these sectors, grantees had to help them understand how their issues intersect with those in the agriculture and food sectors, in addition to how these issues affect communities of color. The challenge of getting organizations in the food movement to confront issues pertaining to race, class, and power is well documented in the work of a small number of scholars (see, for example, Slocum, 2006; Wiley, 2008). POC-led organizations find themselves having to play multiple roles, including educator, bridge builder, advocate, community organizer, and leader. These multiple roles and how they stretch POC-led organizations' capacity has not been sufficiently recognized and supported by foundations and capacity builders (Guerra, 1998), and it is critical that more attention and assistance be given to help POC-led organizations balance these functions.

*Poor reception by mainstream and dominant groups.* Many grantees encountered what they perceived to be prejudicial attitudes toward people of color during most of their interactions. They all told a common story. They were eagerly invited to join coalitions, associations, or governing boards due to the diversity they bring. However, once they joined, they found themselves frustrated by resistance from the dominant group to prioritize the interests of their constituency. Foundations and capacity builders have to help POC-led organizations deal with the dismissive responses they get to prevent them from becoming discouraged and burned out and to hold White-led organizations accountable for becoming more inclusive.

*Need to simultaneously build civic and leadership capacities.* The 10 grantees also had to strengthen their constituency base to increase their advocacy capacity. Their constituencies

were primarily composed of people of color whose voices have traditionally been ignored, drowned out, or given only token recognition. Some of their constituencies (e.g., immigrants) did not initially understand the advocacy process due to language and cultural differences. Different cultures have different perspectives on what is considered change and how much influence they have on the change process (Puntenney, 2002). Some grantees learned that they had to reframe the issues so that their constituencies could “connect the dots” and understand the relevance of the issues to their lives (e.g., one grantee had “greater success by framing [sustainable food policy] as an issue of spiritual and cultural significance to the native peoples of the state”). As such, the grantees had to spend a large portion of their time and resources in the first year educating their constituents and building their civic capacity.

Building the civic capacity, however, was not sufficient. Grantees had to simultaneously build their constituents’ leadership capacity in order to develop a larger support base and prevent the existing small group of leaders from experiencing burnout. Three grantees explained that they often found themselves shorthanded and highly dependent on a small number of leaders who had competing demands for their time and inflexible work schedules.

*Being part of movement building.* The 10 grantees frequently discussed the notion of being part of a social movement. This was not an uncommon concern for organizations, including POC-led ones, that are attempting to transform some part of the world to make it more equitable and just (Guerra, 1998; Puntenney, 2002). Guerra (1998) also found that many activists of color were frustrated with the disconnect between organizational development and movement building in the training and support they received. This notion of being part of movement building has two implications. First, new and strengthened relationships that help advance the movement’s agenda are an important measure to include in the evaluation of an initiative like the DLSFP initiative. Second, participating organizations must expose their

constituencies to a wide variety of experiential learning opportunities in order to deepen and broaden their understanding of the interconnectedness between issues and communities. The Noyes Foundation, for instance, found that convening the grantees in locations where they have the opportunity to become aware of agriculture and food issues in other communities (e.g., environmental pollution at U.S.-Mexico border communities) and discuss the interconnectedness of their efforts was a useful strategy for supporting their desire to be part of a movement.

*Peer support.* The 10 grantees coalesced and owned the initiative more than the program officer had anticipated. They exchanged information regularly and contacted one another for assistance beyond the avenues provided by the Noyes Foundation. For example, PCUN (which has more experience in community organizing in Latino communities) and the Land Loss Prevention Project (which has extensive knowledge about land trust issues, especially in Black communities) visited each other’s organizations to exchange knowledge and skills. In years two and three, a smaller group participated actively in the planning of the annual grantee meetings, from setting the agenda to meeting logistics. This sense of cohesion may be a reflection of the isolation POC leadership frequently feels in a movement that has not been intentionally inclusive of their constituencies.

*Balance between flexibility and rigor.* Research about measuring foundations’ investments in social change has found that a flexibility approach is essential (see, for example, Guthrie et al., 2005; Puntenney, 2002). The Noyes Foundation was flexible and adaptable with the tools and process it created to optimize input and leadership by the 10 grantees. For example, after all of the legislative policy objectives sought by one grantee failed for a variety of reasons, the Noyes Foundation’s program officer was able to help AnewAmerica Community Corporation’s staff realize that the organization had greater control and potential impact to influence the policies adopted by its own constituents (i.e., micro-entrepreneurs). As a result, AnewAmerica Community Corpora-

tion began working with a home-based day care provider who prepared food for children from her own vegetable garden and wanted to see other providers do the same. To encourage this practice, the organization planned to work with this innovative provider to explore how this practice may be fashioned into a recommended practice.

The foundation also was flexible in its technical assistance funds. Grantees used the funds to hire experts to help them with organizational development processes (e.g., strategic planning, facilitation of board retreats, communication materials) and staff development (e.g., community organizing), to respond to emerging opportunities that supported their goals (e.g., using a photographic exhibition to educate its constituents about the issue of land loss and partition sales), and to travel to trainings and meetings with constituents and partners. The foundation's flexibility enabled the grantees to get general support where needed to advance their advocacy goals. The lack of such flexibility has been viewed as a major limitation in philanthropy's support of POC-led organizations; thus, the Noyes Foundation's flexibility responded directly to this gap.

In retrospect, the program officer also wished that the application process for technical assistance funds required grantees to more explicitly link their request to capacity assessment results and logic model. Such a process could have helped the program officer better assess the scope and significance of the funds requested.

