

FOUNDATIONS AND POLICY ENGAGEMENT: INSIGHTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS



BLOG SERIES | SEPTEMBER 2020



In a series of posts on the CEP blog in summer 2020, leaders from more than a dozen policy-oriented foundations responded to five key questions that arose from the CEP research report, [*Policy Influence: What Foundations are Doing and Why*](#). This series, packaged here in its entirety, shares these funders' thoughts — in their own words — on why and how foundations can effectively engage in public policy to achieve their goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic; the disproportionate health and economic impact of the pandemic on communities of color; racism laid bare by the murders of George Floyd and countless other Black people by the police. These systemic challenges, along with so many others, require policy solutions — solutions that philanthropy is uniquely positioned to contribute to.

It is especially timely, then, that recent research from CEP, [*Policy Influence: What Foundations are Doing and Why*](#), sheds light on how foundations think about and approach their efforts to influence public policy. For our team at CEP who worked on this study, the findings of our analysis gave rise to several key questions about how foundations can effectively engage in policy. We believe these questions are important for foundation staff and boards to candidly discuss, especially in this moment. So we asked several funders active in the policy realm — in a variety of ways, across a variety of issue areas, utilizing a variety of policy tools — to share their thoughts.

In this resource, we share these funders' responses to five key questions in the hopes that their insights can help others engage more — and more effectively — in the policy realm,

and to advance a more nuanced discussion of philanthropic engagement in policy.

We are grateful to the 14 foundations sharing their perspectives in this resource.

Naomi Orensten, Director, Research, CEP

Ethan McCoy, Senior Writer, Development and Communications, CEP

Five Key Questions

1. [Why is engaging in public policy important for your foundation?](#)
2. [How have you built board support for your foundation's policy efforts?](#)
3. [How and why is your foundation collaborating with others to achieve a shared policy goal?](#)
4. [How does your foundation use its own voice, separate from grantmaking, to influence public policy?](#)
5. [What are some policy wins your foundation has contributed to?](#)

Participating Foundations

Blue Shield of California Foundation

The Brainerd Foundation

Community Foundation Boulder County

Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund

The Healing Trust

Helios Education Foundation

Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation

Lumina Foundation

MacArthur Foundation

Missouri Foundation for Health

REACH Healthcare Foundation

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Walton Family Foundation

W.K. Kellogg Foundation



PART ONE

Why Foundations are Engaging in Public Policy Efforts

Why is engaging in public policy important for your foundation? How much policy work do you do, and how central is it to your work?

Blue Shield of California Foundation

Debbie Chang, President and CEO

The complex problems we must address to meet our bold goals of making California the healthiest state and ending domestic violence require us to engage in public policy as an essential lever for change. Investing in policy change enables and creates the conditions necessary for our grantees' social innovations to spread and scale their impact across the state — and even the nation. Policy change works both at the level of a specific innovation, to help spread a practice that improves health and reduces domestic violence, and at the broader societal level, to address the root causes of poor health and violence that must change for our goals to become reality.

Much of our work is geared toward creating and testing innovative solutions to problems that impact health. For example, since 2016 the state of California has supported a housing-first approach to prevent homelessness among domestic violence survivors. The [Domestic Violence Housing First](#) program provides survivors with flexible funds to help cover costs directly related to their housing stability and safety, such as rental assistance, transportation, and childcare costs, since it is often the small challenges and expenses that lead to housing instability and a greater risk of staying in an abusive relationship.

We have funded an in-depth evaluation of this model, which has demonstrated that the approach prevents homelessness among a majority of program participants. Recently, we presented the evaluation findings in a policy briefing to local and state government policymakers as a step towards our goal of helping survivors statewide. And with this hard data and evidence, grantee partners like the [California Partnership to End Domestic Violence](#) now have proof points and a clear pathway to make the case for this proven solution to help survivors all across the state find safe housing.

Making California the healthiest state also means tackling some of the underlying causes of poor health and domestic violence. Economic insecurity is one such root cause: the stress of poverty leads to poor health in adulthood and perpetuates the cycle of domestic violence in families. There is ample evidence that putting time and money into the hands of low-income families ameliorates this stress. Our support for grantee partners such as the [California Immigrant Policy Center](#) helps their efforts to change state policy to expand eligibility for Earned Income Tax Credit and paid family leave programs that will improve health outcomes for families and children.

Creating policy change is never easy, but we know it is a fundamental tool for creating sustainable, lasting solutions to improve the health of all Californians.

Community Foundation Boulder County

Chris Barge, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives

Public policy is an important part of creating systemic change, and as such is a best practice of community foundations. Community Foundation Boulder County (CFBC) has a long history of supporting education measures in public policy, as well as measures in direct support of local nonprofits. We recently adopted a new vision for our Foundation — of supporting an equitable Boulder County — which calls for the creation of systems where all can thrive. In other words, equity is systems change. Public policy is central to this work since it can advance impact over time not otherwise possible.



Public policy is an important part of creating systemic change.

Our current stance on policy holds that any board or staff member can bring forward a policy issue that impacts CFBC and its clients. In practice, CFBC has refrained from taking institutional policy positions in issue areas outside of education and support for nonprofits. However, we have the legal ability and the authority, as per our own policy, to advocate far more broadly.

Our [TRENDS indicators](#) report on the social, economic, and environmental health of our community and give us a unique and comprehensive basis for our policy positions. And the strategic plan we adopted in 2019 points us toward a north star of equity, with several guiding principles: stand with those most impacted by inequity; do nothing about us without us; and accomplish more together than alone.

We are in the process of re-imagining a broader role for public policy at our foundation that is in line with our vision and approach. We see resident leadership and community engagement as central to our efforts to increase our impact through public policy advocacy, and we will continue to prioritize these points of emphasis.

Helios Education Foundation

Charles Hokanson, Senior Vice President, Florida Community Engagement, and Janice Palmer, Vice President, Public Policy & Government Affairs

In order to realize our vision that every individual in Arizona and Florida has the opportunity to attend and is prepared to succeed in postsecondary education, Helios Education Foundation understands its role in public policy must be deeply rooted in advocacy — advocacy fueled by the needs and aspirations of first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students.

