Meeting Recap: **Envisioning a Funder Network on Childhood Adversity**  
September 4, 2017

**Background**

On August 29, 2017, a group of Bay Area funders came together to brainstorm a possible vision, scope, and set of content directions for a funder learning network\(^1\) on childhood adversity. A range of funders were represented - including family foundations, corporate foundations, community foundations, and individual donors. Some have been funding in the childhood adversity space for decades, while others are at the early stages of their journey. What emerged was a rich discussion exploring the possible ways in which a funder learning network might strengthen our work, and accelerate the pace of change on behalf of children and families in the Bay Area.

**Setting the Vision**

Through visioning exercises, funders described the purpose and experience of participating in an effective network. The following themes emerged:

- Creating a space where funders can come together as **thought partners** - openly sharing experiences, questions, and challenges, and accessing feedback and guidance from peers.
  - Relatedly, the theme of **learning for action** emerged a number of times, recognizing the need to learn not just for “the sake of learning,” but to guide a meaningful outcome (e.g., strengthening our individual or collective approaches, identifying gaps / new areas for investment, fostering relationships and possible collaborations).

- Mapping the **landscape**. Many suggested the network could help demystify the childhood adversity funder landscape, mapping:
  - The range of approaches funders are taking to address childhood adversity (including specific theories of change that have been adopted)
  - Subtopics funders are prioritizing (in order to find areas of alignment/ synergy where work might be integrated across funders)
  - Areas considered to be strengths and constraints across funder strategies, in order to identify synergies and gaps

- Providing **inspiration**. Funders envisioned this group helping them stay motivated, functioning as an avenue where meaningful discussion can give way to new thinking.

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\(^1\) Different from a strategic alignment network or a pooled fund, a funder **learning network** is a group of funders who come together to 1) learn about a field or issue area; 2) share information and best practice; 3) explore potential strategies for making more effective investments. See *Grantcraft’s “Funder Collaboratives, Why and How Funders Work Together”* for more information.
The following factors - both tangible and intangible - were identified as critical to the network’s success:

- **Strong operations**: Clear scope, roles, agendas, facilitation, scheduling, and communications to guide strong participation and meaningful engagement.
- **Individual and collective commitments** towards trust and humility (making it possible for funders to share successes and failures), curiosity, collaboration, and focus on our common purpose.

**Brainstorming Content Directions**

The group identified a range of strategic questions that might serve as the focal point for future discussion. Key themes include:

- **Navigating tough strategic choices**:
  How are others balancing the following considerations, when making strategic choices:
  - Stages in life to focus; individual vs. multi-generational approaches
  - Prevention versus treatment / response to trauma
  - The most effective “agent” of change: parent, pediatrician / healthcare professional, educator, system of care provider, etc.
  - Single system vs. multi- or cross-systems approaches, managing precise (and potentially exclusionary) vs. broad (and potentially diffuse) investment strategies
  - Urgency / need for short-term fixes vs. long-term approaches

- **Understanding the state of the “evidence base”:**
  - Where are the major remaining gaps in the evidence base associated with childhood adversity (and who is monitoring the state of the science)?
  - In what areas might further investment in research add significant value, versus application of existing research?

- **Lifting up best practice, and measuring success**:  
  - Where might there be points of alignment between what the community wants, and what the evidence base shows?
  - Where might we lift up lessons from adjacent fields (e.g., post-partum depression, psychosocial care in key disease areas) or other geographies?
  - How are key actors in the field measuring success? How might we measure effectiveness of cross-sector approaches, vs. individual interventions?

- **Strengthening healthcare-specific approaches**:
  - What are the risks and opportunities associated with ACEs screening?
  - How do we drive adoption of promising practice amongst providers?
○ How do we measure success in ways that healthcare actors (providers, payers, patients, policymakers) accept and understand?

● **Breaking down siloes:**
  ○ How does the field currently define itself (ACEs, childhood trauma, toxic stress, trauma-informed care), where is there common ground, and where might more aligned terminology help?
  ○ How can we foster more cross-sector collaboration and complementary efforts up and downstream?

● **Uncovering “blind spots”:**
  ○ What are the potential risks (and opportunities) associated with addressing childhood adversity from a health / healthcare perspective?
  ○ How might we ensure all children can have their needs addressed, and who might be left out given current focus / momentum in the field?
  ○ Where might orientation towards evidence-based practice mask potentially strong interventions?

**Next Steps:**

● Leverage this input to shape a **charter** for the group, including purpose, goals, approach to membership and operations, governance, and evaluation of the group’s effectiveness.

● Secure **operations support.**

● Launch a follow-up **survey** of relevant Bay Area funders to further gauge interest in the learning network, refine priority areas for discussion, and serve as an initial mapping exercise, gathering basic information on focus, priorities, and approaches of those investing in this field.

● Finalize membership of a small **Steering Committee** to guide the group and shape a content agenda for the next year.

*For more questions, ideas, or feedback, please reach out to Rajni Dronamraju (dronamraju.rajni@gene.com) and Susie Sarlo (susie@thesarlofoundation.org).*