## Conclusion

To date, the DLSFP initiative achieved what it set out to accomplish. At the individual grantee level, some of the desired changes occurred, although others were still in progress at the time of writing this article. On the whole, however, the 10 POC-led organizations strengthened their advocacy capacity, and their presence at a wide range of tables helped increase the diversity of the leadership in the agriculture and food sectors. It is difficult to distinguish which of the forces that affected the grantees' efforts may be typical in any advocacy and policy change effort and which ones were unique to POC-led organizations, except one —

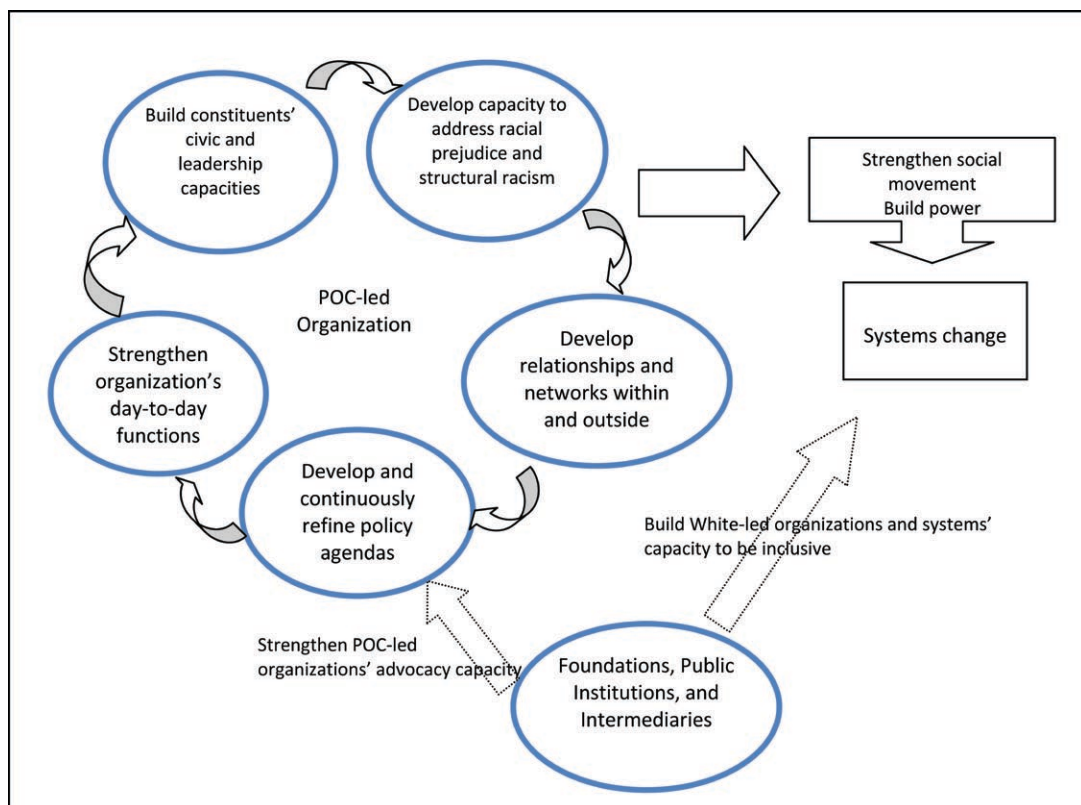
the consequences of our society having missed, ignored, drowned out, or given only tokenistic recognition to the voices of people of color. These consequences have an impact at the local level, including the perpetuation of racial and ethnic disparities.

*The foundation's flexibility enabled the grantees to get general support where needed to advance their advocacy goals.*

There are limited resources that take these consequences into account when building POC-led organizations' advocacy capacity. Advocacy and policy change work has received a lot of attention in the last few years in the philanthropic sector, but the advice generated so far has not paid enough attention to the role of race and power in advocacy capacity-building efforts. Nonprofit capacity building also has received a lot of attention; however, most nonprofit capacity-building models and tools do not include advocacy as a key organizational function. Yet, this capacity appears to be essential to most POC-led organizations that explicitly or implicitly acknowledge that advocating for social justice is a natural part of their functions. The advocacy function is necessary for these organizations to address the structural barriers faced by their constituencies.

The initial theory of change for the DLSFP initiative (shown previously in Figure 1) covered most of the changes that can be typically expected from an advocacy capacity-building effort. The lessons learned, however, imply a theoretical model that reflects a nonlinear process and an interdependent system of factors, including structural racism, that contribute to the advocacy effectiveness of POC-led organizations. Figure 2 presents a more likely illustration of what it takes to build the advocacy capacity of POC-led groups. This model will continue to be refined in the initiative's final year.

**FIGURE 2** Working Model for Building the Advocacy Capacity of POC-led Organizations



Resetting the table for a sustainable and just food system is challenging because, in addition to dealing with issues of race and power, there is insufficient foundation support for POC-led organizations. From the outset, the Noyes Foundation recognized the importance of translating lessons learned from the initiative to other funders in order to promote more diverse grantmaking strategies. What was underestimated was the assertive role funders need to play in ensuring that the predominantly White coalitions and networks they fund are inclusive. Although the Noyes Foundation signaled to all its grantees its interest in supporting groups that help to build a diverse and inclusive food movement, it now believes it must do more to complement and supplement the work of POC-led organizations by leveraging its influence and resources to effect change throughout its portfolio and within philanthropy.

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