

THE WORLD IS HOME

A Case Study of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation | January 2017



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PREFACE

The World Is Home examines Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) ten years after it was created by the merger of Community Foundation Silicon Valley (CFSV) and Peninsula Community Foundation (PCF). That experience, including the hiring of Emmett Carson to serve as its CEO, deeply shaped SVCF's values and vision and created the conditions for it to become the world's largest community foundation. With more than \$8 billion in assets,¹ SVCF has demonstrated resilience and adaptability as a learning organization, ambitiously evolving and reshaping its strategies to better meet the needs of its growing constituency of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and successful dot-com executives and companies. Its roots are local and firmly grounded in the needs of the counties and communities where Silicon Valley has emerged and flourished. Yet, in its search for social justice, SVCF also has engaged in systems-level change, forging partnerships ranging from policymakers in Sacramento and San Jose, California, to the White House.

As a 21st-century community foundation, SVCF has broken new ground. It seeks to identify and meet the needs of its San Mateo and Santa Clara neighbors. Yet, because that community is in many ways global, the world is also home for SVCF. It defines community as Mumbai as well as San Mateo, São Paulo as well as Palo Alto, Cape Town as well as Santa Clara, in response to the needs and interests of its constituents. Being global, national, and local requires hard work and a strong commitment to transparency and trust. SVCF is driven by a belief that its team can do anything it sets out to do through support, honesty, and imagination.

This report is part of a series that examines how global leaders tackle the world's most complex and "wickedly" difficult problems. To help leaders become more successful in their efforts to tackle seemingly intractable challenges, the Wicked Problem framework was developed in the early 1970s. Over four decades, much has been learned about what it takes for leaders to "find the win in wicked." Because each complex problem is unique, leaders must make choices about how to approach them. It is important for leaders to properly diagnose the kind of problem they face: Is it a crisis, where someone must take charge and command a solution? Is it a problem that has been solved other times in other places, where an expert can deploy a toolkit of techniques that have worked in the past? Or is it a Wicked Problem, requiring adaptive leaders who adjust and recalibrate their strategy based on transparent reflection on what is and is not working? Can they put their egos aside, challenge themselves through collaborative decision-making, and seek solutions where one might least expect to find them? Can they blend different approaches to craft innovative change strategies?

pfc Social Impact Advisors (pfc) uses the term "Deliberate Leaders" to describe those who are acting with intention and who consciously accept not only the risks of the challenge ahead, but also the consequences of their actions.² If Wicked Problems were easy, they would have been solved. Deliberate Leaders are shaping a new body of work, and pfc is developing a set of case studies highlighting Deliberate Leaders in action to help guide 21st-century change agents as they tackle the biggest challenges of our time.

The methodology used for the SVCF case study included 30 interviews with staff and stakeholders and a review of SVCF materials and desk research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT



The Power of Possibility

When you enter the offices of Silicon Valley Community Foundation, you are greeted by the motto: “Possibilities Start Here.” This statement, developed by staff, symbolizes the culture of what has become the world’s largest community foundation. CEO Emmett Carson says that “too often organizations ... have processes to get to *no* rather than to get to *yes*. We wanted an organization that would focus on the *how*.” For ten years, SVCF has worked to be the place to make bold ambitions a reality. Its phenomenal growth and the drive that has taken it to unimagined heights are focused on the goals of social justice and of making a measurable difference in the lives of immigrants, families and children in poverty, and the disenfranchised, locally and around the globe.

SVCF was established in 2007, with the merger of two community foundations that served the adjacent counties of San Mateo and Santa Clara in Northern California—Community Foundation Silicon

As the world becomes more interconnected, it will be essential that local communities become more networked, linking individual donors, nonprofit organizations, companies, religious institutions, and government together.

—Emmett Carson,
Silicon Valley Community
Foundation



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Valley (CFSV) and Peninsula Community Foundation (PCF). Though each foundation had existed for decades, the region was changing rapidly to become what the world now knows as Silicon Valley. The atmosphere in Silicon Valley was fast-moving, entrepreneurial, demanding, and impatient. The founders of companies there were amassing enormous wealth and turning their attention from building their companies to spending their wealth on solving big social problems. They also were younger than the traditional philanthropists who had established foundations in the cities of the older industrial United States (US). The new philanthropists of Silicon Valley wanted to be part of the decision making on how to invest for social change and to see results in their lifetimes.

Not surprisingly, SVCF reflects the culture of Silicon Valley. It is data-driven and smart; targets the resources it directs and the funds it advises toward focused strategies; and monitors to see if it is getting results. It tries to listen to all points of view and then make a decision, but it is not afraid to admit when things have gone offtrack. It takes unconventional paths to achieve results, including venturing into the realm of policy advocacy.

As a result, SVCF has become much more than the sum of its parts. It has achieved a scale unimaginable a decade ago, weathering one of the most challenging economic downturns of this century as well as periods of growth that one interviewee characterized as “drinking from a fire hose.” It has become a trusted partner and convener for decision makers from the public, corporate, and philanthropic sectors, providing reports, building websites, testifying in public hearings, and doing what needs to be done to fulfill its mission and achieve its goals. In so doing, SVCF has redefined what it means to be a community foundation in an increasingly global world.

This case examines SVCF at its ten-year anniversary to understand what it has accomplished, the challenges it has faced and will face in the future, and the principles of leadership that have brought the organization to this point.

The Context of Silicon Valley

In the early 2000s, the economy of Northern California was growing by leaps and bounds, as the tech sector expanded into a global economic engine and Silicon Valley became its de facto capital. Also growing were the surrounding region, the needs of its increasingly diverse population, and the gap between rich and poor.

- Silicon Valley is home to approximately 3.5 million people,³ a growth rate of approximately 7 percent since 2010.
- Approximately 37 percent of Silicon Valley residents were born outside the US, and more than 30 percent are Asians or Pacific Islanders, making them the largest single demographic group, according to researchers at the University of Southern California.⁴
- 40 percent of the billionaires on *Forbes*’ list of the world’s 100 wealthiest people in technology live in Silicon Valley; together the top 10 are worth \$227 billion.⁵
- Santa Clara County has an estimated 200,000 families and 60,000 children living in poverty.⁶
- More than 6,500 people are homeless in Silicon Valley. For example, at The Jungle in San Jose, which *USA Today* has described as the US’s largest homeless encampment, 350 people lived in tents, shacks, and tree houses.⁷ Recently, the city of San Jose dispersed the tent city, making alternative shelter available to as many as it could and overruling the protests of the camp’s residents, many of whom claimed they had nowhere else to go.⁸
- As the tech industry expands, property values skyrocket, widening the chasm between the haves and have-nots of Silicon Valley and increasing homelessness.⁹



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Community Foundations: A Snapshot

Since the first community foundation was established in Cleveland in 1914, community foundations have been a vehicle for local donors to help meet local needs and support local nonprofits. Following in the footsteps of Cleveland, many of the industrial cities of the North created community foundations, and gradually other parts of the US followed suit. The Community Foundation Atlas notes that since that first community foundation was established:

- 1,848 place-based foundations have been created, 73 percent of them in the last 25 years.
- Though most—over 1,600—are in North America or Europe, there are community foundations in Asia, Oceania, Africa, and Latin America.
- In 2014, the combined grantmaking of community foundations totaled \$5 billion, and they collectively managed \$63.3 billion in financial reserves.
- Community foundations averaged 7.8 paid staff, although 64 percent had five or fewer paid employees.¹⁰

Among these statistics, Silicon Valley Community Foundation is an outlier: It manages enormous assets—more than \$8 billion in 2016. It works with an estimated 1,900 donor-advisors to help them achieve their philanthropic dreams.¹¹ It has the ability to receive gifts and distribute grants in 6 currencies as well as in two virtual currencies; bitcoin and ripple. SVCF has made grants in 89 countries.¹²

The Merger: Overlaps and Gaps in Silicon Valley

As in other economic hubs around the country, the civic leaders of Silicon Valley established community foundations. Two—Community Foundation Silicon Valley, created in 1954, and Peninsula Community Foundation, established in 1964—served proximate geographies. Though in some ways the area they served was one large region, encompassing the adjacent counties of Santa Clara and San Mateo, it was also fragmented into multiple political jurisdictions, transportation systems, school districts, and differing kinds of local needs.



There were overlaps between the two foundations that confused donors and client populations. Patricia Bresee, who chaired PCF in 2004, recalls that grantees who provided services in both counties had to apply to both foundations separately to fund the same program. And despite the overlaps, there were also gaps in meeting community needs: Bresee also remembers a small, successful museum in Santa Clara County that was going under. Bresee recalls, “Though Peninsula Community Foundation tried to help, at that time, neither foundation had the ability to provide leadership and convening at the needed scale. Ultimately, the community itself created a new board that, after a hiatus, reopened the museum. But a foundation with broader reach—like the one SVCF became—could have enlisted resources from both counties to come to the rescue earlier.”

“Neither foundation had been a leader in community change and identifying issues that could be addressed through philanthropy or through influence.”

—Patricia Bresee

The two foundations differed from one another in many ways, as did their leadership. PCF, led by Sterling Speirn, (who had previously managed Apple’s donations of computers to nonprofits), had a larger endowment, which gave its leadership more discretion over how funds were allocated and provided a more programmatic focus. It made many small grants, in the range of \$5,000, to many organizations. It also had created centers, including a nonprofit resource center and a center for



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venture philanthropy; and pioneered children's welfare and early education and literacy programs. PCF was started with undistributed funding from the Salk polio vaccination program.

CFSV, led by Peter Hero, a former college administrator and successful fundraiser, had focused on recruiting donors. Its mission was broad—community improvement—and under Hero's leadership it had pioneered new and creative ways for community foundations to engage with private and corporate donors and financial advisors. It had been a thought leader and convener in the community and in the nonprofit world. For example, CFSV persuaded several arts organizations to launch a combined endowment campaign rather than competing with one another, and it spearheaded research into community needs that led to improved children's health and community transformation.¹³ It had more donor-advised funds and supporting organizations than its counterpart. Immersed in the dot-com culture, both foundation leaders spearheaded the concept of venture philanthropy and the value of business strategies and investment in shaping philanthropic approaches.

Exploring a Shared Future

From time to time since the founding of Peninsula Community Foundation, board members of the two neighboring community foundations and other civic leaders had talked casually about whether it would make sense for them to merge. They wondered whether by merging there might be efficiencies from having only one philanthropic back office for the region and economies of scale for grantmaking and fundraising. They thought a community foundation for the entire region might be better positioned to meet the needs of a "community" that was rapidly growing and evolving. However, those talks never went far—in part because each foundation had a long-serving leader, a strong sense of local connection, and community voices who felt their interests would be better served by the status quo.

In 2004, the conversation began to go a bit farther. Twelve representatives of the two foundations met for an informal dinner, recalls then-PCF Chair Bresee. As the region faced a challenging amount of expansion and growth, board members from the two foundations recognized that the role of a community foundation could be more than either organization was currently doing alone. Bresee recalls, "We saw it as being able to make some really significant changes in identifying and then bringing influence, bringing in donors, bringing in movers and shakers." But ultimately that conversation lapsed.

Then, in 2005, things began to change rapidly in the foundation sector of Northern California. The long-time PCF president, Sterling Speirn, was recruited by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to become its new president. PCF's board was preparing to launch a search for his successor when Peter Hero, the long-time leader of CFSV, began to contemplate retirement. Suddenly, the time was right to consider seriously a merger.

Board members (all of them civic and business leaders, many of them serving on multiple boards and with deep experience of mergers) began to meet in earnest to take steps toward creating a new community foundation. In 2006, they held listening sessions with stakeholders in both communities to hear their views on the proposed merger. The boards themselves had a clear vision for what they wanted the combined entity to be. Caretha Coleman, who was then on the board of PCF, notes, "We really wanted to bring the two organizations together, not so that we would be necessarily bigger, although that was an outcome. But we wanted to be broader in our thinking. We wanted to be far more strategic. We wanted to be future oriented. We wanted to be able to have a stronger voice so that we could really be advocates for change."



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Greg Avis, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist who chaired the board of CFSV at the time of the merger and went on to chair the board of the combined foundation in its first year, reflects that the two boards felt that “problems in the Bay Area are not confined to a certain city. They’re larger. And we felt also that a lot of the problems we can address can’t be addressed by philanthropy alone.” The boards wanted the new foundation to show leadership around issues that could not be addressed only by direct giving. These issues included growing income inequality and unequal educational outcomes; the persistent shortfall in public funds since the passage of a state ballot initiative, Proposition 13, had capped increases in property tax revenue in the state; and other complex challenges. They thought a community foundation could have greater impact on larger-scale challenges by convening, educating, and mobilizing public opinion to serve the common good.

Coming Together

On July 12, 2006, Silicon Valley Community Foundation was established by the unanimous vote of the boards of Community Foundation Silicon Valley and Peninsula Community Foundation. The board members knew they were venturing onto risky ground. As several interviewees mentioned, four out of five mergers fail. Blending the operations of the two organizations would turn out to be a greater challenge than anyone anticipated. Many members of the two staffs did not know each other, and even felt a sense of competition, according to some long-time staff. The two cultures were very different—because PCF had more unrestricted assets, it had developed a more programmatic focus, while CFSV had a highly effective fundraising apparatus and placed more emphasis on donor relations. Though these differences could be complementary, the contrasting cultures would be difficult to merge. The communities served by the two foundations were different as well—there was more concentrated poverty in San Jose, and PCF, which had established more unrestricted funds, would resist sending disproportionate resources there.

Predictably, donors were nervous. Long-standing grant recipients, who were used to receiving small, unrestricted grants each year, were nervous as well. The boards recognized and embraced these challenges. Among the assets they felt could help overcome them were the culture of Silicon Valley, where people are willing to take on risk; a willingness to collaborate between the two boards, among staff, and with their partners in the community; and an appetite for creativity and innovation. The upside of the merger would be achieving the scale needed to have greater impact on the challenges facing a community that was increasingly global.

Finding a Leader and Building a Shared Culture

The board faced two primary tasks. It had to work through all the questions related to governance and operations for the new community foundation, while communicating with all the internal and external stakeholders, who were watching the merger closely. Most important, it had to identify the right leader to help realize the vision of what the new foundation could be.

In their search for a president, the combined board looked for someone who could help the new organization become, in Board Chair Greg Avis’s words, “a pioneer, ... a leader, ... risk taker, ... trusted, ... difference maker.” They found that leader in Emmett Carson, a nationally known expert on community foundations and African-American philanthropy.

Emmett Carson had degrees in economics, public policy, and international affairs from Morehouse College and Princeton University. He had led the Ford Foundation’s domestic and international grantmaking on philanthropy and the nonprofit sector before becoming the president of the Minneapolis Foundation. He was also a prolific researcher and had published more than 100 works on philanthropy, social justice, and public accountability. He was an outsider to Silicon Valley, but, as the long-time president of the Minneapolis Foundation, combined “the vision for an even better community foundation with the management skills to help create it.”¹⁴



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From Formation to Action

The board members had set out to shape Silicon Valley Community Foundation into the engaged civic leader they felt the region needed. With funding from the Hewlett, Packard, Irvine, and Skoll foundations and Omidyar Network, they were able to retain the consulting firm of McKinsey to help them organize community outreach sessions to map out the region's needs and strategize around SVCF's assets and opportunities.

Once Carson was on board, they again held multiple listening sessions with the grantees of both parent foundations, civic leaders, and philanthropic and nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders in the region to inform the new foundation's grantmaking strategies. Finally, they announced a new, much more focused set of priorities: education, economic security, immigrant integration, regional planning, and responsiveness to time-sensitive community concerns, such as hunger and affordable housing. As these priorities were launched, SVCF established metrics and monitored impact and costs. It worked to maintain alignment between the expectations and needs of external stakeholders, such as donors and grantees, and, internally, among operational and program staff.