Helios' portfolio of policy work is extensive. Oftentimes, our community investment and policy engagement work together to provide thought leadership, public/private partnership investment, and investment proof of concept. Our capacity to engage in policy and align it with our community investments has evolved and matured considerably over the past decade and a half. We've added staff with deep experience and learned from various successes and setbacks along the way. We've found that Helios' vision cannot be achieved without scale, and scale cannot be achieved without meaningful engagement in public policy — ultimately leading to systemic educational reform in both states.

Philanthropy has both an opportunity and a responsibility to use its voice to contribute to policy reforms that create systemic change for our communities. At Helios, we are committed to our policy work and will continue to employ our policy strategies to realize the change that needs to happen to ensure college and career success for all students.

Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation

Andrea Fionda, Director of Programs, and Scott Moyer, President

The Langeloth Foundation's two main focus areas are Justice Reform (with an emphasis on ending the use of solitary confinement in the correctional system) and Safe and Healthy Communities (with a focus on gun violence prevention in Black and brown communities). While undoubtedly important for saving lives, if the Foundation only focused on programs, rather than policy, we would be providing funding for short-term relief without addressing the structural conditions that perpetuate the problem.

To quote Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "There comes a point when we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in." For both of our funding areas, the policies that create the endemics need to be addressed.

Lumina Foundation

Jesse O'Connell, Director of Federal Policy, and Scott Jenkins, Director of State Policy

Lumina Foundation is committed to the creation of a just and fair universal post-secondary learning system that offers every American the opportunity for a better life, and we believe

that policy change can most effectively achieve systemic transformation at scale. So, policy work — both at the state and federal levels — is important to our theory of change, and we support a great deal of this type of work.

Missouri Foundation for Health

Alexandra Rankin, Director of Government Affairs, and Kristy Klein Davis, Chief Strategy Officer

Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) began work in public policy in 2003 and has been engaged in a wide range of related efforts ever since. Policy work is one of several changemaking tools we employ to promote systems-level change. This work primarily focuses on policy driven by state and local government, but also includes improvements to organization-level policy. For example, we have done significant work in healthcare systems to improve policies as they relate to care for LGBTQ individuals. MFH values policy work because of its ability to have far-reaching impact on the health and well-being of communities.

REACH Healthcare Foundation

Brenda Sharpe, President and CEO

Policy work is central to the REACH Healthcare Foundation's vision and mission, but that was not always the case. Like many foundation boards, ours was initially reluctant to engage in advocacy for specific health policies, largely due to legal concerns and misunderstandings about 501(c)3 lobbying and advocacy allowances and limitations.

However, after investing in board development and engaging experts like those at the [Bolder Advocacy Initiative](#) of the Alliance for Justice, we came to better understand the opportunity to more substantially and sustainably advance our mission and the work of our grantees. We now file the annual "H Election" with the IRS, which gives our Board peace of mind that we are participating in direct lobbying only to the extent possible and in ways that will not jeopardize our charitable tax status.

Not engaging in this important work can, in fact, undermine philanthropy's efforts and diminish the return on our community investments. At REACH, we recognize that philanthropy simply cannot make up the difference — even when pooling all our collective resources — to offset significant cuts to public funding streams like healthcare, education, and services for children and families.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Robin Mockenhaupt, Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, and Avenel Joseph, Vice President, Policy

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) strives to build a [Culture of Health](#) and to advance health equity so that everyone in America has a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being. Obstacles to health such as poverty and discrimination have dire consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education, housing, safe environments, and healthcare. To achieve our vision, we

focus on removing these obstacles by improving systems and conditions, shifting mindsets, and supporting policies and practices that promote health and well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic and issues of police brutality and systemic racism have revealed many structural failures in our public policies. Now more than ever, there is an opportunity for transformational change that will make this nation stronger and more prepared to minimize the negative impacts on families and communities. Real opportunities exist for state and national policymakers to fill policy gaps and create lasting, equitable change that will prevent discrimination, support family economic security, and strengthen our healthcare systems.

At RWJF, we believe policy change can have a long-lasting and self-sustaining positive impact on the conditions and systems that promote health and well-being.

Policy changes that center equity must occur at the federal, state, and local levels of government. Some policies that have created or exasperated inequities — like Medicaid access, which varies widely from state to state — have federal and state components, and therefore multiple levers for changes, that can promote health equity.

Policy work requires ongoing and continuous support to achieve new gains and to defend those previously achieved. Changing bad policy takes time and protecting good policy requires ongoing monitoring and advocacy.

Foundations can play important roles in policy development, analysis, and implementation by: 1) gathering and producing evidence that supports health-promoting policies; 2) using our voices — and amplifying others' voices — to educate policymakers and other audiences about the evidence supporting and the importance of these policies; 3) cultivating leaders to support advocacy efforts; and 4) using administrative and judicial strategies to affect the changes they want to see.

With all sectors working together, we can work towards creating a fair and just opportunity for health and well-being in America.

Walton Family Foundation

Daphne Moore, Director of Communications

The Walton Family Foundation does not engage directly in policy work; however, we fund grantees to do research, analysis, and education on the public policy issues and challenges we care deeply about solving.



Foundations have the freedom to innovate and take risks in ways that elected officials or the private sector might not be as comfortable doing.

We couple this work with the other levers at our disposal, recognizing that philanthropy plays a critical role when it comes to creating big social change. Foundations can think about issues at a national or global level, and they can use their resources to test new ideas and see what works and what doesn't. Foundations have the freedom to innovate and take risks in ways that elected officials or the private sector might not be as comfortable doing.

