# THE PLACE-BASED PHILANTHROPY

# FIELD GUIDE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Philanthropy has reached an inflection point. Traditional models—built around thematic portfolios, discrete project grants, and centralized decision-making—no longer match the complexity of the challenges communities face. Problems such as housing instability, inequitable education systems, health disparities, and economic dislocation are deeply interwoven, and they manifest most visibly in place. Geography is where inequity concentrates and where power, trust, and opportunity collide.

Place-based philanthropy reorients the field around that reality. It is the discipline of aligning capital, influence, and institutional behavior within a defined geography to change the underlying systems that shape people's lives. It moves from *funding programs* to *financing conditions*. The core premise is simple but transformative: sustainable change happens when those closest to the issues drive solutions, when institutions stay long enough to matter, and when data, policy, and funding align around community priorities rather than organizational convenience.

Over the past two decades, national foundations, community philanthropies, and regional funders have experimented with versions of this approach—Promise Neighborhoods, Purpose Built Communities, Living Cities, and a new wave of regional collaboratives in health and education. The evidence from these experiments converges on a clear pattern: durable impact depends less on the amount of money invested and more on how that money is governed, sequenced, and held accountable to residents.

**This guide was written for funders who are either beginning to design a place-based strategy or trying to deepen one already underway**. It synthesizes what's been learned from national research, field practice, and the lived experience of communities that have sustained change over time. It details the principles, infrastructure, and culture that distinguish rhetoric from practice.

Key lessons emerge from the knowledge base and experience of other funders:

- Geography is **the** unit of change. Outcomes improve only when public systems and civic partners align their actions within the same geography.
- Residents must lead. Place-based philanthropy without shared power is simply better-coordinated charity.

- Time is a variable, not a constraint. Deep change unfolds over a decade or more; funders must commit to timeframes that match the complexity of the problems they seek to solve.
- Coordination is capital. The work requires a backbone organization—a *community quarterback*—with the capacity and legitimacy to align sectors and sustain learning cycles.
- Evaluation is about learning, not proving. The goal is to adapt strategy through real-time feedback rather than demonstrate attribution through late-stage studies.
- Equity must be structural. A place-based strategy that doesn't address displacement, resource flow, and decision authority risks reinforcing the very inequities it intends to fix.

For funders, adopting a place-based approach means changing how philanthropy itself operates. It requires fewer, larger, multi-year grants that fund capacity rather than projects. It requires data transparency, participatory governance, and humility to follow local leadership. And it demands that philanthropy step out of the cycle of pilot, proof, and exit; and instead act as a civic investor staying long enough for systems to reset.

This guide provides both a conceptual and practical roadmap. Each section explains the logic of place-based practice, identifies common implementation challenges, and illustrates how funders and communities are meeting them. The closing section, *Implications for Funders*, translates these insights into direct recommendations for boards and executives—covering structure, staffing, accountability, and partnership strategy.

Place-based philanthropy is not a trend; it is a re-grounding of the field's purpose. It calls philanthropy back to proximity, accountability, and shared ownership of outcomes. When done well, it transforms both communities and the organizations that serve them.

## SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION: WHY PLACE MATTERS

Philanthropy often aspires to solve large problems—inequality, health disparities, educational opportunity, climate adaptation—but these challenges are not abstract. They are lived and experienced in neighborhoods, towns, and rural counties where systems overlap. The story of inequity is, at its core, a story of place: of where people live, what public infrastructure they can access, and how power and opportunity are distributed across geography.

### FROM PROGRAMMATIC THINKING TO SYSTEMS GROUNDING

For much of the last half-century, philanthropy has been dominated by *programmatic logic*—define an issue, fund a promising project, evaluate outcomes, then scale or replicate. That logic produced technical innovation but often left conditions unchanged. A tutoring initiative might raise reading scores for a small cohort, but the school system's funding inequities persist. A pilot health program might expand access temporarily, but transportation barriers or housing costs soon erode the gains.

Place-based philanthropy begins where project logic ends. It recognizes that **no social outcome exists in isolation**, and that durable improvement depends on re-wiring how systems interact within a community. When funders work in place, they shift from fixing discrete symptoms to building an ecosystem capable of sustaining improvement.

This approach is not new. The concept traces back to early twentieth-century settlement houses, neighborhood development corporations, and community foundations. What is new is the discipline with which today's practitioners treat place as a system boundary. Instead of using geography as a backdrop for programs, they use it as a framework for governance, measurement, and accountability.

### THE RATIONALE FOR PLACE

Three realities have pushed the field toward this reorientation:

1. **Concentration of inequity.** Data show that educational attainment, health outcomes, and income mobility correlate strongly with ZIP code. Concentrated poverty and racial segregation create feedback loops that no single program can disrupt.