Because there had been so little contact between the staffs of the two foundations, creating a sense of common purpose would take work. Former staff recall that when Mari Ellen Loijens, who was the point person for the merger from the CFSV side and now holds the title of Chief Business, Development and Brand Officer as well as Chief of Staff at SVCF, walked into the offices of PCF in the early days, "it was as if she had horns on her head. Everybody was just, 'Don't let her go here. Don't let her see this. And when [we] walked into [CFSV], it was the same thing.'" Lianne M. Araki, who was Sterling Speirn's Executive Assistant at PCF and now serves as Executive Assistant to the CEO and President and Board Liaison for SVCF, recalled PCF's acting CEO Vera Bennett saying to her one day, "It's pretty much unsustainable the way the two foundations are working today." Struck by this, Araki took an opportunity at a monthly staff meeting to say, "I am so looking forward to the merger, having our staff doubled, and being able to effect change across the community as a whole." All of a sudden, she felt, "there was a change in the air."

The task of merging and restructuring the staff and developing a new business model was made more complicated by the recession that began in 2007. The downturn had a catastrophic impact on the operations of the new SVCF. Because its income derived largely from fees on assets under management, as the value of the assets it held dropped and donor-advisors withdrew more to meet urgent community needs, SVCF had to reduce staff by 15 percent, according to Carson. Many observers felt that had the two foundations not merged, reducing their operating costs, neither might have survived. SVCF revised its business model, seeking more corporate partnerships that would provide income not tied to the value of its managed assets.

At the same time, SVCF responded to the heightened community needs by creating a safety-net fund, which met its initial fundraising goal in two and a half months. As financial pressures eased, SVCF changed its practices in other ways. Its commitment to meeting its local community's needs led it to venture into public policy advocacy and to begin making grants internationally for its donor-advisors and corporate partners, both of which were unusual roles for a community foundation. It set benchmarks for progress. Periodically it has revisited priorities, monitored emerging needs, and made evidence-based decisions about how and when to recalibrate.



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Reflecting on a Decade of Growth and Change

Ten years later, these approaches have led to impressive results. Silicon Valley Community Foundation is the largest community foundation in the world, with over \$8 billion in assets under management. At its five-year anniversary, SVCF reflected that its two parent foundations, with their combined 94 years of grantmaking, had issued 50,000 grants totaling \$1.2 billion. In 2016 alone, SVCF received \$1.3 billion in new gifts from individual and corporate donors and awarded 109,000 grants totaling \$1.3 billion, including those from its donor-advised funds and corporate matching gifts. Among its more recent donor-advisors are some of Silicon Valley's wealthiest young tech entrepreneurs, such as Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan, and WhatsApp founder Jan Koum. Carol Larson, the president of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and a partner and funder of SVCF, says, "I think you really have to congratulate Emmett [Carson]. I don't think that the previous models of the two separate foundations would have been as effective in attracting [large] donors and being a place that could manage this money."

More important to its leaders, SVCF has redefined the nature of community and what it means to be a community foundation. It has earned a reputation both locally and globally for trusted leadership, transparency, neutrality, creativity, competence, and compassion. It has become a thought-leader in its field, co-convening a celebration of the hundredth anniversary of community foundations with the White House in 2014 and a national gathering of philanthropic and NGO leaders in 2016 to explore innovations for the future. It can respond to needs both in Silicon Valley and Northern California and—when that is where its donor-advisors wish to invest—in far-flung places like South Asia and Haiti. SVCF has redefined what community can be for community foundations, pushing the boundaries of what is possible financially and programmatically.

A Focus on Values

From the beginning, the leadership of SVCF was driven by organizational values. SVCF's operations and culture, which included its approach, programs, and the desired outcomes, would all flow from a clear articulation of values upon which all the stakeholders agreed. Carson recalls that at the time of the merger, "We had three different teams. We had Peninsula Community Foundation staff, Community Foundation Silicon Valley staff, and new staff like me. So we had to set the table of what it is that we wanted to be."

As they worked through the challenges of merging operations and systems, investment policies, and the expectations of donors and grantee organizations, they set forth values that would shape the culture of the organization. Those values continue to guide SVCF today and include the following principles:

- **SVCF is a learning institution.** Carson is trained as an academic, and for him research and learning are keys to success. As a learning institution, SVCF would review and examine its processes and programs. It would actively seek out and try new things, constantly asking, "Is what we are doing serving a purpose?" The goal would not be to make SVCF a smoothly running, yet static, machine, but to set goals and gather evidence so that it could evolve and adapt.
- **SVCF is committed to excellence.** While most organizations would claim this as a value, a commitment to excellence meant something very specific to SVCF. Carson recalls that, as SVCF staff pledged to do their best and to help others do their best, they also believed their colleagues shared that commitment, which led to their being trusting partners: "There's a tendency ... when things go wrong, to want to find blame. And creating the commitment to excellence took that away."



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- **SVCF creates a culture of candor and trust.** To work together effectively in a complex and changing environment and to be the learning organization they want SVCF to be, SVCF stakeholders have to “believe others are as capable as you are,” says Carson. They have to be open and candidly acknowledge and discuss areas of disagreement. As Carson describes a culture of candor, “We’re all professionals, we all want excellence, but occasionally we’re going to disagree about the right way to get there.” Unless people are forthcoming about these disagreements, they can “boil into some thing that is poisonous.” Particularly when people are being called on to adjust and to be adaptable, “they have to be able to say, ‘Boy, this is creating a tough situation for me.’”
- **SVCF values a team player attitude.** In another, related commitment to trust, SVCF leadership asked team members to support one another and the organization. “There were a lot of decisions being made in real time ... that had big implications,” says Carson. “Being a team player meant you trusted board and management decisions, that you couldn’t have meetings over a period of months to ‘consensus’ a decision. You needed to trust that the people making the decision took into account what was known, and you were going to support their decision.”
- **SVCF values humor and joy.** Carson tries to balance a high-pressure, demanding pace with moments of shared fun: “You need to be able to enjoy what you do. This is hard work, even heart-wrenching work at times. We try to embrace having fun with excellence, with joy.” That culture supports the other values of candor, trust, and feeling like part of a team. Moreover, as other staff describe, sometimes things don’t go the way they should and sometimes people are “building the airplane while learning to fly.” Says Manuel Santamaria, SVCF Vice President Grantmaking and Strategic Initiatives, “The balance between the quality of life and work has to be in place. So celebrating the wins, talking about what you didn’t do right ... means bringing people together to talk about those things with a little chocolate ice cream and celebrate together, bad and good.”
- **SVCF values being adaptable and flexible.** Says Carson, “We do the best we can, but we understand there are always new circumstances. We have a mindset that doesn’t get fixated on one way of doing things.” Being open to new ways of thinking enables SVCF to embrace the future and brings to fruition the reasons for being a learning organization. Carson believes that being “a learning institution on the front end and [merging] adaptability and flexibility” make SVCF an organization that tries things, that says, “Why not?” SVCF’s willingness to adapt, though the leadership acknowledges it can be challenging for people, enables it to pioneer new roles for community foundations.

Our point number one is that we’re a learning institution.

—Emmett Carson,
Silicon Valley Community
Foundation

These values have enabled Silicon Valley Community Foundation to exemplify Deliberate Leadership as it redefined what it means to be a community foundation.

CHAPTER II

BECOMING A COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY



Historically, community foundations have been seen as what John M. Sobrato, donor-advisor and former SVCF Board Chair, refers to as “a philanthropic bank” that holds and manages the money of donor-advisors, who then direct gifts to the charitable causes of their choice. In effect, a community foundation is sometimes viewed as a kind of “back office” for high-net-worth individuals who want to be philanthropic, but not to carry the overhead of professional staff.

Moreover, that giving has traditionally been targeted toward meeting local needs, primarily through giving to direct services, and has not typically engaged in policy or with controversial issues. Emmett Carson emphasizes SVCF’s ongoing commitment to local work, noting that its Community Impact division focuses exclusively on the needs of the two counties. Its signature initiatives locally have

Community foundations are uniquely positioned to create linkages, to leverage impact and create a nuanced understanding of how to position local concerns in a world that will look, feel, and operate very differently.

—Emmett Carson,
Silicon Valley Community
Foundation



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included grants and leadership around creating a stronger social safety net during the Great Recession; education support for schools serving very low-income students, including scholarships, enrichment programs sponsored by donor-advisors, and literacy programs; and responding to community emergency needs such as disaster planning.

Carol Larson describes another function of community foundations—simply encouraging community members to give: “If the goal of a community foundation is to celebrate the nonprofit sector and encourage charitable giving, you really have to send out the message that all philanthropy is good, ... we want more [charitable giving], and we want nonprofits to be deserving of that and to be run well.” That speaks to a role for community foundations of building the capacity of local nonprofits and supporting charitable giving across the spectrum.

But a community foundation can contribute in other important ways in a complex, interconnected world. Erica Wood, SVCF’s Chief Community Impact Officer, describes “a variety of leadership roles we can and should play to effect positive change around difficult social issues.” While people may think of SVCF primarily as a grantmaker, Wood continues, “There are other tools that we employ from our philanthropic toolkit,” including research to get “credible, reliable information to understand an issue.” Also key is SVCF’s role as an “information and knowledge leader,” where stakeholders see SVCF as a credible source of information. Third is its convening role, “bringing different groups of stakeholders and problem solvers to the table” to find fresh ways to approach complex issues. And fourth, and a role in which SVCF has pioneered, is engaging in change at the systems level by informing public policy.

Moreover, what ‘community’ means to donor-advisors who are part of a global diaspora from South and East Asia may be very different from what it meant to the original donors of the Cleveland Foundation, or even to the original donors to SVCF’s two parent foundations. This is especially true in a place like Silicon Valley, where, according to the most recent census, more than 37 percent of residents were born outside the United States, compared to 27 percent across California and 14 percent nationally.¹⁶

As the boards of Peninsula Community Foundation and Community Foundation Silicon Valley met to work through the terms of their merger, they wrestled with the questions of what the role of a community foundation should be in the complex, interconnected world of the 21st century. Their foundational document, *Vision for a New Community Foundation*, reflects their thinking:

Our donors also know that social issues cross geographic boundaries, and they hold different definitions of ‘community.’ To some donors, community means their own neighborhood. To others, it is the town where they grew up. Still others see themselves as global citizens. Silicon Valley Community Foundation will meet donor partners where they are and support their personal definition of building community—locally, nationally, and around the globe.¹⁷

C. S. Park, the first Asian-American to chair SVCF’s board, reflects, “If you visit major companies in Silicon Valley—Intel, Cisco, whatever—the majority of the significant engineering resources and talents are all spread around the world ethnically. And if you ask them, ‘Where is your community?’ they clearly accept their primary residency or workplace as their community. But at the same time, they have community with their mothers, fathers, friends living in India, and almost daily communications with their families, and going back and forth [to visit], so their community in that part of the world is equally important. So there are many, many dual citizens, not legally, but dual citizens in terms



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of their interest. So if you accept the demographic changes in Silicon Valley, it is very natural that a community foundation is reflective of their community's people."

In addition, the boundaries of Silicon Valley are elastic and expanding. Unlike the boundaries of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, they are not drawn on any map. Carson points out that donors may live in San Francisco or elsewhere in northern California, so in April of 2012 SVCF opened an office in San Francisco. SVCF's breaking out of a geographic definition of community is new for the field. Many people commented that, like many forms of disruption, the bold move to expand the definition of community was good and forced people to think in new ways.

As Emmett Carson points out, the threats to local communities are increasingly global in nature, and serving the community can take a variety of forms. Incoming Board Chair Samuel Johnson, Jr. (SVCF's first African-American board chair) cites an initiative on how math placement practices in middle schools were disadvantaging youth of color: "We thought initially that math misplacement was a local issue, but we found it was a problem statewide and required a systemic approach." If local health is threatened by the Ebola virus, and that cannot be dealt with on a local scale, SVCF needs to meet it at the scale that is appropriate. That does not mean dispensing with focus. Carson cautions that "to be successful, I've always felt you need a laser-like focus that says this is what we're trying to achieve, because the more I can narrow the topic, the more I can understand the variables, and the more I can stay on alignment with goal and aspiration, result and impact." However, this approach may mean venturing beyond the geographic boundaries of one's physical location.

Merging Cultures, Creating Alignment

As SVCF began its existence as a new entity, it had to build alignment between two very different staffs and cultures. The directors and senior staff who were around at the time remember that the staffs of the two parent foundations didn't even know each other. They had entirely different operational systems, from financial software to donor relations teams. Vera Bennett recalled the challenges of, "Just trying to merge all of the accounts and all of the donor funds. We had two separate operating systems and computer systems for the first 18 months. And so staff was really stressed. ... The fact that we got together continuously and learned to trust each other implicitly is what made it happen."

Mari Ellen Loijens, currently Chief Business, Development, and Brand Officer and Chief of Staff for SVCF, was part of the original four-person leadership team. She recalls the challenges of that time as also offering opportunities. "Unlike other community foundations that have a great deal of history, we had the advantage of starting fresh," she recalls. "It gives you the freedom of thinking critically about everything." That meant creating systems and operations from scratch, from HR policies to grantmaking to managing investments. As SVCF grew, it would mean building the capacity internally to facilitate and manage its phenomenal scale and scope.

When Carson was hired to lead the new organization, he came in as a complete outsider to Silicon Valley and the foundations. In many ways, that jumpstarted the recalibration, but it meant, in effect, merging three cultures, and adjustments had to be made on all sides. But because Carson was coming in from the outside, he was able to use the permission the board had given him to "wipe the slate" and start fresh. Staff were asked to reapply for their jobs—or for other roles within the new foundation, if they wanted—giving them an opportunity to think about what and how they wanted to contribute. A months-long process of meeting with and listening to stakeholders enabled Carson to map the region and understand its needs.



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In retrospect, board members say they underestimated the time it would take to truly complete the merger. It was 18 months before things were achieving some normalcy. Moving the two staffs into a single location helped, as did team-building efforts. For example, when the staff of Community Foundation Silicon Valley scheduled a “last annual picnic,” Carson announced that the combined staffs would attend, and handed out “SVCF” T-shirts at the event.

The merger was not without conflicts, both internal and external. As a highly educated professional African-American man, Emmett Carson represented an approach and worldview that was outside the experience of many in Silicon Valley. Several board members recall that Silicon Valley was not used to assertive African-American men in leadership positions and that some were taken aback by his strong advocacy for social justice and his willingness to speak truth to power. Sally Osberg, President and CEO of the Skoll Foundation, believes that Silicon Valley sees itself as very diverse, with positive relationships among cultures and races. “It takes people like Emmett,” she says, “to remind those of us who tend to think we live in utopia that it’s really not.” In fact, Sid Espinosa of Microsoft, another long-time partner of SVCF, believed that some staff left SVCF after the merger because they were not comfortable with the emphasis on social justice in SVCF’s future directions.

Importantly, SVCF included diversity as a guiding principle when it began to operate. For SVCF, this means not just hiring more people of color, but making sure staff bring a diversity of perspectives, as a means to getting multiple points of view and understanding cultural differences and similarities. Today 73 percent of staff identify as female, 37 percent as white, 33 percent as Asian, 11 percent as more than one race (non-Latino/a), 10 percent as Latino/a, 5 percent as African American, 2 percent as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent as American Indian/Native Alaskan, making SVCF a slightly more diverse representation of community than either Santa Clara or San Mateo County.¹⁸

Diversity at SVCF also means striving to implement projects and conduct grantmaking in a manner that reflects the demographic and socioeconomic reality of Silicon Valley as well as providing thought-leadership to the field and carrying that message more broadly. SVCF’s commitment to diversity goes wide and deep. For example, Senior Vice President for Investments Bert Feuss has incorporated transparent and diverse sourcing into SVCF’s own hiring of investment managers, and has become an expert and a sought-after voice on this topic, encouraging his profession to think harder about diversifying itself.