We share the knowledge we gain through our grantees' work. What we learn and where we succeed — or fail — can ultimately inform decisions that policymakers take. We also recognize that sound policymaking occurs at a more local level and works best when it's developed by those in the communities we serve, so our engagement with these communities is integral to our work.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Robb Gray, Director of Policy-Advocacy

Children are at the heart of everything we do at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Our goal is lasting, transformational change for children. Children are more likely to thrive when they have a healthy start and quality learning experiences, their families are economically secure, and they live in vibrant, equitable communities. As a foundation, we use a variety of tools to support and improve children's lives — grantmaking, impact investing, convening, and public policy engagement.

Because public policy impacts every aspect of a child's life, policy engagement is central to our work. When rooted in equity and evidence-based research and practices, public policy can be a vehicle to construct lasting opportunities, ensure a stable economic future, and lead to full civic participation of communities where children and families can develop, grow, and contribute.

The primary way our foundation supports policy engagement is at the community level. We find that when communities have a hand in creating, negotiating, and implementing solutions, the policies are more relevant, more likely to be embraced, and ultimately more sustainable. In addition to promoting community voices, we also leverage strategic partnerships and engage directly to help families and civic leaders play an active role in making children's development and well-being central to their decision-making.

To support communities in the advancement of public policy, we invest our grantmaking resources in advocacy leadership development, policy analysis and research, civic participation and access, as well as policy innovation at the local, state, and national levels. We work throughout the U.S. and with sovereign tribes, concentrating up to two-thirds of our grantmaking in priority places of Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico, New Orleans, indigenous communities in Mexico, and rural Haiti.





PART TWO

Building Board Support for Foundation Public Policy Efforts

How have you built board support for your foundation's policy efforts? What advice do you have for funders who wish to develop more support for policy engagement from their board?

Community Foundation Boulder County

Chris Barge, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives

We have recently invited local thought leaders on the Census and on affordable housing to speak to our Board. This has led to board votes in favor of supporting a complete and accurate 2020 Census count, as well as votes in favor of collaborating with other affordable housing advocates on policy efforts.

With regard to the Census, we opened a fund seeded by inspired trustees. We raised \$120,000, and also leveraged \$130,000 in additional grant dollars, to land in our nonprofit ecosystem. This has allowed us to fund a cross-county coalition of agencies that have hired cultural brokers to help ensure a complete and accurate count among our most hard-to-count communities. Early results are promising.

With regard to housing, we have begun working with other agencies to promote awareness of the importance of affordable housing in our community. COVID-19 has eliminated a previously conceived idea for a local tax initiative on the November ballot, but we are making the most of the opportunity to highlight the importance of home during these stay-at-home orders.

We have also assembled a small group of staff and trustees for occasional meetings of an ad hoc policy committee, to help guide these expanding policy efforts.

Our Board sees a direct connection between our strategic plan and the way in which we are approaching our work involving the 2020 Census and affordable housing. I would recommend other foundations also seek alignment between a specific vision for their community(ies) and the power of policy advocacy in achieving this vision. Start with the most important issues identified by the people. Otherwise, getting involved with public policy writ large is a prescription for paralysis by analysis.



Direct engagement is the best way for the board to understand what [policy] work is — and, most crucially, what this work is not.

Lumina Foundation

Jesse O'Connell, Director of Federal Policy, and Scott Jenkins, Director of State Policy

The best thing a foundation can do to develop board support for policy engagement is to put their program staff doing policy work in front of the board. Let the board ask questions and understand the work, allow them to voice their concerns about risks, and let the program staff respond to and calibrate the work against that guidance.

This direct engagement is the best way for the board to understand what this work is — and, most crucially, what this work is not. While reputation and relationships with policymakers are vital, accomplishing policy success is not based on partisan or relationship-driven lobbying. Allowing program staff to directly show the board the types of activities you are planning to support — and how those activities have been successful in the past — is an effective way to quell concerns about lobbying and reputational risk.

Additionally, boards should have a sense of ownership in the vision of the policy work. They should endorse and understand the changes the foundation wishes to enable in the system. The means may be varied, but a north-star goal or set of goals, adopted by the board, permits a foundation to show progress over time. In our case, Lumina's Board is absolutely committed to [Goal 2025](#). Encouraging 50 states (more than 40 are currently on board) to adopt a similar attainment goal (along with the requisite evidence-based policies to attain it) was a logical extension of Lumina's internal and national thought leadership. Seeing this brought to action in states aligned in our vision, which our Board understood and embraced.

Missouri Foundation for Health

Alexandra Rankin, Director of Government Affairs, and Kristy Klein Davis, Chief Strategy Officer

Our Board understands the significance of investing in policy-change work because it is an efficient and effective way to ensure that everyone in Missouri has a fair and just opportunity to lead a healthy life. While direct programmatic services are still a crucial component of our work, influencing policy enables us to remove barriers and improve quality outcomes across a wide range of systems that impact health. Although policy change may be intimidating or difficult to evaluate, it offers a sustainable intervention that can serve broader constituencies.

We would advise others in philanthropy to challenge their thinking on how they can best support their mission and aspirational goals.

Philanthropic organizations are often the most well-positioned stakeholders to advance policy and systemic change, as they have the resources, sway, and insulation to take on bold initiatives.

Walton Family Foundation

Daphne Moore, Director of Communications

The Walton Family Foundation works with our Board to set five-year grantmaking strategies. Our strategy-development process requires deep engagement over the course of a year or longer. Through this process, we contemplate the impact that public policy has on the issues we work to tackle in our philanthropy.



PART THREE

How Foundations are Collaborating with Others to Achieve Their Public Policy Goals

How and why is your foundation collaborating with others — grantees, other funders — to achieve a shared policy goal?

The Healing Trust

Meredith Sullivan Benton, Vice-President, Programs and Advocacy

In 2019, we decided to use the Trust’s influence to engage in advocacy alongside our grantee partners. This type of advocacy — an extension of our mission and previous advocacy grantmaking — came at the request of our grantee partners and peer groups. Engaging in advocacy allows us to focus on the root causes of the issues that our grantee partners work to address with support from our grants programs. (The Trust also supports advocacy via grantmaking and provides technical assistance to build grantee partners’ advocacy capacity.)

Even prior to our efforts beginning last year, the Trust has listened to and collaborated with our grantee partners to support policy-oriented work. For example, our grantee partners told us that they needed access to accurate, nonpartisan data to help them as they worked on policy change. They pointed out that our state, Tennessee, was

one of very few states that lacked a nonpartisan, public policy research center. In response to this, we incubated and launched [The Sycamore Institute](#) in 2015, whose research is now being used by nonprofits and policymakers throughout Tennessee. We are proud of their work to support data-driven decision-making in our community.

To enhance our connection with policymakers, we have hosted site visits with grantee partners serving their districts. Our grantee partners appreciate connecting with a policymaker, and the policymakers appreciate gaining a local contact that can serve as a resource to them. In addition to these collaborative site visits, we also host regular convenings with grantee partners where they jointly develop advocacy goals and strategies.

Policymakers appreciate engaging with the Trust for several reasons: 1) we aren’t asking for money, as we have our own endowment, and 2) while we talk policy, as a private foundation we cannot voice an opinion on any specific bill. Policymakers also appreciate the value we add to their communities by supporting more than 100 nonprofits in 40 counties in Middle Tennessee.

Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation

Andrea Fionda, Director of Programs, and Scott Moyer, President

The Langeloth Foundation has found that investments in funder collaboratives in various issue areas have enabled us to learn more about an issue area, to meet other funders, and to be exposed to a greater array of projects.

For example, the Foundation is a member of the [Fund for a Safer Future](#), a gun violence prevention collaborative, that has allowed our small staff to learn the lay of the land in what is a relatively complex topic. It has also given the Foundation much greater reach into the field than we would have if we were on our own.

In addition, in the Foundation’s funding strategy, we try to approach areas from a variety of avenues, which leads to collaborating with others. In our funding aimed at stopping the use of solitary confinement, for example, the Foundation supports efforts in advocacy, culture change, media, and lifting up the voices of the directly impacted.

Lumina Foundation

Jesse O’Connell, Director of Federal Policy, and Scott Jenkins, Director of State Policy

Collaboration is key because policy success greatly benefits from policymakers hearing a clear and consistent message from constituents. By working together from a shared set of principles and simple set of evidence-backed actions, funders can give transparent guidance to both grantees and other funders, as well as policymakers themselves.

MacArthur Foundation

Mijo Vodopic, Senior Program Officer, Climate Solutions Program

The longer we delay aggressive and durable climate action, the more challenges we will face in reaching climate neutrality by mid-century. One way that we can significantly

improve emissions trajectories is to expand global access to energy-efficient, climate-friendly cooling. Climate-friendly cooling means switching away from certain refrigerant gases with high global warming potential, namely those identified in the [Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol](#).

Building on the momentum to swap out these harmful gases, a diverse group of 17 foundations and individual donors, including the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, came together to help make cooling equipment more energy-efficient, and thereby reduce the demand for energy, which most often is produced from fossil fuels. A dual course of action to make cooling both more climate-friendly and more energy-efficient has the potential to reduce the projected global temperature increase by 1°C in the coming decades.

This group of funders, called the [Kigali Cooling Efficiency Program](#) (K-CEP), formed in 2017 to help accelerate major changes to arguably one of the cornerstones of modern life. Space cooling and refrigeration provides an essential service for billions of individuals and businesses around the world by keeping vaccines stable, food nutritious, homes comfortable, students focused, and workers productive. Improved access to cooling is also critical for the achievement of a number of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, namely those related to health, poverty reduction, education, shelter, gender, and energy access. K-CEP is an initiative that emboldens governments, businesses, and advocates alike to align their policies, investments, and expertise to work collectively in building a better, climate-stable world.

Without the trusted partnership of foundation and individual donors, the opportunity to drive policy changes that both make substantive improvements in people's lives and address climate change would have been missed. Importantly, the partnering donors committed to quickly deploying the funding to match countries' commitments to rapidly transition refrigerants. In doing this, the foundations and donors aimed to model the scale and speed being asked of the developing countries making changes to their policies.

It was only through the collective, sustained effort by these 17 funders that one of — if not the largest — philanthropic energy efficiency funds was created and deployed.

Missouri Foundation for Health

Alexandra Rankin, Director of Government Affairs, and Kristy Klein Davis, Chief Strategy Officer

Effective policy work requires input and commitment from a broad audience of stakeholders, including grassroots advocates, community-based organizations, businesses, government agencies, and "grasstops" leaders. It's important that we leverage existing resources and amplify voices to move the needle on policy change. The role of strategic communications in generating systems change cannot be understated. While adequate investment is always critical to any policy movement, human capital and collective action

are what shapes a campaign. Ensuring that human stories and experiences are not only highlighted, but also inform the overall strategy, is a top priority for all of MFH's policy work.

Walton Family Foundation

Daphne Moore, Director of Communications

We believe collaboration is critical to creating social change, and so the Foundation works hard to be a convener and a catalyst for creating coalitions.

Collaboration helps leverage more funding to solve problems and raises more voices in a chorus for change. At the Foundation, we form or join alliances in all of our program areas — it's a vital part of how we operate. For example, in our Environment program, the Foundation helped bring together a diverse coalition of conservation groups, business groups, and industry to build broad support for Louisiana's coastal restoration plan. The [Coastal Master Plan](#) is a blueprint for hope — and one of the most significant conservation opportunities of our lifetime. Similarly, in the Colorado River basin, we co-founded the [Water Funder Initiative](#), bringing together several significant funders — including the Rockefeller Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation — to work on water sustainability in the West.

In our K-12 Education Program, we're working right now with grantees and funders across the country to address the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on students and schools — and to help them prepare for the big changes needed to adapt our education system to overcome this crisis.



Collaboration helps leverage more funding to solve problems and raises more voices in a chorus for change.