For his part, Carson was not used to a community foundation where donor-advisors controlled so much of the assets and played such a strong role. When the five priorities for SVCF’s discretionary giving were announced, many in the community criticized the lack of support for the arts and local institutions. Some of the donor-advisors, recalls the Packard Foundation’s Carol Larson, were concerned that their priorities were no longer important to SVCF.



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Factors in Achieving Alignment

Greg Avis credits three factors for enabling SVCF to achieve the internal and external alignment needed to be successful. These factors shaped and continue to shape the culture of SVCF.

- **The culture of Silicon Valley embraces risk taking.** After board members conducted meetings and listening sessions with concerned stakeholders both before and after the merger, they reminded themselves that change was what they had sought, and that more engagement with policy, more focus, and greater impact was what they had wanted. They reaffirmed the direction in which SVCF was going. Donor-advisors were willing to go along as they saw results and as SVCF added services to help them pursue their own philanthropy and learn more, such as topical donor circles and a database that cataloged and vetted NGOs outside the US.
- **A spirit of collaboration.** From the beginning, the two boards had worked well together and collaborated closely to build the merger, according to Avis and Bresee. As SVCF moved into its next phase, because it was clear that the lack of unrestricted dollars would limit what it could do directly, it consciously sought to work with partners, says Sobrato. In its international work, it can't have "boots on the ground," so its culture and its strategy are to find the right partners. Its policy initiatives on the safety net and education reform have involved partnerships with county and city government. And, the values of SVCF, constantly referred to and reinforced, encourage internal collaboration and the breaking down of silos, contributing to the ethos of "finding a way to say yes." As Loijens describes it, "There's enormous cross-functional communication all the time about all sorts of things ... it's so deeply embedded that employees at every level reinforce the culture ... And it's not from the top, it's from the bottom up where there is a great pride of purpose." Vice President of Development Rebecca Dupras adds, "You do have to be intentional [because of the size of the organization], but everybody's goal is to do that; you don't get any resistance."
- **Optimism about the future of Silicon Valley.** Despite the economic downturn, recalls Avis, the boards knew that resources in Silicon Valley were going to grow. The merger was not done for defensive reasons, but to maximize resources available to tackle the greatest challenges facing society in Silicon Valley and in the virtual communities of its residents. Going forward, SVCF's new philanthropists, and, increasingly, some from outside Silicon Valley like Seattle billionaire Paul Allen, have been choosing SVCF as a partner in various initiatives.

Silicon Valley is a global community, and anybody who thinks like that, or has any connections to it, is potentially part of our family wherever they live.

—Thomas Friel,
Former SVCF Board Chair

The Calculated Risk of Going International

SVCF has responded to new realities by becoming international in scope. It needed to grow its capacities to do that effectively, and it has been careful to do so in ways that make sense, according to Nancy Handel, who joined SVCF in 2007 as its first outside elected board member and in 2009 became its Chair. She recalls that the reflection process included careful thinking through of how to engage: "You need to do a lot of homework before you decide you're actually going to do on-the-ground



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work outside of the US. And [SVCF leadership] came to the conclusion that they could service global philanthropy by being a conduit for organizations, and they could vet and they could guide and they could steer, but that they should not be, basically, trying to be on-the-ground.”

SVCF responded to the interests of its donor-advisors by testing how it could best support international philanthropy. Misti Sangani, Chief Donor Experience and Engagement Officer, is responsible for relationships with donor-advisors. She describes SVCF’s approach as, “We meet donors where they are,” bringing to that relationship both the Foundation’s core values and a focus on building trust, understanding that for donor-advisors and for SVCF, “the world is home.”

That has meant both disaster relief in times of emergency and more sustained investment in meeting basic human security needs. To serve these needs effectively, SVCF has had to expand its toolkit for supporting international work. For example, in response to international disasters such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti or mudslides in Pakistan, says Carson, “Our donors came and said you’ve got to get involved. We trust you to find the right organizations.” SVCF’s relationship with its donor-advisors meant serving as a trusted partner, even outside its geographically proximate community.

An SVCF annual impact report described the process of the organization’s response to the 2010 Haitian earthquake: “Community foundation donors from around the world stepped forward together to help. Moments after the community foundation created a relief fund, a donor-advisor in Marin with a long history of giving in Haiti offered a \$50,000 matching grant to inspire others to participate. The matching grant was met within hours, leading five other community foundation donors to offer matching grants to sustain the incredible momentum of giving. The Haiti Earthquake Relief Fund ultimately created a virtual network of more than 700 donors from 27 states, Belgium, Peru, China, and Canada. ... More than \$585,000 was awarded directly to organizations with strong track records of providing emergency assistance and long-term redevelopment throughout Haiti.”¹⁹

Adaptive Responses to Global Emergencies

Carson also describes how—despite reservations—SVCF has responded even to disasters outside what it had defined as priority areas of engagement: “So take the Japanese earthquake, the tsunami that hit. We have a protocol in place for when there’s an international disaster, and part of that protocol is, ‘Should we open up a fund or not?’ And we went through our protocol and I decided, based on the answers, we would not open up a fund. Japan’s a developed country. And then one of our major corporate clients came to us and said, the president has put out this amount of money to help families of victims, and the company wants to do something, and you’re our philanthropic partner.” For NVIDIA Corporation, SVCF created a fund that raised \$2.75 million in two weeks for disaster relief in northern Japan, including a strategy for supporting economic recovery in devastated communities there.²⁰

These episodes were important, says Carson, “because it said people saw us as being an international actor to help them get things done.” Other partners who were part of the global diaspora community in Silicon Valley wanted to support education or health care in their country of origin. Thus, SVCF had to find a way to engage effectively and appropriately in those situations as well. That presented new challenges, particularly in countries with different laws and regulatory regimes than those of Western, developed nations.

“When our international grants started to increase,” says Carson, “people could say, okay, we’re making gifts to the UK and Germany. But then we were making grants to countries in Africa. ... there



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was a fear. First it's 'should we be doing it?' But then once you start to do it, that's complicated stuff." Sally Osberg of the Skoll Foundation, which includes a supporting organization at SVCF, spells out some of those complications: "There are the logistics of expenditure responsibility and different legal requirements, currency challenges, and all kinds of pressures on civil society in places like India and parts of Africa. Beyond the logistical obstacles, one must consider the range of issues, from humanitarian relief at one end, which is the easiest money to get out the door, to the kinds of systemic change work Skoll supports, which are designed to catalyze and drive sustainable change from the ground up." Board and staff leadership of SVCF began to think through what might be their most valuable contribution short of setting up shop in international locations.

In keeping with the values of being a learning institution, collaborating, creating trust, and finding a way to say 'yes,' SVCF tried first to better understand the areas where donors wanted it to help them give. Staff began to explore supporting donors to India, for example, by first producing a report on Indian community philanthropy both in Silicon Valley and to India. COO/CFO Paul Velaski notes that SVCF has "staff from all parts of the world." That helped SVCF practice cultural competence: "When we did site visits for some of our donors in India, one of our staff who is from that particular part of India" participated in the trip and helped navigate the local culture.

SVCF staff understood that they would need to approach international giving with cultural competence and humility: "We try to always be respectful of other cultures and other processes," says Carson. "I think for the most part we start out with, 'This is why we think this approach has merit, and here's the data.' It's not a Western approach or a non-Western approach. "It's not, 'This is the political way it works in the United States,' or 'This is how NGOs work in the United States.' It's culturally specific to why we think it could work for you."

Because international gifts come from donor-advised and corporate funds, and the donor-advisors generally recommend grants based on contacts they have in country, SVCF staff are not designing the strategy or originating the grants. But they draw on their corporate advisors or giving circle members, and have been establishing contacts on the ground through intermediary organizations, so program staff can work with the donor to ensure grants are thoughtful, respectful, and "do no harm." They also bring their own cultural competence and connections to the task. For example, Sangani cites the Global Fund for Women (where she worked before joining SVCF), local community foundations, and the Asia Foundation as advisors in SVCF's international grantmaking. SVCF is exploring relationships with community foundations in other countries to serve as project intermediaries and do the on-the-ground research. Velaski says often that SVCF staff has met staff from other countries at conferences, built connections through email and phone communications, and find "they want to facilitate money coming into organizations in their countries and find ways we can develop an ongoing relationship."

Engaging in Operational Learning

To support international giving, SVCF had to engage in operational learning as well. For example, Lea Rauscher, Vice President of Grants, Gifts and Compliance, is responsible for overseeing all gift and grant transactions processed by SVCF. That means that her department had to understand the rules in all countries where SVCF donor-advisors and corporate partners wanted to give, including not only vetting nearly 900 NGOs, but also learning how to process transactions in multiple currencies, including bitcoin. To do that effectively, SVCF compliance and grants management staff have specialized into domestic or international, and the international staff are building detailed knowledge of rules and issues on the ground in all the countries in which SVCF donors wish to give.



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As SVCF added corporate partners with multinational roots, those partners also could inform its explorations into communities and causes outside the US. Park notes that, over seven or eight years, the board's composition has evolved to reflect the way that SVCF has been becoming more global in outlook. For example, board member Wade Loo, a retired partner from KPMG, not only is involved locally with an organization in East Palo Alto that helps people in need find meaningful jobs, but also has worked in Beijing, Singapore, and Tokyo. Park himself has served as Chairman and CEO of SK Hynix, a leading semiconductor memory manufacturer based in Korea, and as managing director of H&Q Asia Pacific, an Asian private equity firm. Having board members whose experience and connections are global as well as local helps SVCF expand its vision of how to participate in the international community of its donor-advisors and corporate partners.

SVCF also has found partners on the ground in countries where its donor-advisors want to give. For example, in India, SVCF linked up with Guidestar India and its India Giving Network to vet organizations. The India Giving Network is dedicated to promoting transparency and accountability among Indian NGOs, and this partnership was an important step in promoting innovative development strategies. Sangani reports that members of the Donor Circle for Africa have supported the African Leadership Academy, a program to develop a network of future African leaders, to tap local expertise and inform their giving.

Building Its Capacity to Support Giving Globally

SVCF decided that it could add value to the field by collecting what it was learning through vetting possible grantee organizations in emerging economies. It offered guidance in regulations and customs, such as an October 2013 webinar to explain provisions of the Indian Companies Act of 2013, which had substantially changed the rules governing corporate social responsibility in India.

To support individual giving to nonprofits around the globe, SVCF launched a global database of almost 900 nongovernmental organizations that met stringent due diligence requirements, categorized according to 35 issue areas in 93 countries. (That database had grown to over 1,100 nonprofits in 2014, is searchable by name, category, and country, and is accessible to both SVCF participants and nonparticipants.) Through this portal, individuals can make gifts for any amount greater than \$100. Says Carson, "The global charity database, where we allow nonprofits and NGOs to be registered so that any individual in the United States can go online with a credit card, make a gift and not worry about whether it is a terrorist organization, get a tax deduction, and know that it's going for the cause that they care about, and the nonprofit knows that they will get that resource" was an important milestone in SVCF's ability to facilitate global giving.

SVCF also committed to serving aspiring philanthropists' interest in learning how they could give more effectively. It created giving circles where prospective donors could come together, learn together, and try to have greater impact together than if they gave individually; this enabled SVCF staff to inform their giving without actually directing it. It arranged site visits within Silicon Valley and field visits overseas, so donor-advisors could experience firsthand what the needs were.

This ability to support donors at whatever level they wish has helped SVCF build relationships and become a trusted partner. Jim Ducey, who co-founded the Donor Circle for Africa at SVCF, reflects that the donor circle has enabled him to move beyond "checkbook philanthropy" to become a donor with goals; to network with like-minded donors and connect others to the projects the giving circle supports; and to ensure that their gifts accomplish something tangible at the community level rather than being a "drop in the ocean" of a big international charity. SVCF staff connect donors with people working on the ground and ensure the projects they are interested in supporting are thoroughly vetted. They also steer donors who express an interest in a specific issue area to activities like the African or other giving circles, where they can explore issues more deeply.



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Taking Calculated Risks

The decision to make these changes posed certain risks for SVCF, but the organization's leaders embrace calculated risk as "the opportunity for success or failure," says Carson. For him as CEO, the risk lay in the possibility of "wasting resources or wasting time." But that risk could always be mitigated by the amount of research and planning undertaken. Because it does thorough advance preparation, when SVCF presents its proposal to potential supporters, "we are able to have charted a pathway that is still risky in terms of success, but we feel we've substantially lowered the risk because of what we've done."

Balancing Local and Global Giving and Needs

There was also a risk of pushback from local stakeholders, both from the smaller NGOs who no longer received regular annual grants as they had from Peninsula Community Foundation and Community Foundation Silicon Valley, and from donor-advisors who cared about issues that were no longer a focus. This was a risk the board members of the two parent foundations had foreseen as a predictable consequence of any kind of change. However, beginning to provide support for international giving waved a red flag for some in the local community, who felt local needs should come first. In 2014, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* reported, "Silicon Valley Community Foundation has been criticized for not giving enough to local causes. By contrast, nearly 85 percent of the Tulsa Community Foundation's grants are local."²¹ There was also a public relations challenge: SVCF had to communicate with those who saw "\$8 billion in assets" and did not understand that SVCF itself controlled only the \$10 million or so it distributed each year from unrestricted funds.

The only way to mitigate the risk of such criticism from the community is through respectfully listening to all perspectives, communicating with stakeholders, and offering transparency. Carson and his colleagues try to help the community understand how their discretionary giving is restricted by the size of their endowment, and that most of the funds they disburse are driven by the charitable interests of their unrestricted funds to local causes that are consistent with the five areas of focus, all of which represent important needs for disadvantaged populations in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Data from SVCF shows that, though international giving may receive a disproportionate amount of attention, most of the funds disbursed by SVCF are spent domestically within its region. In its 2015 annual report, SVCF reports that the lion's share of SVCF's giving, both locally and from its donor-advisors, focused on local, state, and US needs. Since 2008, SVCF has granted \$75 million through its discretionary grantmaking programs to support more than 500 local nonprofits. Even when adding in grants from donor-advised funds, whose recipients are selected not by SVCF but by the donor-advisors, 3 percent of grants disbursed by SVCF went to international charities; 44 percent went to charities in the Bay Area, 5 percent to charities in California outside the Bay Area, and 48 percent to US charities outside of California. Detailed information on giving and reports identifying needs and assessing impact are posted on SVCF's website.

More than Money

Moreover, SVCF is able to leverage its other roles as educator, convener, and matchmaker to help support those organizations and service providers to which it does not provide funds directly. It supports donor circles in areas such as the arts and the environment where it does not have programs. The donor circle for arts, for example, consistently gives approximately \$100,000 per year to support emerging artists and cultural institutions, including those that represent the cultural diversity of Silicon Valley. SVCF also helps nonprofits build their fundraising capacity through workshops. Moreover, SVCF has experimented with supporting nonprofit fundraising through an event called



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Silicon Valley Gives, which involves helping nonprofits expand their capacity for online solicitation and social media communications and then publicizing a giving day on which the public is urged to donate to those charities. Though SVCF has decided to recalibrate this program, for reasons that are discussed later, it raised approximately \$24 million over three years in this way for area nonprofits.

SVCF's special initiatives enable it to support organizations and causes that no longer received annual support under the new priorities. One example is Save the Bay, an organization that protects and restores the San Francisco Bay and San Joaquin Estuary and their watersheds. David Lewis, the long-time Executive Director, recalls that his organization had been funded by one of the parent foundations, and he had been part of SVCF's consultations with community organizations to set priorities. However, when the five programmatic areas were announced, his organization's Bay work was not a priority for support. He continued to meet regularly with the staff, including Carson, and kept them updated on Save the Bay's activities. In 2016, SVCF's environmental donor circle decided it wanted to be briefed on the issues facing the San Francisco Bay, and Lewis was invited to speak to the group about general issues and a ballot measure campaign his organization was leading with a regional coalition. The goal was a parcel tax in the nine-county area to generate revenue to restore wetlands around the Bay. Save the Bay received an almost immediate, substantial grant from the donor circle. SVCF chose to endorse the ballot measure and make a significant donation toward its passage, also hosting an educational event at their offices, providing social media support, lending Carson's personal endorsement to ballot materials, and "endorsing it with their brand."

SVCF has used its research and convening power to meet community needs in a number of ways:

- **Strengthening the Safety Net.** Beginning in 2008, it launched a campaign, Strengthen the Safety Net, raising \$3 million to meet basic needs for food and shelter in the region as the financial crisis deepened. It has continued to work to strengthen the local safety net in a variety of ways, partnering with San Mateo County in 2009 to provide safety net relief as well as exploring policy options to help the hungry. SVCF convened an Action Summit on Food and Shelter issues in 2008 that brought together civic and nonprofit leaders with policy makers to explore systems-level options to deal with hunger and homelessness in local communities. They found that regulatory barriers such as fingerprinting requirements prevented eligible applicants from applying for food stamps, and that the state was losing \$1 billion per year in federal nutrition assistance funds because of low participation rates. State legislation enacted in 2011 simplifies the application process and makes federal food aid more accessible to residents of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.
- **Disaster Preparedness.** Another initiative that benefited SVCF's local community was inspired by its Japanese tsunami relief work in 2011. The earthquake and resulting tsunami in Japan led to a voluntary evacuation order in San Mateo County that revealed how vulnerable the West Coast might be to a similar emergency. In 2012, SVCF commissioned an emergency preparedness report that assessed gaps in community readiness and recommended solutions ranging from training emergency response teams, to creating Spanish-language protocols, to ensuring funding for emergency supplies and shelters.
- **Encouraging Regional Solutions.** Velaski describes how SVCF's convening power has helped the region find solutions to problems that affect more than one county: "We have a regional meeting every year. ... The challenges we face in this community, from transportation to affordable housing, are not just a one-county issue. ... At last year's meeting [2015], we had city or county managers from San Mateo, Santa Clara, and San Francisco counties. That was the first time those three people had met. ... I think we're making the biggest impact just ... being able to bring folks [like that] together and begin the conversation."



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Supporting Corporate Social Responsibility

SVCF's support for corporate partners has created bold and innovative solutions to corporate social responsibility (CSR) needs. At the same time, it revolutionized SVCF's business model, providing countercyclical income that strengthened it during the economic downturn following 2008. Carson recalls that at the time, "Our fees were shrinking ... we had to deal with a very painful layoff, ... and that was defining for us." SVCF began to work more intentionally with corporations, and learned in the process "how to say, it's not about us. ... We moved to a brand that fits comfortably in partnership with some of the major corporate brands of the world, in true partnership." As those partnerships have moved toward providing program design and advice, SVCF increasingly sees alignment between its CSR support and its mission.

At the time of the merger, SVCF inherited a small number of corporate donor-advised funds from its parent foundations. The number of its corporate partnerships has grown dramatically: SVCF now lists nearly 100 corporate partners and manages \$52 million in corporate-advised funds. It has quickly become a place where corporations can turn for support in designing, implementing, and operating a corporate giving program. These services take a variety of forms. SVCF manages corporate-advised funds; helps employers engage their employees in charitable programs, such as workplace giving or volunteer activities; and offers customized services. SVCF staff have had to expand their specialized expertise in tax, finance, and legal issues and in programmatic areas, such as immigration, the social safety net, and education.

Today SVCF's corporate partners include such recognizable Silicon Valley names as Cisco, PayPal, eBay, Dell, Hewlett Packard, and many others. SVCF provides its corporate partners with a variety of services, from partnering to manage special projects, to organizing employee giving and matching programs, to seeking their voice in support of public policy initiatives, such as the Math Misplacement campaign. According to Carson, these relationships began in part because post-2008 SVCF needed a source of revenue that was countercyclical, and a fee-for-service relationship with corporations was one way to meet that need. Yet over ten years those relationships have grown into important partnerships that expand SVCF's range in ways that can also serve its social mission.

Maeve Miccio, SVCF's former Vice President of Corporate Social Responsibility and current Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, Eastern Region, describes how, over a relatively short time frame, SVCF has gone from merely facilitating grants administration to "more of a partnership, ... providing counsel on how to structure [our corporate] program, what other companies are doing, how could we enhance [our program], what are best practices, what should I be thinking about, so really more of a deeper engagement." As some corporate partners have eliminated in-house management of CSR in the interests of cost containment, SVCF has developed its capacity to offer "a contractor role" to manage it for them. Their nonprofit status makes them competitive pricewise, and their specialized knowledge and ability to vet applicants have been an important added value for corporate partners. As more of those partners are multinational, SVCF has expanded its ability to provide that service globally as well.

Evolving CSR Relationships

SVCF's long-term relationship with the eBay Foundation offers an example of how SVCF's ability to serve as a partner for corporate philanthropy has evolved. The corporate philanthropy of eBay had begun in 1998, as a donor-advised fund of Community Foundation Silicon Valley. eBay's founders built philanthropy into their decision making early, setting aside a block of pre-IPO eBay stock that was then valued at \$100,000 and placing it in a charitable fund at SVCF. That stock was later sold by SVCF for \$40 million and became the basis for the eBay Foundation.²² This approach



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pioneered a model that has become more formal in the sector—tech corporation leaders have launched a Pledge 1% movement similar to the Giving Pledge championed by Warren Buffet and Bill Gates.²³ According to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, in December 2015, SVCF was “working with 20 companies that have agreed to donate equity or closely held stock to charitable vehicles.”²⁴

When Amy Millington, now the President of eBay Foundation, joined eBay, she recalls that, while there was an employee committee that directed giving to local causes, “there wasn’t a lot of direction or focus.” Jeff Skoll, the first President of eBay, wanted to see that change, so the eBay philanthropy took on a new form and relationship with its community foundation host. Rather than being a donor-advised fund, it became a supporting organization, established a separate board within the CFSV structure to make giving decisions, and was actually housed within the foundation. By 2002, CFSV had four such dot-com funds.²⁵

In 2008-9 the eBay Foundation moved to its corporate headquarters but continued to keep its funds and back-office operations with SVCF. Throughout these changes, says Millington, “we’ve continued to be really closely connected with the community foundation. ... They provide all the back-end accounting for our private foundation and all of our investments are commingled; they’re part of the community foundation’s assets. We do the vast majority of our grantmaking through a corporate advised fund.”

Millington sees great added value in this model: In addition to supporting corporate giving, including employee-directed grantmaking and employee matching grants, SVCF’s convenings create partnerships and shared learning for the eBay Foundation. She recalls meetings organized by SVCF staff where several supporters of an organization were able to have in-depth conversations with its executive director at the same time. She sees SVCF as “an enabler, a connector, ... [someone we rely on] for their expertise, a deep wealth of knowledge ... on particular elements of our grantmaking.” In addition to that value to corporate partners, she says, SVCF is “an anchor for this community... highlighting some of the most pressing local issues” as well as having the expertise to help its donor partners have impact around the globe.

Peter Tavernise, who leads one of the corporate giving programs at Cisco, has also found SVCF’s corporate giving staff to be invaluable partners, and the organization’s research and background understanding of community needs to be an important resource: “When I moved here [from a Cisco program in another state], part of what helped me get my feet under me included their meticulous research and reporting. Specifically, ... every five years they did a survey of local needs versus where local institutional giving was being invested.” That kind of information enabled Cisco to put its giving in context of that wider picture, and decide where its corporate giving would have the greatest impact, aligned with Cisco’s giving mission. With the average tenure of a corporate employee in the Bay Area being less than five years, Tavernise notes, SVCF staff are a critical repository of information about the community.

In addition to managing corporate advised funds, SVCF has grown its ability to help its corporate partners expand employee giving, managing matching programs and other programs designed to encourage giving. Its argument, set forth in a 2015 guide to corporate social responsibility for startups, is that a sense of social purpose is good for companies, building goodwill in customers and loyalty in employees.²⁶ It has experimented with ways to meet those needs—for example, from 2013 to 2016, it partnered with YourCause and offered that service to its corporate partners. YourCause, a Texas-based startup, has developed software that helps individuals search for causes that can make good use of their time, money, and other contributions.



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Stepping into a New Role: Policy Advocacy for Social Change

SVCF has sought to go beyond direct giving and donor advice to facilitate systemic social change through policy advocacy, another area in which it is breaking new ground as a community foundation. Founding board members of SVCF agree that an important and path-breaking role for SVCF has been to actively engage in policy change and advocacy.

As with international giving, this new direction for SVCF was driven and shaped by its core values. And, as with international giving, it is not typically a role with which community foundations, or even many private foundations, have been comfortable. But public policy change stood front and center in SVCF's founding public document, *Vision for a New Community Foundation*, which said that a key contribution for the new community foundation would be "Initiating policy discussions on the county, state, and national level."

They have really used their expertise, their knowledge. It goes way beyond grant-making. Their ability to act as a convener, the work that they are now doing in the policy space around advocacy—it's really a grantmaking-plus model.

—Amy Millington,
eBay Foundation

Embracing the Risk of Policy Advocacy

SVCF's leaders agreed that achieving some of their goals for the communities they served would require them to tackle policy change. But those who were there early on recall that the board, which had chosen to take on policy change for greater impact, did not anticipate how much negative feedback the new directions would receive.

Rather than applauding them for their courage, grantees, stakeholders, and donors asked why SVCF was deserting the community. It was not an easy time. However, Eleanor Clement Glass, whose title was then Chief Giving and Donor Engagement Officer for the first round of grants, recalled that SVCF was able to show quick returns from its early policy work. During the recession, SVCF supplemented \$5.8 million in grants to safety net organizations with a Food and Shelter Summit that led to advocacy for legislative changes to criteria to qualify for food stamps. Another early policy initiative grew out of SVCF's direct support to schools providing math instruction to very low-income students. Finding that the improved math scores alone weren't altering those students' outcomes, SVCF sought to change math placement rules for less advantaged but academically prepared middle-school students. The new approach paid off, enabling those students to look forward to a different future.

Where some nonprofit managers might prefer to have SVCF go back to the days of smaller unrestricted grants, Luisa Buada, who runs a community health care agency, also sees value in its advocacy on systemic issues. Buada says, "Unless there's a regional approach and a voice out there in the wilderness trying to bring attention to these issues, then every little nonprofit is trying to fight this battle on their own. [SVCF is] trying to make long-term larger investments in changing the way services are delivered that could have an impact mainly on children coming out of poverty, families coming out of poverty." That can have a longer-term, more lasting impact than simply funding agencies that provide direct services to relatively small populations.



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Greg Avis says that when the SVCF board recruited Carson, “He was known in Minneapolis for being progressive, and very interested in public policy, and very interested in programming. And, frankly, that’s what we wanted, because neither of the two organizations were very progressive and had not dabbled in public policy.” That caused some challenges at first with the donor-advisors: “I think some donors said, ‘Oh geez, here’s the new kid on the block; he’s more interested in policy and in his agenda than taking my phone calls.’” There were concerns that SVCF might lose some of its donor-advised funds, though ultimately only one donor left; a corporate donor also left and then later returned.

Caretha Coleman, who co-chaired the search committee and participated in the transition process, also recalls that the board and donors were ambivalent: “We talked to Emmett about social justice. As it turned out, one of the first activities that Emmett got involved in was the march [addressing youth violence] in East Palo Alto, a very underserved part of our community here. When some of the donors and constituents heard that, they’re like, ‘Wait. We’re not getting involved in these kinds of activist movements.’” Real change was hard: “We all conceptually agreed that we wanted to do the merger, and that would require real change. But when people talk about needing to change, what you internalize first is third person. It’s not first person. It’s always, ‘*That* needs to change; or *they* need to change.’ But internalizing in real time that *I* need to change, that’s a whole different deal.” Coleman continues, “We had to go through a deliberate process to make that happen. But change takes courage. And we’re all better off because we did have to change.”

Save the Bay’s David Lewis speculates that SVCF’s leadership may need to walk a fine line between getting out in front on social change issues and letting its donors take the lead: “There are some very prominent donors and donor-advisors to the community foundation. And ... SVCF may choose to take a lower profile on some things, not outshine the donors. On the other hand, some donors might be attracted to an institution that’s taking a leading role on some cutting-edge issues. I have huge respect for Emmett and the staff and the board trying to feel that out.”

Making the Move toward Policy

To mitigate some of the challenges posed by the cultural change Carson was leading, particularly the shift toward policy engagement, board members recall that several things had to happen:

- **Ensuring capacity to meet stakeholders’ needs.** Greg Avis credits staffing changes for helping donors in particular accept the new style of engagement. “We had to bulk up the staff. There was a fantastic donor relations person, Leigh Stilwell, and she was able to staff that [function].” Vera Bennett thought the capacity issue went beyond donor relations: “You have to think about how far you stretch your staff, which I think was always a concern we had as we were growing.” As SVCF continues to grow, that has held true, and continues to hold true, for all operational staff.
- **Making adjustments and clearer communications on both sides.** Avis also believes that Carson had to adjust. SVCF had a different culture than the Minneapolis Foundation, which had had more unrestricted funding, and Carson had to understand his new colleagues, particularly the donors. “He came to realize [it was a different place, where the donors felt it was their money],” though “thank goodness, he never abandoned his commitment to social change and public policy change.” At first, board members held listening sessions with stakeholders and reported the criticisms they heard back to Carson. To create transparency and improve communications, “We created a donor council where donors could come every quarter or every six months, meet with senior staff, meet with board members, and talk about their issues and things that concerned them. I think something similar was done on the program side.” He adds, “The board’s outreach and Emmett’s outreach helped. People just said, ‘Okay, we’ll give this some time.’”



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- **Educating partners about how policy change could make a significant difference.** Silicon Valley is often described as a place where wealth and poverty exist side by side, but where the poverty tends to be invisible to those in the wealthy tech industry. One interviewee said, "One of the biggest gaps is how many people in Silicon Valley don't realize that the people who clean their office at night when they're gone are the people that they should be helping to support." As SVCF dipped a toe into the water on policy, its board and donors learned about the needs of less wealthy people in the community and how SVCF could have impact as a convener and educator. Former Board Chair Park, recalling SVCF's first foray into advocacy on regulating the payday loan industry, says, "Our board is invited to participate and understand what struggles low- or moderate- income families have, and we're amazed at what we learn in our backyard."

Erica Wood describes the role SVCF can play in advancing policy initiatives: "[With board approval that a particular policy opportunity is important], we can make a financial contribution to a campaign that's supporting a policy initiative. We can have a seat at the leadership table that's steering the campaign. We can communicate and urge other influentials and the public to take a position, have information on our website. ... And we're not doing these things alone; we're in coalition with other actors." SVCF has built its capacity to work in this arena by retaining a lobbying group in Sacramento and creating a staff position, Special Advisor to the President for Public Policy, to liaise with local and state officials.

This is an area where SVCF is still learning, believes Sid Espinosa of Microsoft. He says, "I think there's a lot of debate about where ... [SVCF] should be. There are obviously legal parameters, but there's a lot of debate about what advocacy and policymaking roles foundations should have over time. ... And I think that's something SVCF is thinking about and struggling with."

Lessons from Policy Advocacy

By all accounts, SVCF's initial forays into policy advocacy were highly successful. Interviewees mentioned two examples in particular. The first was an effort to curb the worst excesses of the payday loan industry. The second was the campaign to change placement rules that led to a disproportionate number of lower-income students, primarily students of color, having to repeat algebra despite strong GPAs and test scores. This made it impossible for them to complete enough sequential math courses in high school to apply to selective four-year colleges, depressing their career prospects and earning ability for life. In each case, SVCF's strategy was the same: research the topic and produce a report including data, a description of the regulatory regime, and other points of engagement with the issue; present options and make recommendations; and then convene or engage with the appropriate decision makers.