Another example of collaboration is the work we've been doing in our Home Region program to rally support among funders to increase economic opportunity and break the cycle of poverty in the Delta region of Arkansas and Mississippi. The Foundation convened the [Delta Philanthropy Forum](#) to strengthen relationships and share information on philanthropic investments in the Delta. Our aim is to lay a foundation for future cooperation — and greater resources — that helps break the cycle of persistent poverty in the region and creates opportunity for people to realize their full potential.





PART FOUR

How Foundations Are Using Their Voice to Influence Public Policy

How — and when and why — does your foundation use its own voice, separate from grantmaking, to influence public policy?

Blue Shield of California Foundation

Debbie Chang, President and CEO

As a corporate foundation, we speak up when we feel our voice would help to bring more weight to issues aligned with our bold goal of making California the healthiest state with the lowest rate of domestic violence, and when our values — equity, possibility, partnership, and integrity — compel us to act.

No matter how we decide to weigh in, our policy and program work go hand in hand. Our policy approach is strongest when we build on what we have learned from our program investments, and from our grantees and the communities they serve. Our voice allows us to bring our full knowledge of health and well-being, gleaned from strong partnerships and from listening to grantees, to statewide and national policy conversations.

California is America's most diverse state and has been built by its immigrant communities. We know we cannot become the healthiest state unless all our communities are resilient and have the support they need for health and safety. So, in recent years, we have used our voice to oppose policy changes that threaten to undermine the well-being of those communities. For example, we submitted [comments](#) opposing changes to the federal public charge rule, which establishes a higher bar for legal permanent residence by denying admissibility to immigrants based on age, income, and the receipt of certain public benefits. This rule will deepen inequity in our state by discouraging immigrant families from accessing healthcare and nutrition programs for which they or their children are eligible, and so we feel compelled to use our platform to oppose it.

We also used our voice to oppose changes that threaten the ability of immigrant Californians to influence their futures. We

publicly opposed the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 Census, which would have discouraged many immigrant families from being counted. To fight this, we supported research in the San Joaquin Valley to understand directly from immigrant communities how a citizenship question would affect their willingness to be counted. We also signed on to an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court summarizing this evidence in a lawsuit that ultimately successfully prevented the question's inclusion in the Census.

When we speak on these issues, we often find that we are unique among corporate foundations in taking a stand. But when evidence from our research, our grantees, and our community partners tells us that a policy will harm our communities — and when our values tell us the same — we will speak up to help make California the healthiest state.

Community Foundation Boulder County

Chris Barge, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives

It is generally not our style to stand at a lectern and speak to a specific policy issue. We prefer to stand with our neighbors who know a particular struggle the best, and find ways to lift up their voices.

The primary way we do this is through our [TRENDS reporting initiative](#), which shares more than 150 indicators of our community's social, economic, and environmental health to inform and engage local residents and civic leaders. In addition to a biennial magazine on these issues, we now have a TRENDS podcast in partnership with local KGNU Community Radio, as well as a [TRENDS Diary](#) that provides first-person accounts of connecting and solving problems during social isolation. Upcoming projects include a "COVID TRENDS Special Report" that will document the local impact of the pandemic, a reporting fellowship for local reporters interested in deepening their coverage of pressing community needs, reporting stipends, and a new solutions fund designed to catalyze community response to issues raised by this reporting.

In a similar vein, we are planning focus groups with local residents most impacted by COVID-19 to discover a collective vision for how the "new normal" should look. We plan to ask a simple question: what is essential to ensure that everyone here may thrive? We want to create systems that answer this question, and we want to understand and ensure that which is essential to those most impacted by inequity. Our findings from these focus groups will inform a series of design workshops, where we will bring together residents who have experienced the sharpest pains of COVID-19 with donors, innovators, and other leaders to co-design policy solutions for our community.

The Healing Trust

Meredith Sullivan Benton, Vice-President, Programs and Advocacy

We survey our grantee partners annually to create our advocacy agenda, and our Board then approves three to five focus areas. Our current advocacy agenda focuses on the 2020 Census, healthcare access, trauma-informed schools, health equity, and voter participation during COVID-19.



Our grantee partners appreciate our voice because we can take risks that they cannot due to the potential loss of funding or relationships.

Once we have listened to our grantees and identified focus areas, we use our voice to advance this agenda by sending letters, making calls, hosting meetings, submitting public comments, and promoting opportunities for grantee partner engagement. We also use our active social media platforms to raise awareness and issue calls to action. Our grantee partners appreciate our voice because we can take risks that they cannot due to the potential loss of funding or relationships.

Jacob & Valeria Langeloth Foundation

Andrea Fionda, Director of Programs, and Scott Moyer, President

For the first time, we are putting the Langeloth Foundation itself front and center and using our voice in a policy push, which is not our typical way of working. With the onset of COVID-19 and the disproportionate impact the pandemic is having on communities of color, the Foundation has made a significant grant to two funder collaboratives that focus on civic engagement. We believe that in order for the populations that the Foundation cares about to engage in the democratic process, safe voting needs to be available to everyone. We believe using our voice is going to be key in this work. To that end, we are placing the Foundation more centrally in this effort by hiring a communications firm that will support us in amplifying our efforts and issuing a broader call to other foundations to step into this space with us.

Lumina Foundation

Jesse O'Connell, Director of Federal Policy, and Scott Jenkins, Director of State Policy

We use our own voice to comment on policy areas where we have internal expertise, have a new or different perspective to add to the discussion, and of course when we are not restricted by our lobbying prohibitions.

MacArthur Foundation

Laurie Garduque, Director, Criminal Justice

For too long, our country has failed to grapple with the deep harm it has caused to communities of color, low-income

people, and those suffering from mental illness and substance use. While Black and Latinx people together make up 30 percent of the general population, they account for 51 percent of the jail population. Serious mental illness affects one in six men and one in three women in jail. And because people with low incomes cannot afford bail or other fines and fees, they often spend more time incarcerated awaiting trial than the longest possible sentence for their alleged offense.