The payday loan campaign began in 2009, when SVCF commissioned the Public Interest Law Firm of the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley to produce a report on the status of the industry and attempts to rein in the worst abuses. This was in the wake of the 2007 financial crisis, and SVCF staff had heard from their direct-service-agency grantees that payday loans were worsening the financial problems of their clients. Park recalls the board's support when "we focused on payday lending and [learned] how much these low-income-level people depend on unbearably high-interest-rate [loans], and that led us to push the legislative agenda in Sacramento."

Through convening, SVCF highlighted the problem and facilitated efforts led by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco to explore alternative models of credit for lower-income borrowers. Through grantmaking, it supported successful efforts to enact a local moratorium on payday lenders in



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California cities. Through advocacy, it engaged in conversations to support statewide legislation that created a pilot program offering alternative credit options for low-income borrowers.

In the campaign to reform math placement policies that were holding back students of color, SVCF also produced a well-researched report, and then worked closely with State Senator Holly Mitchell as a legislative solution was sought. They co-convened a hearing for the state's Legislative Black Caucus to hear testimony about the issue. Ultimately, Governor Jerry Brown signed into law a bill correcting the problem, and SVCF provided education for school district leadership and others working to implement the new requirements.

Senator Mitchell praised SVCF's ability to partner with policy decision makers effectively: "Often what happens is foundations live in their world, do what they consider to be policy research, publish, and then I think assume through osmosis it will translate into policy." That was not what happened with SVCF. Mitchell went on to say, "My experience has been that they really understand our role as policymakers. And we've worked very well in terms of identifying a problem, finding mutual agreement on what we can do about it, and we went forward. The hearing [sponsored by the Legislative Black Caucus] was just phenomenal. ... I had had conversations with [SVCF], had seen the report as chair, and had talked about it with my colleagues. But it was very helpful for my colleagues to sit through a hearing, hear testimony, see the data presented, hear from witnesses who talked about real-life applications, to have caucus members say, 'Wait a minute, I think that happened to me.'"

SVCF, she noted, had already presented its findings to individual school districts; some were changing their policy, and SVCF was considering lawsuits against others. But Mitchell determined a legislative remedy was possible, and she agreed to sponsor a bill. SVCF showed a sophisticated understanding of how it could help, writing and soliciting letters of support, reviewing policy language, and attending hearings and meetings of organizations like the Association of School Superintendents. What was most helpful, Mitchell felt, was that SVCF understood the process of legislating, and that its role was not to provide a smart policy answer and walk away, but to sit patiently in waiting rooms, to make phone calls when appropriate, and to be patient with the process. An ancillary benefit, she thought, was building the relationships and creating a conversation "about race and perception and bias in a very tangible, meaningful way, but in a way that people kind of got it."

More local policymakers expressed appreciation for how SVCF partners with them. San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo describes working closely with SVCF staff, including Carson and current policy advisor Gina Dalma, on issues such as education and reading. He says, "Across those and several other initiatives, we benefited enormously from SVCF's expertise, its relationships with key stakeholders, and, in some cases, its financial resources. I'm grateful for the incredible partnership that we've developed with the SVCF team." Like Mitchell, he understands the challenges of partnering with bureaucracies and elected officials and is grateful for SVCF's willingness to play that role. Coming into office at a time when San Jose was "licking its wounds" after the recession, Liccardo determined he needed to reach outside City Hall to create new alliances to meet the community's needs, and SVCF was one of the first partners he thought of.

John Maltbie, San Mateo County Manager, appreciates how SVCF has identified long-term systemic issues that must be dealt with to improve social justice in Silicon Valley, and he values SVCF's ability to leverage federal matches for county funds. But he believes SVCF has brought very little local funding to those efforts and wishes it could persuade its donors to do more. He is concerned that pressing local issues—such as affordable housing and related poverty issues, which his office has flagged as



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far and away the most urgent need for the region—are being overlooked, or that SVCF hasn’t taken the long view, investing in three-year initiatives that aren’t large enough or sustained enough to achieve meaningful change.

Bridging the Regional Policy Divide

John M. Sobrato, a former Board Chair who also works with SVCF through a donor-advised fund, believes that local and state governments have been unable to address the needs of the Silicon Valley region in terms of transportation, education, housing, and similar issues, “so it may take a coalition of groups convened by the community foundation to take the lead on addressing regional problems as opposed to our local legislature.” The merger strengthened SVCF’s capacity to do that: “I think the problems we need to take on are regional in nature, and so the larger the scope of [SVCF] the better advocacy platform it will have.” The Packard Foundation’s Larson agrees: “If they could set the table for really moving progress on issues like housing, or housing plus transportation, by setting the table regionally to provide the place where people come together, and talk and move to action on such issues—I [would] applaud that.”

Since 2008, SVCF has sought to engage some of those multijurisdictional issues. Education is an area in which SVCF has been active as a convener, funder, and partner, including in early childhood education, seeking to harmonize policies across the two counties’ 54 school districts, and seeking to improve educational opportunities and job training for adults through the community college system.

SVCF also engaged in regional planning and visioning exercises around transportation and land use. The goal of those exercises was to ensure that the community can create its vision for higher-density development that maintains community character, meets housing and transportation needs, and supports vibrant, walkable neighborhoods that are available and accessible to all in the region. SVCF particularly wanted lower-income residents, including residents of color and recent immigrants, to have a voice in such exercises. To that end, it made available a computer visualization tool, YouChoose, that some participants argued steered outcomes toward the compact development desired by planners.²⁷ Public hearings and visioning sessions generated unanticipated controversy when Tea Party members and property rights advocates offered organized disruption. Their goal, expressed by an East Bay Tea Party blogger, was “to defeat the Delphi Technique used ... to force their expensive and anti-property rights Agenda 21/ Sustainable Development plans on an unwilling public.”²⁸ In retrospect, regional planners believe they should not have co-convened with a land-use advocacy organization, Green-Belt Alliance, and that there may be some truth to opponents’ claims that planning processes lack transparency and opportunities for different voices to be heard. The planning profession believes different formats will be necessary to get genuine public input into regional visioning in the future. It is also worth noting that one county official felt that SVCF had exited its transportation and planning involvement abruptly and without an adequate handoff.

Several interviewees cautioned that, while SVCF’s initial forays into policy advocacy have been successful and have created an appetite to do more, the two initiatives cited most often were aimed at issues that were not particularly contentious. Once public awareness had been created, there was little support for the payday loan industry or for the discriminatory math placement practices. SVCF’s communications on the issues focused on fairness and—crucial to gaining the support of business groups on the Math Misplacement issue—on how the issue was limiting the pipeline of young people prepared for STEM jobs.



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There are risks to engaging in policy advocacy around more controversial issues, Sobrato points out, which SVCF leadership is fully aware of and embraces. There is always a risk of stepping over legal boundaries, though SVCF is aware of them and careful to act appropriately. The greater risk is that donors will leave a community foundation that engages with policy issues that are controversial or that the donor opposes. Sobrato cautions, "If [SVCF is] going to be effective, they will have to take controversial positions, and by the very nature of taking a controversial position there are going to be customers of [SVCF] on both sides of the issue, and thus the potential to lose donors over those positions. Immigration reform, Prop 13, housing/growth—there is no shortage of critical issues that need to be addressed in our community." Thinking about how to moderate those risks will be a challenge for SVCF as it engages more in the policy arena.

CHAPTER III

SVCF AS A DELIBERATE LEADER



Without being familiar with the concept, the leaders of Community Foundation Silicon Valley, Peninsula Community Foundation, and the combined Silicon Valley Community Foundation that succeeded them, were acting as Deliberate Leaders. Deliberate Leadership is a response to the challenges posed by Wicked Problems. It is a framework for leaders to use in tackling problems with no easy consensus or solution. Each characteristic of Deliberate Leadership is based on proven business and social sector theory and practice. They are recognized leadership strategies used in creating lasting positive change within companies and organizations and in the lives of people most affected by the consequences of Wicked Problems.

The Deliberate Leader does not approach a complex problem as a commander who has to take charge or as an expert who has all the answers. Deliberate Leaders first assess the scope of the problem and try to understand the context and the range of stakeholders engaged with some aspect of that problem; then take action with partners,



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but always carefully assessing the consequences, intended and unintended, of their actions; and, finally, reflect candidly on what is being learned, admit what is not working, and, if necessary, recalibrate. Seven key characteristics are essential to this kind of leadership:

- **Courage**—to embrace risk and live with the ambiguity. Deliberate Leaders recognize that simple solutions are insufficient to address complex challenges. They also realize that risk is inherent in Wicked Problems; solutions must be tried, tested, and allowed to evolve.
- **Collaboration**—to seek out and listen to divergent viewpoints. Deliberate Leaders recognize that building collaborative solutions may be slow and uncomfortable, but essential to understanding options, gaining new knowledge, and building powerful solutions.
- **Community**—to build solutions together from the ground up. Deliberate Leaders recognize that answers to tough issues may already reside in Positive Deviants, community members who do things a little differently from their neighbors and find solutions others can emulate. They seek uncommon answers to difficult solutions and put people at the center of decision-making.
- **Candor**—to speak the truth about what is working and what isn't. Deliberate Leaders embrace failure and success equally—to manage risk and allow for recalibration and innovation.
- **Creativity**—to imagine a new future and to move beyond the constraints of the past. Deliberate Leaders look for “big ideas” and evolving practices through scenarios that envision a different future.
- **Capital**—to examine how financial resources are invested and impact is analyzed.
- **Compassion**—to understand how empathy and partnership, not ego, impact the power dynamics within and surrounding an organization.

Deliberate Leaders exhibit these characteristics throughout a three-stage process of responding to a Wicked Problem. The three phases of Deliberate Leadership in addressing Wicked Problems are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Deliberate Leader Learning Process





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In the first stage, Deliberate Leaders explore the nature of the problem and of the community in which they will be working. They undertake this planning process with partners (including members of the affected community) to ensure the plan they develop reflects the needs and realities of the situation. They seek to understand and anticipate risks, threats, and opportunities, and they map stakeholders and partners so that they know who else is engaged in the same area or issue. Finally, knowing that in the complex world of Wicked Problems there are no easy answers and that mistakes will be made, they establish a learning framework to monitor results and guide them when it is time to adjust the program.

In the second phase, they act and at the same time assess progress, again in consultation with internal and external partners. Through communications, Deliberate Leaders seek to maintain alignment with internal and external stakeholders and create a safe space for telling the truth about what is and what is not working. They collect qualitative and quantitative data that can tell the story and guide them in the third phase of deep reflection. They also look closely at the nature of their partnerships—are they good partners with other stakeholders and with the community, listening to their perspective and looking for answers in unlikely places, or are they acting as powerful experts who have the answers and dominate the solution?

Finally, in phase three, Deliberate Leaders step back to reflect and recalibrate. They seek to learn from the data and stories that have been collected, and, if necessary, challenge basic assumptions and go back to the drawing board. They also strive for transparency and candor, sharing these lessons with partners and with the field.

Embracing Risk

In broadening their definition of what “community” means and what a community foundation’s role should be, the leaders of SVCF were taking some conscious risks, stepping outside of their comfort zone and looking beyond their immediate needs. Deliberate Leaders approach risk-taking as venture capitalists do, viewing expanded opportunity as the upside of risk.

As the discussion above demonstrates, the leaders of SVCF were very aware of the risks they faced, in undertaking the merger; in engaging directly in policy advocacy; and in expanding SVCF’s geography and its definition of community. But they thought the risks could be mitigated through consultation and listening to stakeholders, transparency and communications, and adapting. In looking back, the expanded opportunities to make a difference have clearly justified the risks to date. Continuing to face and understand risk can hopefully help SVCF make the most of future opportunities as they emerge.

Seeking Alignment, Inside and Out

One vital aspect of Deliberate Leadership—or of leadership for social change—is building alignment with internal and external stakeholders. That is a particular challenge in managing a community foundation, because the expectations and needs of donors may differ substantially from those of other stakeholders, particularly grant recipients.

SVCF has emphasized communications and alignment since its inception, and continually adjusts its practices in response to requests for more or different kinds of communication. Meetings to create alignment and share information are a constant theme of interviewees, both internal and external. Mari Ellen Loijens notes, “There is enormous cross-functional communication all the time about all sorts of things. ... One of the hallmarks of our culture is how collaborative it is.” Staff meet regularly to ensure internal communications and to overcome the risk of working within silos. Program and operations staff meet so that each can understand the challenges facing the others and work as a team.



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Externally, there is a separate program area, Community Impact, that focuses on local needs. SVCF staff meet regularly with stakeholder groups from the community to get input into strategic planning and to get feedback from them on the community's perspective. Donor experience and donor relations staff meet with the donors at regular intervals.

Interviewees note that Carson leads like a corporate manager, with clear goals and expectations, but that he listens to all perspectives and seeks to facilitate candid communications within and without. Greg Gallo, an early board member, comments, "The way he manages is he gets his groups together, his committee of the board, or his staff people, and you work together to create, see what the goals are ... and then you work through the next level at the staff level. And then he pushes forward on that thing. He takes a lot of input, talks to the community a lot, changes things a lot. So he listens, but he's got opinions, and he's a leader."

This approach has been a constant with SVCF since Carson came on board. In the early days following the merger, leadership endorsed a more focused approach to giving in a few priority areas. Numerous interviewees report that this approach caused some pushback at first, but that, in general, stakeholders appreciate the increased focus and effectiveness. This growing acceptance has been facilitated in part by the results, but even more importantly by SVCF's commitment to transparency and building trust with its stakeholders.

Communications and Trust

Manuel Santamaria explains the process by which SVCF develops its initiatives, solicits community input, and is able to facilitate collaboration and strategic partnerships. SVCF's process, "which we do almost all the time, is take a look at what are the most pressing issues based on reports, indicators of X, Y, and Z that are out in the community, and data from different sources, and really comb that and come up with what's the niche for our foundation."

Input from stakeholders is key. To get it, establishing trust is important, but so is a quality Santamaria calls 'stamina.' Trust, says Santamaria, is building the relationships so you can sit down and talk about community needs with the stakeholders who experience them and with those who can do something differently. "Stamina means staying with it, researching, learning, talking about it, and also investing dollars in it, and bringing others to the table." These initiatives, says Santamaria, can take years to develop, from seeing a need to having the conversations—in the case of SVCF's adult education initiative focused on community colleges, it took "at least eight months of just having the conversations" before starting to build partnerships and create a plan. But because a community foundation is there in perpetuity, it can stay with the issue "through the ups and downs." This ability to be part of the community for the long haul enables it to provide value that goes beyond grantmaking, to being a trusted partner, convener, and collaborator, and an advocate without biases beyond 'the common good.'

Sourcing Ideas through Engagement and Listening

Where does SVCF get its ideas? Some come from donor-advisors, some from other reports or information in the community. For example, the payday lending initiative was inspired by reports from service providers that the exorbitant interest rates of payday lenders were deepening the impacts of the financial crisis. The Math Misplacement initiative was triggered by a complaint from grantees working to improve math instruction for less advantaged middle schoolers. They were finding that, based on GPAs and standardized achievement tests, they were effective at delivering mathematics content and instruction. But, reports Erica Wood, "We were hearing anecdotally from our grantees when it came time to assess our impact, 'We feel like we're doing everything right."



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And ... we're seeing kids who have been successful in their algebra class being held back and made to repeat it again when they go on to the 9th grade." That observation was confirmed by a report by the Noyce Foundation, a local funder,²⁹ and additional research commissioned by the community foundation confirmed it was a large-scale problem. Wood reports that SVCF's research "enabled us to look at a number of school districts up and down the State of California. ... The data set had 24,000 students. And, lo and behold, the same patterns kept showing up." SVCF began to explore "math misplacement" as an issue and, ultimately, launched an initiative to raise awareness of and change placement policies.