Through the [Safety and Justice Challenge](#), the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is using its voice to support cities and counties as they address these issues head on by: 1) identifying where these disparities exist; and 2) putting in place changes to policies and practices. While redesigning criminal justice systems is good, meaningful change can only occur through reinvention. To do this, we must build justice systems that are more fair, just, and equitable.

Our goal is to communicate successes, challenges, and learnings from the Safety and Justice Challenge to persuade other parts of the country to pursue their own policy reforms that confront the misuse and overuse of jails. We do this by promoting emerging research and data, case studies, and trends in the field through media outreach, op-eds, letters to the editor, and multiple social media platforms. With these activities, we aim to reach and engage both individuals who work within justice systems and members of the public. We are confident these communications efforts will also make already-implemented reforms more sustainable.

Using the Foundation's voice to advance these goals is more important than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has proven that it is possible to quickly and safely reduce jail populations. And, it has highlighted the danger of not addressing over-incarceration, as thousands of people in cramped jails have been exposed to the deadly virus — starkly reminding us, again, how the system disproportionately impacts low-income people and people of color.

Local justice systems can change. Sharing this message and spreading it even further can help make that happen.

Missouri Foundation for Health

Alexandra Rankin, Director of Government Affairs, and Kristy Klein Davis, Chief Strategy Officer

In 2019, MFH established a public affairs agenda that allows us to leverage our organizational position and take a public leadership role on issues that are critical to the health and well-being of Missouri's individuals and communities. The agenda provides focus for our organizational voice, allowing us to create a public narrative about who we are, what we care about, and what we want to be known for. As our public affairs work continues to evolve, we aim to be responsive and flexible, but also more deliberate in how we use these opportunities to influence public policy, elevate appropriate messages, build and maintain a strong reputation, and find common ground with stakeholders.

Over the past several months, we have been using our voice

in various ways to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have collaborated with public health and healthcare organizations to issue a letter to Missouri’s governor regarding the state’s stay-at-home order, submitted recommendations to state agencies on several policy extensions that would better serve our communities, and elevated concerns of local public health agencies to administration officials. We believe these advocacy activities — made possible by years of work to build relationships and capital with policymakers — complement our COVID-19 investment strategy by amplifying concerns of communities in need who often don’t have access to decision makers.

REACH Healthcare Foundation

Brenda Sharpe, President and CEO

This question is a tricky one. If we are not careful, and do not carefully engage community partners and external experts when developing our policy agenda, we can inadvertently undermine — or even compete with — policy priorities of the very organizations and populations we are trying to help. Their priorities must inform ours. That’s why REACH engages our grantees, consumer groups, national and statewide advocacy organizations, and our local legislative delegates as we craft our [annual policy agenda](#).

On occasion, we have stood alone and used our own voice, usually in situations where our nonprofit partners risk politically-motivated backlash — or even funding cuts — if they were to speak out. In these cases, we determine how much of our own “political capital” we are willing to expend, and then only advocate on behalf of issues and policies clearly aligned with our mission and vision.

Foundations quick to take a position on every issue will quickly find they are ignored by policymakers. Given this, on some occasions, especially when policies violate or are in direct contention with our guiding principles, we will speak out quickly and unequivocally. Examples include our opposition to the detainment of immigrant children, city ordinances that allow continued discriminatory practices against members of the LGBTQ community, or bills advancing punitive requirements based on stereotypes of the poor, such as Medicaid work requirements.

Generally, REACH favors working — and adding our voice to a collective effort — through coalitions, campaigns, and advocacy partnerships to advance common goals and agendas, such as the [Alliance for a Healthy Kansas](#) and [YesOn2 Healthcare for Missouri](#). As we see it, we are better together!

Walton Family Foundation

Daphne Moore, Director of Communications

Big social change requires public support, otherwise it won’t be real or lasting. By being thought leaders on the big issues we work to tackle, we can help build a solid foundation of support for the change we seek. To that end, when appropriate, we use

our voice to make a case for the solutions we believe will help increase access to opportunity for people and communities.

One example is a [Huffington Post op-ed](#) that Marc Sternberg, who directs the Foundation’s K-12 Education Program, authored urging protection for Dreamers through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Protecting and supporting Dreamers is [an issue we care about](#), and we felt our voice could help the students, parents, and families we aim to support.

We also use our voice to bring attention to emerging issues that might not be on the radar screens of the public and policymakers, but we feel need to be. For example, in our Home Region of Northwest Arkansas, lack of equitable access to affordable housing is a growing concern. To help raise awareness of that issue, our board member, Alice Walton, [wrote an op-ed in the Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette](#) urging the region’s leaders to develop policy solutions that close the housing gap, which are both creative in design and affordable.



Big social change requires public support, otherwise it won’t be real or lasting.

In our Environment Program’s work, we are using our voice to press for creative conservation solutions. For example, the program has elevated the importance of public policy in incentivizing farmers in the Mississippi River basin to adopt better conservation practices. In [a recent op-ed](#), interim Environment Program Director Moira McDonald argued that policymakers should invest in training and financial assistance to improve farmers’ access to technology and make it easier and more feasible for them to adapt their operations.





PART FIVE

How Foundations are Contributing to Public Policy Successes

What are some policy wins your foundation has contributed to?

Brainerd Foundation

Keiki Kehoe, Co-Director

As a limited life foundation dedicated to protecting the air, land, and water of our region, engaging in public policy has been core to our mission. From our inception, our trustees understood the importance of policy and never wavered in their commitment to be bold, visionary, and persistent. Looking back on 25 years of grantmaking, the achievements of our policy grantees give us hope for what is possible in the years to come.

Our approach to policy has included advocacy, litigation, and voter education. Investments in protecting critical ecosystems have resulted in major public lands bills signed into law by four successive presidents. At the state and local level, our grantees have made significant policy gains by working with governors, legislators, agencies, and local elected officials. They have addressed carbon in the atmosphere, blocked the expansion of the fossil fuel industry, advanced the development of clean energy, increased protections for clean air and water, and expanded access to public lands. Legal groups made sure that government, industries, and private citizens understood and followed the laws that protect our air, land, and water. And voter education groups made sure that people understood the consequences of elections and were able to exercise their right to vote.