Sometimes, the information comes from just being aware of the community of which a foundation is a part. Santamaria describes Carson's noticing from the windows of his office that the street adjacent to SVCF had become "home" to a set of RVs where homeless families were living. He called Santamaria into his office and asked, "What are you doing about homelessness?" This question launched another set of explorations for SVCF.

Santamaria illustrates how taking the long view shaped SVCF's engagement in adult education through community colleges. The challenge, he recalls, was, "How do you bring together systems that haven't worked together to actually think about even working together? So what we've got to promise was that my vice president of instruction or the department head will work with you guys to actually bring together adult schools, community colleges, and community-based organizations that are working in the space to plan. That was probably about eight months of just conversations and talking. And it's led to some very interesting strategic partnerships in which we were ahead by four or five years."

He goes on, "We give out grants and we bring folks together as learning cohorts. Led by the program officer, we bring them together three, four times a year for three hours or so to talk about the strategy. In the beginning it was about money. But now it is about thinking about the future. ... One of the most important things that I think has happened is that the providers are looking at a seamless way to actually help a student, when they come in through whatever door they come into, get access to the courses, a pathway, and support so that they can get out into the workforce a much better prepared individual in a faster time." These partnerships could not happen without the patient investment of time and trust from SVCF.

Partnering with Candor and Compassion

Before launching a venture, Deliberate Leaders seek to map and understand the lay of the land, identify partners and potential collaborators, and look for wisdom wherever it may be found. That means keeping the ultimate purpose—for SVCF, the beneficiaries of its efforts—firmly in mind, listening with humility, and keeping lines of communication open. In particular, it is important to understand efforts on the ground and to listen to the community's understanding of its own needs and how they might be addressed. In the past, social change agents have made mistakes and even caused unintentional harm by not fully understanding the context into which they were entering. In 2010, *Forbes* magazine reported that "making decisions based on political or media pressure, rather than

on a comprehensive survey of needs—as donors admitted to doing in post-tsunami evaluations [in Thailand]—leads to waste. Aid can end up being driven by supply: In post-tsunami Thailand, funding boats was popular among donors, so boats were supplied, without regard for how many boats and which kind of boats were actually needed."³⁰



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Another example is the effort, once viewed as a “magic bullet,” to fight malaria in Africa by distributing free insecticide-impregnated mosquito nets. Communities used them for other purposes, including as dragnets to fish in smaller lakes, thereby destroying local fisheries and fertile ecosystems.³¹ Unfortunately, while locals knew this was happening, the international public health community and donors were slower to discover the unintended harm.

Mapping Stakeholders for People-centered Grantmaking

By all accounts, SVCF has been an organization that takes time to understand the landscape in which it is operating, locally and globally. When it launched its first programming following the merger in 2008, a series of community listening events allowed it to map and understand existing activities and needs. These early efforts were led by Eleanor Clement Glass, then Chief Giving, Donor Experience and Engagement Officer. The planning process, as Steven LaFrance, a consultant to SVCF as well as to both of its parent foundations, describes it, was long and thorough, representing the best practices of community outreach at a time before the expansion of social media. While the priorities and guidelines developed would only apply to the discretionary grantmaking of SVCF, the information gathered could also be shared with donor-advisors and corporate partners.

Working with SVCF, LaFrance and his team developed a strategy to get community input. Working in partnership with staff of the newly merged community foundation, they framed eight areas of community need, including topics such as health, education, food security, and immigration. Community leaders, including civic and nonprofit leaders, public officials, subject matter experts, and colleague funders were invited to a series of community conversations to discuss the nature of the problems, what role a community foundation might play in response, and what might be the ripest opportunities for impact. It then commissioned issue briefs on the areas and sought input from the broader community through email and surveys linked to its website. All this information fed into the final selection of five programmatic areas for grantmaking.

Moreover, periodically SVCF repeats the process of assessment and learning to ensure that it continues to understand the context in which it operates. When it evaluates grants and programs, where program staff have worked with evaluation consultants and grantees to map goals and benchmarks, grantees also provide feedback at six- and twelve-month intervals. Staff, evaluators, and grantees work together to understand what is working and whether and how the landscape is changing. When it evaluates strategic initiatives, such as SVCF’s initiative to support the implementation of Common Core standards, there is a deeper partnership with grantees, with monthly meetings to understand progress against goals and benchmarks.

LaFrance also notes that part of his role is to ensure a safe space for grantees and staff to talk openly about what is *not* going well. The culture of Silicon Valley, where failure means learning and if you fall you fall forward, does not penalize failure, and the culture of SVCF supports that. But because it isn’t always easy to admit things are going off track, the process is designed to encourage truth telling and learning from failure.

Part of what we like is to be able to hear all the different opinions and points of view...I think that’s part of the beauty of this foundation, that we’re willing to hear them out.

—Lianne Araki,
Silicon Valley Community Foundation



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As SVCF approaches its second decade, it is engaged in a top-to-bottom process of reflection and recalibrating its program priorities. The community outreach again is directed by LaFrance's team, using best practices that this time include the sophisticated use of social media to ensure thorough input from stakeholders.

SVCF staff find that candor and compassion are required in working with donor-advisors and corporate advisors, as well. SVCF's Vice President of Development, Rebecca Dupras, is responsible for bringing in new donors to SVCF. She explains that when new potential donors come to SVCF, they may or may not have a general idea of what they want to do with their assets, but often "they don't even really understand what all the possibilities are, which I think is what's great about our slogan, 'Possibilities Start Here,' being so on the nose with what happens here. They show up thinking sometimes they want to do X, and we tell them all the things they can do, and they're like, 'Oh wow, I didn't know I could do this and that and the other thing.' So giving them more options ... is gratifying, to them and to us."

On the other end, Lea Rauscher, Vice President of Grants, Gifts and Compliance, notes that it may be the donors' initial foray into philanthropy, or their thinking may be so strongly shaped by a business background that they don't understand how nonprofit grantees operate, and vice versa. Or they may want to do things that potential grantees aren't ready for or that won't work in context. Then, SVCF must find a way to gently say, "You may have overshot a bit," and help the donor understand other ways to get to the outcome they want to achieve.

Becoming a Learning Organization

As a trained academic and Ph.D., Carson declared from day one that SVCF would be a learning organization. Many interviewees highlighted its data-driven approach and the way that SVCF emphasized information gathering and learning. And the process is ongoing. This year, SVCF is revisiting all its strategies, asking its stakeholders and itself if it is still on the right track. It reminds one of Carson's entry into the SVCF leadership role, when he asked every employee of SVCF to reapply for their jobs. Says Santamaria, "We're doing the same process that we did when we first started the strategies—going into the community and asking what are the toughest problems, are we still working on the toughest problems?"

Challenging Assumptions through Double-Loop Learning

At SVCF, learning takes multiple paths:

- **Research and documentation.** With his academic background, Carson naturally gravitated to foundational research. Interviewees noted that when SVCF took on an issue, and as it sharpened its focus within an issue area, the initiative was always well researched. SVCF began its post-merger agenda setting by producing a series of issue briefs on such topics as community economic development and economic disparity in Silicon Valley, immigration needs, housing affordability and availability, and arts, and then identifying how it might best address the needs posed. It also makes a practice of issuing research briefs that may highlight emerging needs, such as its report on community disaster preparedness or its research on the implementation of Common Core standards in public schools. Often, these documents lay the groundwork for a special initiative in which SVCF works with partners to address a big concern. For example, The Big Lift, a collaboration with other foundations, local and federal governments, the United Way, Stanford Business School,



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and others, aimed to develop and assess comprehensive interventions to ensure all children in San Mateo County were school-ready for kindergarten and reading at grade level by third grade.

- **Evaluation.** The research and feedback process also shaped SVCF's ongoing evaluation and learning. As it established priorities for its own grantmaking, SVCF was informed by what had been learned through its initial priority-setting exercise. SVCF has broadened its sphere of activity both through special initiatives and in response to the requests of donor-advisors or corporate partners. In both cases, it is able to provide background and input about community needs because it receives information from partners with "boots on the ground."

Five years after the merger, SVCF also engaged in a deeper process of learning with grantees, seeking input on how the landscape had changed, whether the indicators and goals they were using were still the right ones, and how the work they were doing had changed or should change.

- **Deeper learning and recalibration.** One way in which SVCF has practiced Deliberate Leadership was in its ability to embrace and learn from failure, recalibrate, and adapt. As Carson describes it, "It's the culture about how to take something that could be a negative and make it into 'we're proud of it'; we exited professionally; and we take pride in the achievement of how we move out of it and deal with it." To that end, SVCF has created a set of steps for a successful "handoff," depicted in Figure 2.

Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From quiet reflection will come more effective action.

—Peter Drucker,
Management and Leadership
Consultant

Figure 2. Silicon Valley Community Foundation Guidelines for Good Handoffs





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Learning from Unanticipated Outcomes

As described, SVCF holds learning from failure and owning one's mistakes as a core value. One key initiative where failure—or at least, a different outcome than had been anticipated—led SVCF to rethink its approach was Silicon Valley Gives (SVGives). Designed to encourage giving to all groups, SVGives was a highly publicized day of giving to charity. On a designated day in May, using an online platform to connect individual givers to a charity of their choice, SVCF helped local nonprofits raise more than \$7 million per year in 2014, 2015, and 2016 for causes ranging from homelessness to breast cancer to STEM education. In addition to publicizing and hosting the event, SVCF offered training to help the participating nonprofits strengthen their social media and communications capacities.

By many measures, this initiative was highly successful. Nonprofits say they definitely benefited from the capacity building and also raised significant resources on SVGives Day. Yet some felt that in some cases they ended up competing for donor attention, and that some donors simply advanced their end-of-year giving to May. Says Luisa Buada, "It ended up burning out donors, so there's a lot of donor fatigue for that. I think it was instructive, but not sustainable. So they are not going to do it again." From SVCF's perspective, there were problems as well, says current Board Chair Sam Johnson: "SVGives Day was to be a one-year commitment; however, because of its success the first year, the board approved the program for a second and third year." But as negative feedback came from some of the nonprofits—and as it appeared that some donors didn't like paying the fees involved in using the giving intermediary—the board determined to take a break. SVCF is suspending the project for 2017 but seeking to understand how a 2.0 version might offer better results for the long-term sustainability of community NGOs.

Steven LaFrance recalls another instance of learning and recalibration, an iterative process that led to a different kind of handoff. As part of its immigrant assimilation work, SVCF was supporting the development of a website, CONEC.US, to connect volunteer lawyers to the needs of immigrants for legal services. Manuel Santamaria, who staffed the project, describes it as based on an earlier handoff:

The most successful example of something that we seeded and another foundation took on is called Citizenshipworks. And Citizenshipworks allows individuals who are able to naturalize to go into the platform and type in [their information] and it runs you through a set of questions and criteria and flags it if you have a criminal record, ... and then it works very closely with legal service providers.

That award-winning project was then adopted by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which invested in a 2.0 version that is now being used across the country. From that experience, SVCF went on to develop another web-based matching service, but the experience with that project offered a different kind of iterative learning.

SVCF designed the CONEC.US platform to connect legal services volunteers with organizations that offered legal services to immigrants, working closely with its partners to design the platform they said they wanted. However, they found that the service providers were not using it. As busy nonprofit managers, they "didn't have the inclination to learn something new ... They preferred the most basic of processes, which was pen and paper."



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SVCF went back to the drawing board, saying that they wanted to provide a tool that would help lawyers and legal services organizations connect to serve immigrants, but that the end users would need to help in designing it. “I’m not a lawyer and I’m not a service provider,” says Santamaria. “You need to help us out.”

This process of designing the project, diagnosing why it wasn’t being used, and going back to the work that had been started three or four years earlier finally led to “completely switching gears,” says Santamaria. A technical assistance provider SVCF had hired designed a simpler process on the side, and “folks really gravitated to that.” So SVCF is working with the stakeholders to produce a new model that they are enthusiastic about working with. And the next step is to build something that can be used not only in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, but throughout the Bay Area and in other states with large immigrant populations. Florida and Texas have already expressed interest, and the process of understanding where things went off track and patiently rebuilding is likely to pay dividends for the cause of immigrant integration.

Learning from Staff Collaborations

Internal feedback loops and creative learning from and across teams are built into SVCF operations. Lea Rauscher describes regular meetings to ensure everyone understands the needs and expectations of clients, in this case donor-advisors. Those needs may vary from the speed with which a payment is processed, to specialized reporting expectations, to helping each other understand what background the donor-advisor brings to his or her philanthropy. It is all part of getting to ‘yes’ successfully. “Because we are creative and fairly nontraditional,” says Rauscher, “I think we welcome lots of perspectives, because we like a creative approach. Sometimes traditional is not the best fit. Certainly deep knowledge is always appreciated and valued. But I think having such a variety of folks here makes us a very strong team. Together we can be creative. One person can’t solve everything. But if you collaborate well, it’s so much more powerful than what you can come up with on your own.”

As SVCF continues its extraordinary pace of growth, Mari Ellen Loijens sees physical and logistical challenges to the collaboration and a breaking down of silos to which the organization is committed. And if new staff come from smaller organizations where they may have had more direct input into decision making, they may have difficulty adjusting to an organization whose staff are in three different locations and, even if they come together, cannot fit into one room. She also notes, as Chief of Staff, that SVCF may be better at communicating internally about process failures and institutional failures and discussing solutions; the challenge that she sees is having those conversations one on one or department to department. These are issues that SVCF will need to address as it continues to grow.

Creative Uses of Capital for Impact

Like other philanthropic Deliberate Leaders, SVCF has recognized that it brings more to the table than money. Nevertheless, its status as the largest community foundation, and one of the largest philanthropic entities, in the world gives SVCF tremendous power to leverage the impact of those resources for social change. Even though it directs little of that money programmatically, its roles as a partner to financial advisory offices and an advisor and convener of donor circles enable it to influence the disbursement of grants not only locally, but also around the world.



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SVCF's Senior Vice President of Investments, Bert Feuss, describes how his role has evolved as part of SVCF's business model. After the merger, Feuss recalls, "Some of [our] professional advisors ... said your challenge over time is going to be how do you remain a nimble, responsive, boutique provider of what we know and value now as you grow." To meet the needs of partners for quick analysis, integrity, and decision making, "we moved from a traditional quarterly investment committee cycle and oversight that was not staff driven to more staff-driven inter-meeting communications and approval processes." SVCF designed segmented services where transaction costs varied based on the needs of donors. The next step was developing investment opportunities in response to the interests of donor-advisors and corporate partners that could also have a programmatic impact.

SVCF has developed a portfolio of program-related investments (PRIs) that are "an aggregation of donor interests," says Feuss. Most are foundations that lack the specialized in-house knowledge needed to handle PRIs, so they prefer to work through their donor-advised funds. But SVCF—in keeping with its motto that "Possibilities Start Here"—has been willing to make other tools available if clients request them. To that end, Feuss and his team have worked with partners on recoverable grants and loans to nonprofit organizations in need of capital, and helped clients decide what is the most appropriate tool for the need they wish to meet. "It's truly a service, it's not a product," says Feuss. "If we're a comprehensive center for philanthropy and this is of interest to our donors, we need to be able to support it" on a fee-for-service basis.

Impact investing, another tool for creative deployment of philanthropic capital for social ends, may be the next step, says Feuss. It hasn't been a tool that's been used in the community foundation setting because "most community foundations don't have staff with an investment or investment banking or banking credit analysis background. ... [we're] asking if it is really scalable and capacity-wise how we would handle it."