We understand why some foundations are reluctant to engage in public policy — it is hard, often messy, and unpredictable. Yet our investments in policy have led to significant gains in every part of our region. Among the many factors that contributed to our success, four key elements stand out.

First, whenever possible, we provided the kind of support our grantees needed most—: general operating funds without

unnecessary restrictions. The [Alliance for Justice](#) helped us understand the rules governing private foundations, and our own lawyer regularly reviewed foundation documents to make sure we were complying with the law. This allowed us to be bold in our grantmaking.

Second, we understood the necessity of building political will to achieve policy change. This meant supporting organizations engaged in non-partisan civic engagement. Each year we see more elected leaders standing up for conservation values and championing the protection of our air, land, and water. Without political will, policy efforts are futile.

Third, we understood that progress doesn't happen in a straight line. Every policy effort has surges and setbacks, and foundations have a reputation for developing fatigue. We chose our grantees carefully and invested deeply, bolstering their ability to be effective and resilient. Many of our policy grantees have received consistent funding from us for the better part of two decades.

Finally, we knew that nobody does this work alone. We partnered with other foundations to ensure that our grantees had the resources they needed. And we provided support for our grantees to collaborate with the partners and allies in ways that made them stronger and more successful.



It is incumbent on all of us to roll up our sleeves and do all we can to build the world we want to see.

When we chose 2020 as the year to close our foundation, we never imagined that our sunset would coincide with a global pandemic and an historical movement for racial justice. The events of recent months underscore the fact that policies at the local, state, and federal level determine who lives, who dies, and who pays the price for our failure to enact laws and policies that reflect our values.

It is incumbent on all of us to roll up our sleeves and do all we can to build the world we want to see.

Community Foundation Boulder County

Chris Barge, Vice President of Strategic Initiatives

Our education advocacy work has led to winning school funding campaigns that have helped double full-day kindergarten and preschool opportunities across our county. Our advocacy for nonprofits has also led to ballot issues that have secured funding for safety net services and for capital projects for nonprofits.

As we have begun to advocate with rather than for those most impacted by inequity, we have also seen some policy wins led by a nonprofit that began as a program at our Foundation. [ELPASO \(Engaged Latino Parents Advancing Student Outcomes\)](#) now employs community organizers who

have helped parents advocate for K-12 school district policies against racial bias, bullying, and youth drug use.

Lastly, our stance in support of a complete and accurate 2020 Census count is driving our participation numbers in the right direction during an incredibly challenging year, given the social distancing requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though it is too early to call this a definitive “win,” we are encouraged by the results we are seeing thus far.

Haas, Jr. Fund

Cathy Cha, President

For much of its history, the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund was a funder of organizations and initiatives providing direct services to vulnerable populations, primarily in the San Francisco Bay Area. At the same time, we’ve come to realize we can have outsized impact by working with partners to change policies and systems.

One great example is our work on marriage equality. When we started investing in that issue in the early 2000s, many people thought progress wasn’t possible. But over the following 15 years, we worked with other funders and partners in the movement on a state-by-state campaign that changed hearts and minds across the country. The result was a historic Supreme Court ruling affirming marriage equality from coast to coast.

Another example comes from our work on immigrant rights. For a long time, the Haas, Jr. Fund was a local funder of Bay Area groups working with Latino workers and their families. With the adoption of anti-immigrant policies in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., over many years, we saw how immigrant communities in our backyard — and particularly undocumented immigrants — were facing huge problems including deportation and family separation, as well as a lack of job opportunities and critical services.



We’ve come to realize we can have outsized impact by working with partners to change policies and systems.

In the early 2000s, we began to work with movement and government partners to help California make the shift to become one of the most pro-immigrant states in the nation. Today in California, undocumented immigrants can get driver’s licenses, access in-state tuition and financial aid, and apply for licensure as accountants, healthcare workers, and in other positions — and it’s all because funders, nonprofits, and other partners came together to say that California should support and strengthen our immigrant communities. (In tandem with this work, the Haas, Jr. Fund has also supported undocumented young people to organize and lead the fight for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)).

The Haas, Jr. Fund continues to support critical services for people and communities in need, but policy and systems change is now an overriding focus for us. Once our Board saw the impact we could have through this kind of work, there was no going back.

Of course, we didn’t do any of this alone. By joining with like-minded funders, and by lifting up the voices of people who are closest to the problems we want to solve, we’ve found that philanthropy can make a lasting difference on critical issues facing communities we all care about.

The Healing Trust

Meredith Sullivan Benton, Vice-President, Programs and Advocacy

Our local school district in Nashville, Tennessee had [trauma-informed-school](#) staff positions that were all grant funded. When the grants were ending, however, the positions needed to move to the district’s operating budget. But chronic underfunding was preventing that from happening. So, we convened other funders to create a joint fund that provided a one-year match to transition the positions over two years into the district’s operating budget. We rallied public support for the work and communicated directly with School Board members and Metro Council members for the financial support. We were successful in securing the match funding and this year, all of the positions were funded in the operating budget without private support.

Another example of a policy win the Trust has contributed to is our role in helping refugees have a home in Tennessee. Last year, Tennessee’s Governor was considering ending refugee resettlement in the state. We advocated for the Governor and his advisors to meet with nonprofit leaders who work with refugees and hear from them firsthand. This led to several meetings where our grantee partners could meet directly with policymakers and advocate for the continuation of the state’s program that was on the chopping block. The Governor announced late last year that he had changed his mind and would continue to support refugee resettlement in Tennessee.

Helios Education Foundation

Charles Hokanson, Senior Vice President, Florida Community Engagement, and Janice Palmer, Vice President, Public Policy & Government Affairs

Helios Education Foundation’s College Knowing & Going Initiative is a college and career readiness program that has invested in the potential of thousands of low-income, Latino students in Arizona. At its core, a five-year grant provided approximately 40 percent of Arizona juniors and seniors with no-cost access to the ACT, assistance with college applications, and assistance with completing financial aid forms.

Evaluation of this five-year initiative found that postsecondary access is aided by ensuring all students take the ACT exam. Armed with this proof of concept, Helios met with elected leaders, including the Arizona Governor’s Office, key legislators, and the State Board of Education (SBE). These

conversations ultimately informed legislative action in 2018 that launched the state's College Readiness Pilot, which ensured 100 percent of Arizona's juniors were able to take the ACT in 2018-19. This public/private partnership gave further confidence to state leaders to enact legislation covering the cost of every Arizona high school junior to take a college readiness exam, ensuring equity and access.

At the same time, Helios engaged as a thought leader with the SBE as it crafted its A-F School Accountability system. The result was the inclusion of a College and Career Readiness Indicator for high school, in which ACT exam growth and FAFSA completion rates were included. This incentivizes high schools to focus on student college and career readiness, by incorporating key items that were included in the College Knowing & Going initiative.

In Florida, our policy work has focused on and been effective in the early learning years. Helios identified that many of our partners in Florida struggled to achieve impact because the state had gaps in its early childhood system, which was not well aligned with the K-12 system.

In response, Helios created a multi-year strategy centered on systemic reforms that ultimately helped convince the State Legislature to create a bi-partisan Blue Ribbon committee, funded by Helios as a public/private partnership, to study how to improve childcare program quality and develop a coherent assessment system for early-learning programs. From those recommendations, the legislature then passed additional legislation that established the state's first tilt in funding towards rewarding higher quality childcare programs.

There is still work to do, especially given that a major bill to reform the state's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program stalled in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19. Nonetheless, Florida has built coalitions, identified champions, and made progress, and Helios will continue its policy focus on advancing early learning with our partners at the state level.

Lumina Foundation

Jesse O'Connell, Director of Federal Policy, and Scott Jenkins, Director of State Policy

There are three wins, among many others, that we believe have amplified key conversations and policy change at the federal and state levels. The first of these is states setting attainment goals. At this point, nearly 45 states have set goals that are rigorous; are established in a way to guide policy, budgets, and practice; and fundamentally address the need for equity in post-secondary attainment.

A second notable win has been changing the fixed mindset of policymakers when it comes to today's students. We know that, today, more students are older, more racially diverse, work full-time, have children of their own, and are challenged by a system that is still organized to educate relatively well-off, white, traditional-age students. As we, along with many others, have worked to spread awareness of this reality, we've seen it show up in various policy contexts, both directly

through efforts that aim to address these students' needs and concerns, and indirectly by ensuring that policies are no longer written in ways that exclude or ignore them.

Finally, Lumina's equity imperative drives all our state policy work to operate with a racial equity lens. Three years ago, we created the [Talent, Innovation, and Equity \(TIE\) initiative](#) to see if we could identify and support states that were willing to dramatically increase attainment for students of color. Selected states commit to increase post-secondary attainment for equity populations by a minimum of 5 percent over four years. Colorado, Tennessee, Oregon, Virginia, and Massachusetts are part of the TIE initiative, and we have been impressed with how these states have made significant strides to gain public buy-in on racial equity, and also to identify and remove policies that result in negative outcomes for students of color.

Missouri Foundation for Health

Alexandra Rankin, Director of Government Affairs, and Kristy Klein Davis, Chief Strategy Officer

Since the Foundation's inception, MFH has contributed to several different policy initiatives that address topics such as health insurance coverage, Medicaid policy, health equity, and emergency medical care. [We have worked](#) to develop a coordinated emergency medical system for stroke and heart attack victims, restore Medicaid adult dental benefits and a state dental director, reduce smoking in Missouri through local policy change, and support efforts to improve access to quality healthcare products for incarcerated women.

In addition to public policy change, we have also focused on contributing to systems change, recognizing that policy improvement does not only happen at a government level. For example, we've supported work to advance organizational policies that protect LGBTQ people across healthcare providers and systems. As we move forward in 2020, we are focusing significantly on work to support Medicaid expansion in Missouri and improve our current Medicaid enrollment system.

Walton Family Foundation

Daphne Moore, Director of Communications

Our philanthropic investments in Gulf Coast restoration played a catalytic role in building public support for Louisiana's approval of its [Coastal Master Plan](#), which "guides the actions needed to sustain [the state's] coastal ecosystem, safeguard coastal populations, and protect vital economic and cultural resources." The Foundation helped bring together the Restore the Mississippi Delta Coalition following the Gulf oil spill to highlight the urgency of the land-loss crisis on the Gulf Coast. That coalition included Foundation grantees like the Environmental Defense Fund, National Wildlife Federation, and the National Audubon Society. By educating the public and policymakers, the coalition's efforts also helped solidify political support for the 2012 passage of the federal [RESTORE Act](#), which allocated 80 percent of the Gulf oil spill fines and penalties to spill-affected states for coastal restoration.

In the Colorado River basin, the Foundation worked with a diverse group of public, private, and nonprofit leaders to build coalitions through educational outreach to help secure passage of [Minute 323](#), a nine-year agreement between the U.S. and Mexico to increase water security. The agreement gives philanthropic organizations a critical role in sharing the cost of restoration in the Colorado River Delta.

Additionally, the Foundation is proud of the role our K-12 Education Program grantees have played in helping secure big education policy victories. With the Foundation's support for their nonpartisan research and educational outreach, our K-12 grantees' efforts have, since 2017, allowed for an additional \$3.4 billion of funding for our grantees and issues we support.

And finally, in our Home Region Program, the Foundation was an early and important supporter of the Razorback Regional Greenway, a 37-mile system of multi-purpose pedestrian and bicycling trails that now connects six cities in Northwest Arkansas. Our funding helped 32 different municipalities work together to achieve this goal and secure federal matching funds to support the construction of the Greenway.

For more, download *Policy Influence*:



cep.org