In the meantime, donors to SVCF can allocate funds to an investment pool, one of five SVCF offers, that is a socially responsible fund seeking to balance the rate of return with social impact. Since the merger, that fund has transitioned from one that was characterized by negative screens (no tobacco investments, for example) to one that uses positive screens to find productive investments that align with mission and values. Its goal is to have "truly double-bottom-line investments," including micro-credit, private equity, and World Bank bond funds. It also supports mission-related individual investments. One example in India: SVCF facilitated a \$25,000 investment in a for-profit waste recycling business that hires the poorest of the poor to collect, separate, and recycle trash. The investments team is exploring other options, such as community development financial institutions, which deliver responsible, affordable lending targeted to helping people with low income and assets join the economic mainstream.

As with many of SVCF's innovations, the challenges of creating such investments were followed by the challenge of communicating with stakeholders. Feuss reflects that "it was a difficult ... story to tell. ... Our development staff didn't know how to talk about it, or our engagement staff didn't know how to talk about it. It was [up] to me and my staff to try to explain what we were doing. And the donors who got it, loved it, and the nonprofits who were looking for something screened or aligned with their mission got it." It seems that even in its investment practices, SVCF is breaking new ground and finding the way to get to 'yes.'

SVCF has learned that sometimes it can be most effective by being willing to stay behind the scenes. As an example, Carson cites three instances in which SVCF managed philanthropic engagement for high-profile donors.



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- **Starbucks' Concert for Valor.** In November 2013, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz recognized Veterans Day by committing to a program to hire and support 10,000 veterans over the next five years. He also wrote a book about the contribution veterans have made that would be sold in Starbucks' stores, with the proceeds given to veterans' organizations and committed \$30 million from his family foundation to support veterans' transitions to civilian life. In 2014, he and HBO CEO Richard Plepler decided to honor Veterans Day and raise public awareness with a high-profile concert on the Washington Mall featuring Bruce Springsteen, Carrie Underwood, Rihanna, Eminem, Metallica, Zac Brown, Jennifer Hudson, and others (in 2015 Chase joined as a sponsor).³² Though the concert was free, concertgoers and viewers were given opportunities to donate to support veterans' needs. SVCF served as the philanthropic partner, receiving and disbursing funds. The operational capacity SVCF has developed enabled it to support a national effort to educate the public and encourage individual contributions to a cause that is not linked to a specific geography.
- **Startup: Education.** In 2010 Mark Zuckerberg met with then-Newark Mayor Cory Booker and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, and the three developed a plan to invest \$100 million from Zuckerberg in Newark's failing school system. The goal was to deploy the accumulated knowledge and best practices of school reformers around the country in one place and try to make it a model for school district turnaround.

The initiative was announced with great fanfare on *Oprah* and has since been the subject of many articles and a book by *Washington Post* journalist Dale Russakoff, arguing that it largely failed. Others counter that it is too soon to tell; that enormous progress has been made in Newark school graduation rates; that charter schools in Newark are outperforming district schools by an unusually wide margin thanks to this intervention; and that there are many lessons that can be applied elsewhere. Certainly, Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan are applying some of those lessons through their education philanthropy in the San Francisco Bay Area.

What the world didn't know, according to Carson, was that Zuckerberg had approached SVCF to administer the fund and staff the project. The request led to serious soul-searching and a watershed decision for SVCF: "Here's a donor who's clearly local, they live here, wanting to do something someplace else. And something big, something historic, something dramatic, and nobody would know we were even involved."

Carson said that led to the first serious discussion of how broadly the definition of 'community' should be interpreted: "Should we do this? Is it in our interests? What does that mean?" Carson went back to the founding documents for guidance. He and the board concluded that the two founding boards had envisioned that community could be local, regional, or global, and that SVCF would meet donors "where they are." The Zuckerberg gift was different in size and scope, but donor-advisors to SVCF and other community foundations made gifts outside their local community all the time. So SVCF served as the manager of the gift and remained behind the scenes.

Carson believes that experience provided a second valuable lesson for SVCF: the needs of the donor were at the center, and SVCF was content to be anonymous. The trust established in that relationship led Zuckerberg and Chan to later place a fund publicly with SVCF.



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Some observers raise questions about the Zuckerberg gift to Newark—community was not consulted, they argue, and the elected officials involved have since moved on, leaving the district without champions in government. This critique also raises questions for SVCF: to what extent can its advice to donor-advisors reflect its own values of social justice, listening to community, and “doing no harm?” How can a community foundation, working mostly through wealthy and powerful philanthropists, encourage them to go through the same processes of listening, reflecting, challenging themselves, and recalibrating that SVCF itself practices?

- **Paul Allen Ebola Challenge.** Carson believes the experience with Zuckerberg’s Newark initiative positioned SVCF to support a similar behind-the-scenes relationship with Seattle billionaire Paul Allen. Though he has multiple vehicles for philanthropy, Allen wanted to do a special initiative on the Ebola virus and launch a challenge to fight the disease. SVCF created a website and managed crowd funding for the program.

Says Carson, “Our learning [from these initiatives], going back to our values, is that we don’t have to be the lead. We can be as visible or invisible as the project requires. [This] has allowed us to attract people who aren’t local to our community, where they’ve looked for who can manage a large-scale project effectively but does not need to be in front.”

CHAPTER IV

FACING FUTURE CHALLENGES



As SVCF considers where it has come from and where it is going, it seems that the possibilities are only expanding. Nevertheless, its leaders are very aware of some of the challenges SVCF will face going forward.

The Innovation Conference SVCF convened and hosted in October 2016 brought together philanthropists to look head-on at how innovations in technology were changing the world for philanthropy and agents of social change.³³ As an institution headquartered in the tech capital of the world, SVCF has worked to stay abreast of those changes, building nonprofits' capacity to deploy advanced technologies in education, health care, immigrant integration, and other fields, as well as in its operations.

Where we are in assets, that's great. But I think about it more in the terms of the impact that we have and, sure, that is derived from the dollars. But the voice, the community interaction, the engagement of the community, the impact that we've had and what we'll be able to do in the future—that inspires me a lot. And I'm so very proud of that work.

—Caretha Coleman,
Former board member,
Peninsula Community Foundation
and Silicon Valley Community
Foundation



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But a dialogue that occurred in the final plenary, among the presidents of several national foundations, also pointed to key challenges for all philanthropy in the future that have more to do with values and leadership than with disruptive technologies. The foundation presidents described how the field must challenge *itself* to change, embracing diversity, learning to listen to community, taking the long view, and understanding the need to earn trust. Without those changes, philanthropy would lose touch with the disruptions of today's society and technology and, increasingly, its ability to be relevant in the future.

Ian Bird, President and CEO of the Community Foundations of Canada, put his organization's work with indigenous people in the context of the conference's theme. Instead of helping First Nations adapt to new technologies, Bird challenged philanthropy to change its own thinking and learn from a holistic view of the world that "has been in indigenous communities for thousands of years." He believes that if foundations can learn to listen to that ethic, they will find a way forward for the planet. However, he acknowledged that it will be "messy and confrontational," and that the philanthropic sector has to learn and change, "something we're not often good at."

Alberto Ibargüen, President and CEO of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, talked about how the Knight Foundation challenged itself to find and support innovative thinking, seeking ideas from people who were "mostly not on our radar." Ibargüen also described how Knight tries to imagine the future ten years out, sketching alternative scenarios in order to be prepared for a variety of social needs. He, too, reflected that "if you think about any change anywhere, it's always easy to tell somebody else what to do—we needed to reset our own internal mindset to be aligned with the growth and pace of technology."

Julia Stasch, President and CEO of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, noted that a loss of trust in institutions has permeated society both globally and in the United States. She pointed to how little faith citizens have in banks, law enforcement, and other institutions, and noted that philanthropy is not immune. Many accuse foundations of being elite, opaque, and unaccountable. Stasch challenged the philanthropic community to become more transparent, to be more responsive to and willing to work with community, and to listen more, to earn back society's trust.

Darren Walker, President and CEO of the Ford Foundation, talked of how legacy philanthropies like the Ford Foundation often lack proficiency and comfort with disruptive new technologies and must challenge themselves to disrupt their own institutions to engage with the future. The new philanthropies, conversely, are comfortable with change but may lack an understanding of context. He believes that philanthropy is insulated from forces, such as competition and the marketplace, that generally force change. If foundations do not disrupt themselves, he argued, they will become increasingly irrelevant.

What was striking in this conversation was that the themes that recurred—the need to embrace diversity, to recognize the need to change, to be adaptable and open, to listen to community—are those of Deliberate Leadership. They are also the values that SVCF has embraced and sought to embody over its first ten years.

Some key differences between SVCF and the private foundations represented on the panel may make SVCF more able to accept disruption, challenge itself to change, question its values and assumptions, and embrace and lead change:



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First, as a community foundation, SVCF is not immune to competition. Other community foundations, commercial financial managers such as Fidelity and Schwab, and even philanthropic advisors such as Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, compete to support new philanthropists. For SVCF to grow as it has, and to work successfully with demanding donor-advisors who expect to be engaged in decision making and who expect results, it has had to succeed in this competitive marketplace. It has had to be open to outside ideas in a way that private philanthropy does not. According to partners like Osberg of the Skoll Foundation, Carson has shown “just the right deft hand” in building relationships that are “productive, rewarding, and respectful.” And that need to be attuned to outside ideas and input from stakeholders has given SVCF an advantage in staying in touch with and relevant to society more broadly.

Second, as a community foundation, SVCF must be responsive to many stakeholders. This means that it can and must take the long view. To succeed in its mission—“to engage donors and corporations from Silicon Valley across the country and around the globe to make our region and world better for all”—it must earn and keep their trust. SVCF is accountable both to its donor-advisors and to the communities it serves, and strives to stay attuned to them and meet their needs. That creates a culture of openness and a willingness to understand that, as former board member Caretha Coleman said, “Sometimes we need to change.” Whereas the foundation presidents cited trust building and the need to change as critical for the philanthropic sector in the future, SVCF by its very nature has always seen trust and adaptability as critical to its ability to fulfill its mission and purpose.

Third, SVCF inhabits a geography where disruption and innovation are embraced, and extreme income gaps magnify social needs. The culture and specific needs of Silicon Valley have shaped SVCF today, but also create special opportunities and pose special challenges for SVCF in the future. Some of those challenges may be managerial and operational as well as programmatic—current Board Chair Samuel Johnson, Jr. expresses a concern about recruiting and retaining staff below the leadership level when as a nonprofit SVCF cannot pay the kinds of salaries that those in the tech industry command. Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, Eastern Region Maeve Miccio flagged the same concern: “The biggest challenge has been managing growth. So as we’re growing, we’re a nonprofit organization. We are not like a company with endless resources to invest in systems and staffing, so definitely that has been the largest challenge, is managing the growth so that we sustain our customer service.”

Balancing the Needs and Demands of Stakeholders

On the operational side, SVCF holds funds for and works with relatively small donor-advised funds (funds start at \$5,000), very large donor-advised funds like those of the Zuckerberg-Chan family and WhatsApp’s Jeff Koum, and corporate funds like those of Cisco and eBay. Compounding this challenge is SVCF’s commitment to programmatic strategies and its responsibilities to serve the local community through its programs.

Vera Bennett recalled that there was tension between financial management and development staff over finding the balance between serving the few largest donor-advisors and the many smaller ones. The range is challenging: In 2015, 15 percent of the donor-advised funds (166) had an asset balance of more than \$1 million; 30 percent (324) had assets between \$100,000 and \$1 million; 23 percent (249) between \$25,000 and \$100,000, and 32 percent (353) less than \$25,000. While those numbers may change—donors may add to their funds yearly or for specific purposes, a bequest may change the status of a fund—the spread suggests a range of services on both the operational and program side. “There was always the concern about [whether we are] donor-centric or program-centric? And are we spending a lot of time on the large funds versus the time we spend on the smaller funds? And I think that challenge will always continue. You have to balance that.”



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One under-40 philanthropist who is not a donor to SVCF but who represents the perspective of many young entrepreneur-donors told the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* that he and his wife “wanted to dedicate our time and significant financial resources to improving our society. We decided that the best way to achieve this goal was to abandon the conventional, but nonetheless necessary and admirable, path of traditional philanthropy—namely, large donations to hospitals, universities, or cultural organizations.” Instead they chose to pursue sustainable solutions to complex problems by “analyzing extremely complicated and endemic societal problems, collaborating with experts in the field to understand the issues in depth, rigorously testing hypotheses to arrive at the best solutions, and, finally, seeking to implement those alternatives at scale through systemic policy reforms.”³⁴ Yet one observer said, “It’s no secret that a lot [of the disbursements from SVCF’s donor-advised funds] currently go to Stanford University.” (SVCF’s searchable grants catalog reports that in 2015 \$21.5 million of \$800 million went to Stanford University and projects there from its donor-advised funds.)³⁵ Large donors with such different goals may need different kinds of relationships with staff, and the range of fund sizes suggests many such different needs among SVCF’s donors.

As SVCF continues to grow and diversify its sources of funding, the perceived conflicts between large and small donor-advisors and programs are likely to continue as a challenge—the downside of the tremendous leverage SVCF derives from its growing scale. Yet the opportunity this growth offers is tremendous as well—to help large and small donors learn together and from one another, to support broader strategies for social change in which the “drop in the ocean” giving referenced by Jim Ducey acquires collective impact. For SVCF and its relationships with its donors, greater alignment could yield greater satisfaction and greater outcomes in the future.

Balancing Transparency Against Confidentiality

While SVCF’s leadership is committed to candor internally, and to transparency externally, a national environment in which philanthropy receives increasing scrutiny poses ongoing challenges to the boundaries of that transparency.

Examples of SVCF’s sharing information with its broader community abound throughout its ten-year history. When the two boards first developed a plan for the merger, they published their *Vision for a New Community Foundation*, setting forth their vision, mission, and values. That blueprint is still available³⁶ and is still used by leadership as a guidepost. SVCF’s leadership reported on the achievements of the first year after the merger.³⁷ And, after questions were raised about where the money was going, they created a database of almost half a billion dollars in grants and who received them in 2015.³⁸

Sometimes complaints about a lack of transparency can mean something else, such as a concern about a large donor’s lack of accountability or its disproportionate influence. The Zuckerberg gift to the Newark public schools attracted such criticism. People sometimes “hide things behind the label of transparency unfairly,” Carson feels, trying to make the project sound slightly “untoward” by saying it wasn’t transparent. Newark was fully transparent, he believes: the genesis of the project (conversations between Cory Booker, Chris Christie, and Mark Zuckerberg) was known, as was the source of the funding.



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However, amid growing questions about the scale of philanthropy and whether it buys disproportionate influence in the United States and globally, SVCF does not make public the identities of those behind the grants. There are many reasons to preserve donor confidentiality: some high-net-worth individuals choose to work through a community foundation because they do not want to receive unwanted solicitations; others prefer to keep a low profile for religious reasons or to avoid mixing their philanthropic and business interests. Carson believes that being a trusted partner, allowing a donor to fly below the radar as long as they wish, is a key role of SVCF. And he further challenges the purpose of transparency for transparency's sake.

This question about balancing donors' desire for privacy against the public's desire to know is likely to be one that SVCF leadership must continue to wrestle with. Yet it also presents an opportunity to educate the public about the nature and purpose of philanthropy, and its role for good in society. SVCF has made great strides through its blogs, reports, and updates in helping the public learn more. It has the opportunity to help narrow the gap between philanthropy and the public to ensure its ongoing relevance in a time of change.

Redefining Community in the 21st Century

Several of the cases in which SVCF has engaged or supported philanthropy outside its immediate geography have been crisis interventions—the 2010 earthquake in Haiti or the tsunami in Japan—but others have been supporting education or poverty programs around the world. As it attracts more and larger partners who want to have impact globally, the challenge of listening to community to deal with complex challenges will also grow.

Some in the local community are likely to continue to ask SVCF to try to keep more of the dollars it manages in California and the Silicon Valley counties. One nonprofit executive said, "[SVCF] is spending a lot of time and effort convening and strategizing and figuring out or trying to help organizations figure out where you could move the needle, and then not applying all the fuel or pressure on the accelerator or thumb on the scale that it potentially could. [That may not be] without risk. But if the problems are so darn urgent, I'd love to see them try."

Packard Foundation's Carol Larson also would like to see SVCF use its powers of convening and persuading to direct resources to local needs. She observes that many of Silicon Valley's philanthropists are more aware of global issues than of local nonprofits working to serve local communities: "From our perspective at Packard, there does seem to be a gap: ... a lot of the new philanthropy isn't following the Dave [Packard] and Bill [Hewlett] model, saying, 'Let's give locally, too.'" Carson notes that SVCF's donors give more to Bay Area nonprofits than any other local or national foundation, and that its Donor Experience and Engagement division and donor circles do educate its donor-advisors about needs of which they may not be aware.

Some in the nonprofit sector in Silicon Valley also would like to see SVCF playing a more active role in educating its donor-advisors and other social investors about pressing needs affecting the region. Eric Cohen is the current Executive Director of the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC), a long-time grantee and partner of SVCF and one of its parent foundations for work on immigrant integration. Since the merger, immigrant integration has been one of SVCF's core funding priorities, and SVCF staff have also brought the work of ILRC to the attention of donor-advisors with an interest in immigrant needs. While Cohen is grateful for this support for his organization and its work, he wonders if SVCF also could be proactive in educating its donor-



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advisors and partners in the region not just about specific organizations but about the scope and the gravity of this and other issues that affect the region as a whole. He suggests that leaders in those issue areas could be a resource for SVCF to draw on in educating philanthropists about such regional concerns.

Sally Osberg of the Skoll Foundation offers this advice for the future: “I’d love to see the Community Foundation identify some of these on-the-horizon issues [like educational disparities, the increase in hate speech, and the loss of civil discourse] and be a force for convening some of the brainpower in the Valley—those working at innovators like Google, Tesla, and solar companies—together with political leaders, citizens, teachers, and others—to come up with ways that the Valley might help lead true progress for ordinary people.”

Similarly, Carson challenges philanthropy as a whole, as well as his own foundation, to become more comfortable funding technology that can help nonprofits do a better job and also bridge the deep divides in society to which technology contributes. He offers as an example a downloadable video game that helps children understand income inequality and empathize with the challenges that face the disadvantaged. But he notes that “even at the epicenter of the world’s technological revolution,” SVCF has not done enough to help nonprofits be at the leading edge of technology. He urges the philanthropic sector (including SVCF) to understand that unless they do more in this area, the nonprofit sector will not succeed either in bringing the benefits of technology to marginalized communities or in bringing attention to technology’s shortcomings.

Translating Growth into Positive Social Change

Carson says that when he joined SVCF he had a set of milestones for the foundation—financial, international, and corporate—all of which have been substantially achieved. Financially, SVCF has grown both the assets it manages and the amount of money it disburses each year to a scale that would have been unimaginable in 2007. Having achieved this scale, and the efficient and sophisticated operational capacity to manage it, SVCF was able to expand its operations to support donor-advisors with global ambitions. It now makes international grants, through its donor-advised funds and its giving circles, in 89 countries. Finally, SVCF planned to grow its capacity to serve corporate donors, and it now works with approximately 100 who also give locally, nationally, and globally.

To date, SVCF has reached scale by remaining closely tied to its values and purpose with continued growth. How will it maintain that alignment as it moves forward? SVCF’s educational role with its board and donor-advisors is clearly key. Success in its advocacy efforts can help to build the institution’s appetite for further efforts at systems-level change. So does the commitment of its leadership to facilitating teamwork and shared learning within the organization. But most important of all will be for the colleagues within SVCF to continue to look out the window at the people living in dilapidated recreational vehicles, as Carson did; keep meeting with the people in the community on a regular basis to hear their concerns, as staff do; and to continue to remind themselves that growth is only a means to an end, not the end in itself.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD



Overall, the research indicates that SVCF has found a critical balance between many competing forces. According to Packard's Carol Larson, "[SVCF] has been successful in trying to attract, manage, and not judge the global philanthropy of people giving in Silicon Valley ... while still seeking to beat the drum for the needs of people here locally." Similarly, State Senator Holly Mitchell believes SVCF "understands the role of policy makers and being effective partners with them." Skoll's Sally Osberg lauds SVCF for finding the right approach to meet the needs of high-wealth donors by being both hands off and helpful when requested.



CONCLUSION: LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

These positive perceptions are buttressed by facts. SVCF's achievements: explosive growth in its assets and grantmaking portfolio; successful initiatives relating to homelessness and hunger, disaster readiness, and education reform in the Bay Area and the state; thought-leadership on a national stage; and a strong suite of tools and services to support giving by large and small donors, both locally and around the world. SVCF's success and approach has pushed the field to redefine "community" for community foundations.

Internally, SVCF has managed to adapt, in a remarkably short time, from being the child of two geographically bounded entities to becoming a leader both locally and globally. It espouses the values of social justice, transparency, and trust, and seeks systems to embody them. Lacking the independence of a private foundation, it has learned to operate through collaboration. It listens to its community and responds to criticism, becoming more diverse, more transparent, and more consultative. It also acts decisively when it deems it appropriate to do so.

The Next Decade

The recent Innovation Conference set the stage for SVCF's next ten years by raising questions for itself and the field of philanthropy:

- How will philanthropy remain relevant and impactful in a world rapidly changed by technology?
- How will it help a powerful technology sector promote an ambitious social justice agenda that opens the door for diversity, economic opportunity, and inclusion of all?
- How will it partner and help a fast-paced, technology-based world incorporate values of trust, transparency, and candor about what is and isn't working?
- How can philanthropy offer guidance to new tech-centered donors on addressing complex social change issues to accelerate positive impact and minimize potential harm?
- How can new collaborations be forged between philanthropy and technology sectors that tap mutual expertise and help direct funding to the critical complex issues from climate change to immigration?

These big issues, coupled with the trajectory for additional growth, will require SVCF to remain true to its motto: "Possibilities Start Here." Carson predicts that SVCF will continue riding the wave of unexplored opportunity with optimism and ambition. He believes, "The next decade will not slow down but ramp up. The fast, entrepreneurial pace will require us to continue to live outside our comfort zone, act on new evidence, and listen vigilantly to the needs of local and global community. We have the team, drive, and commitment to go to the next level ... exciting times ahead."

NOTES

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

NAME	TITLE	ORGANIZATION
Lianne M. Araki	Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive Officer and Board Liaison	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Greg Avis	Former Board Chair Co-founder and Senior Advisor	Silicon Valley Community Foundation Summit Partners
Vera Bennett	Former Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Pat Bresee	Former Board Chair (Ret.) Commissioner	Silicon Valley Community Foundation San Mateo County Juvenile Court
Luisa Buada	Chief Executive Officer	Ravenswood Health Clinic
Emmett Carson	Chief Executive Officer and President	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Eric Cohen	Executive Director	Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Caretha Coleman	Former Board Member Consultant	Silicon Valley Community Foundation Coleman Consulting
Gina Dalma	Special Advisor to the President for Public Policy	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Jim Ducey	Co-founder	Donor Circle for Africa
Rebecca Dupras	Vice President, Development	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Sid Espinosa	Director of Philanthropy and Civic Engagement	Microsoft
Bert Feuss	Senior Vice President, Investments	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Thomas J. Friel	Former Board Chair (Ret.) Chairman	Silicon Valley Community Foundation Heidrick & Struggles International, Inc.
Gregory M. Gallo	Former Board Member Partner	Silicon Valley Community Foundation DLA Piper
Nancy Handel	Former Board Chair (Ret.) Chief Financial Officer	Silicon Valley Community Foundation Applied Materials
Samuel Johnson, Jr.	Board Chair Director of Administrative Services	Silicon Valley Community Foundation Notre Dame de Namur University
Steven LaFrance	Founder and Chief Executive Officer	Learning for Action
Carol Larson	President and Chief Executive Officer	David and Lucile Packard Foundation
David Lewis	Executive Director	Save the Bay
Sam Liccardo	Mayor	City of San Jose
Mari Ellen Loijens	Chief Business, Development and Brand Officer	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
John Maltbie	County Manager	San Mateo County
Maeve Miccio	Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, Eastern Region	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Amy Millington	President	eBay Foundation
Holly Mitchell	Senator	California State Senate
Sally Osberg	President and Chief Executive Officer	Skoll Foundation
C.S. Park	Immediate Past Board Chair (Ret.) Chair and Chief Executive Officer	Silicon Valley Community Foundation Seagate Technology
D. Lea Rauscher	Vice President, Grants, Gifts and Compliance	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Misti Sangani	Chief Donor Experience and Engagement Officer	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Manuel Santamaria	Vice President, Strategic Initiatives and Grantmaking	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
John M. Sobrato	Former Board Chair Chief Executive Officer	Silicon Valley Community Foundation The Sobrato Organization
Peter Tavernise	Executive Director	Cisco Foundation
Sarah Valencia	Vice President, Finance	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Paul Velaski	Chief Operating Officer and Chief Financial Officer	Silicon Valley Community Foundation
Erica Wood	Chief Community Impact Officer	Silicon Valley Community Foundation

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Context and Background Interviewees

1. Please describe your role with respect to the merging of Peninsula Community Foundation and Community Foundation Silicon Valley. What was your/your organization's goal in participating in this project? Was this goal achieved?
2. What key expectations did you have about the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) at the time of the merger (2006/2007)? In what ways did you think SVCF would be able to better address the challenges faced by vulnerable populations in the region? To what extent were your expectations met?
*What do you consider to be the biggest challenges faced by the community today?
In what ways is/can SVCF address them?*
3. As the merger process was being designed, how risky did you consider this concept to be? In what ways were potential risks weighed against possible rewards? Did your perception of risk change over time? If so, how and why?
4. How honest were stakeholders regarding the challenges of the merger and transition process? In what ways did decisions from this time influence the development of a culture of openness and constant improvement within SVCF?
5. Beyond those already noted in public documents, were there other partnerships that helped SVCF through the merger and transition process? What about partnerships that supported and continue to support ongoing reflection and refinement?
6. To what extent were the local communities consulted during the merger and transition? To what extent are they consulted now?
7. In what ways has SVCF leveraged all its combined resources (not just financial) to achieve the scope and impact it has today?
8. What do you think have been the most important contributions made by SVCF? Why do you say this?
Explore depth of contribution, location, amount/resources invested, and rationale for response.
9. To what extent does SVCF's location in Silicon Valley influence its ability to creatively address social challenges?
10. What lessons from the merger and transition experience do you think are most important to share with other donors/investors/students interested in large-scale social change?
11. What one thing could have been done differently in retrospect? What do you wish you had known at the beginning?
12. In what ways is SVCF a Deliberate Leader? Please share examples that informed your response.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Policy and Grantmaking Interviewees

1. Please describe your role with respect to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) and its policy and/or grantmaking programs.
2. What was the methodology undertaken to design a comprehensive policy or grantmaking program post-merger? Who was included in this process and how frequently is this program assessed now?
3. What role do you think community foundations can or should play in policy advocacy and/or independent grantmaking? What do you think SVCF's approach is to policy and/or local, independent grantmaking strategies that address pressing social challenges? Is SVCF addressing these issues effectively?
4. How does SVCF build partnerships to effect change using policy and/or independent grantmaking? What are some of the advantages and challenges to this strategy?
5. Do you consider this strategy to be risky in any way? If so, why? In what ways are potential risks measured against possible rewards? Has your perception of riskiness changed over time?
6. How honest are stakeholders regarding the challenges of: 1) effectively managing policy advocacy and/or local grantmaking, and 2) ensuring cultural appropriateness and sensitivity in this work?
7. How does SVCF ensure consistent and honest feedback loops from policy and/or grantmaking programs? How do SVCF's various endeavors learn from each other?
8. In what ways does SVCF leverage all its combined resources (not just financial) to achieve meaningful scope and impact in policy and/or local grantmaking?
9. To what extent are local communities consulted during the development, implementation, and refinement of policy and/or grantmaking programs? Has this changed in any way during the past 10 years?
10. What do you think have been the most important contributions made by SVCF? To what extent does SVCF's location in Silicon Valley influence its ability to creatively address social challenges?
Explore depth of contribution, location, amount/resources invested, and rationale for response.
11. What lessons from SVCF's policy and/or local grantmaking experience do you think are most important to share with other donors/investors/students interested in large-scale social change? What could have been done differently in retrospect?
12. In what ways is SVCF a Deliberate Leader?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Global Interviewees

1. Please describe your role with respect to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) and its global programs.
2. What was the methodology undertaken to design a comprehensive global program? Who was included in this process and how frequently are global programs assessed?
3. What role do you think community foundations can or should play on a global scale? What do you think SVCF's approach is to global problems, and is it addressing global issues effectively?
4. How does SVCF build partnerships to support change in places where it does not have a physical presence? What are some of the advantages and challenges to this strategy?
5. Do you consider a global strategy managed by a community foundation to be risky in any way? If so, why? In what ways are potential risks measured against possible rewards? Has your perception of riskiness changed over time?
6. How honest are stakeholders regarding the challenges of: 1) operating effectively at a global scale, and 2) ensuring cultural appropriateness and sensitivity?
7. How does SVCF ensure consistent and honest feedback loops from global programs? Do global and domestic programs learn from each other?
8. In what ways does SVCF leverage all its combined resources (not just financial) to achieve meaningful scope and impact on a global scale?
9. To what extent are local communities consulted during the design of global projects? To what extent are they involved in ongoing refinement?
10. What do you think have been the most important contributions made by SVCF? To what extent does SVCF's location in Silicon Valley influence its ability to creatively address social challenges?
Explore depth of contribution, location, amount/resources invested, and rationale for response.
11. What lessons from SVCF's global experience do you think are most important to share with other donors/investors/students interested in large-scale social change? What could have been done differently in retrospect?
12. In what ways is SVCF a Deliberate Leader?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Fundraising and Special Projects Interviewees

1. Please describe your role with respect to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) and its fundraising or INSERT NAME OF SPECIAL PROJECT strategy.
2. What was the methodology undertaken to design a comprehensive program/fundraising strategy post-merger? Who was included in this process and how frequently is the program/strategy assessed?
3. Do you consider SVCF's strategy for program/fundraising to be risky in any way? If so, why? In what ways are potential risks measured against possible rewards? Has your perception of riskiness changed over time?
4. How does SVCF ensure consistent and honest feedback loops in your program/strategy? How does the program/strategy contribute to and learn from other areas of SVCF's work?
5. In what ways does SVCF leverage all its combined resources (not just financial) to achieve meaningful scope and impact in the INSERT NAME program/strategy?
6. To what extent are local communities consulted as part of understanding the impact of your work? How is this process managed and included in overall SVCF strategy?
7. What do you think have been the most important contributions made by SVCF in the area of fundraising for community foundations/INSERT NAME? To what extent does SVCF's location in Silicon Valley influence its ability to address social challenges creatively?

Explore depth of contribution, location, amount/resources invested, and rationale for response.

8. What lessons from SVCF's experience in fundraising/INSERT NAME do you think are most important to share with other donors/investors/students interested in large-scale social change? What could have been done differently in retrospect?
9. In what ways is SVCF a Deliberate Leader?

10. SPECIAL PROJECTS ONLY:

- What role do you think community foundations can or should play in managing special projects such as INSERT NAME? In what ways does INSERT NAME advance SVCF's ability to address the most pressing problems facing your community?
- How does SVCF build partnerships to effect change on the ground? What are some of the advantages and challenges to this strategy?

11. FUNDRAISING ONLY:

- How honest are stakeholders regarding the challenges of: 1) effectively operating a fundraising strategy in one of the wealthiest regions in the United States, and 2) ensuring cultural appropriateness and sensitivity of this strategy?