2. **Fragmented institutions.** Public and private systems—schools, hospitals, housing authorities, workforce agencies—rarely coordinate at the community level. Their overlapping mandates produce service deserts and duplication.

3. **Erosion of civic trust.** Communities fatigued by short-term initiatives and outside agendas are skeptical of new promises. Place-based philanthropy offers a chance to rebuild trust by staying long enough for results to become visible.

In short, *place matters because systems converge there.* Every school reform, public health effort, and housing intervention ultimately lands in the same geography. Coordinating those efforts locally is not an optional efficiency, it is the only scale at which complex problems can actually be solved.

## THE LIMITS OF TRADITIONAL PHILANTHROPY

Traditional philanthropy treats proximity as risk. Boards prefer geographic diversification, quick wins, and measurable outputs. But the very design choices that make foundations comfortable—short time horizons, narrow focus areas, competitive grant cycles—are the ones that make systemic change impossible.

Local organizations are forced into reactive postures, chasing grants that rarely align or last. National funders parachute in with pilot projects, only to exit when the grant term ends. The community is left to patch together residual programs without the infrastructure to sustain them. This *initiative churn* is costly and demoralizing.

A place-based approach flips that equation. Instead of scattering investments across topics and regions, a funder concentrates its resources, relationships, and attention in one geography for a defined period—typically five to ten years. By doing so, the foundation can align partners, co-finance with government, and learn fast enough to adapt. The goal shifts from **spending money well** to **building systems that outlast the money.**

## WHAT MAKES PLACE-BASED WORK DISTINCT

Four attributes distinguish credible place-based strategies from “local grantmaking with better branding”:

- **Temporal discipline.** Funders commit to multi-year horizons that match the scale of change they seek. Short grants do not build trust or infrastructure.
- **Geographic precision.** The “place” is clearly defined—whether a neighborhood, county, or region—and treated as a closed system for planning and evaluation.
- **Resident authority.** Decision-making power is shared with those who live the issues, not just those who fund or study them.
- **Systems alignment.** Partners agree on a small set of measurable outcomes and synchronize actions around them.

These features make the work slower, riskier, and more political—but they also make it real. When philanthropy stays long enough to align budgets, policies, and relationships, it ceases to be a visitor and becomes a civic actor.

### THE OPPORTUNITY AND THE OBLIGATION

For funders, embracing place-based work is both an opportunity and an obligation. It offers a way to move beyond transactional grantmaking toward structural change. It also demands humility: foundations must give up some control, share data, and measure success through community outcomes rather than institutional metrics.

In an era of declining trust in public and private institutions, the funder that chooses to stay in place, listen, and co-govern earns credibility that money alone cannot buy. Place-based philanthropy is therefore more than a strategy; it is a civic stance—a way of working that treats community members as partners, not grantees, and sees geography as the arena where equity either advances or fails.

## SECTION 2 – DEFINING PLACE-BASED PHILANTHROPY

Place-based philanthropy is the deliberate concentration of money, influence, data, and institutional behavior within a **bounded geography** to change the underlying **conditions** that produce unequal outcomes. It treats a neighborhood, city, rural county, or region as a **system boundary**: the arena where schools, health providers, employers, landlords, transit agencies, and civic groups interact—and where residents experience the results.

### WHAT IT IS (AND ISN'T)

- **Is:** A multi-year, resident-led, cross-sector strategy that aligns partners around a small set of **public, shared outcomes** (e.g., 3rd-grade reading, housing stability, youth employment, community safety).
- **Isn't:** A portfolio of good local programs. Programs are **inputs**; the aim is **system performance** in a place—policies changed, budgets aligned, practices standardized, and accountability visible.

### CORE ELEMENTS (THE NON-NEGOTIABLES)

1. **Geographic precision.** Define the "place" (tracts, neighborhoods, city, county) and keep planning/evaluation inside that boundary.
2. **Resident authority.** Residents co-set priorities and control a real portion of resources (not just advisory roles).

3. **A community quarterback.** A trusted intermediary coordinates partners, manages the learning agenda, keeps the calendar, and publishes results.

4. **Shared indicators + public dashboard.** 10–15 measures with baselines/targets; transparent reporting and course-correction.

5. **Time discipline.** Stay a minimum **5–10 years**; publish renewal/exit criteria.

6. **Capital stack.** Multi-year grants + flexible finance (recoverables/PRIs/guarantees) when the thesis requires it.

7. **Learning over proof.** Developmental evaluation early; more rigorous designs once implementation stabilizes.

## FIELD TYPOLOGIES & ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

Below are common **modes** of place-based work with examples used frequently in the field. (Use these as patterns—not prescriptions.)

### A) Cradle-to-Career / Education-Anchored Systems

- **Promise Neighborhoods** (multiple U.S. sites): Federal seed capital; local backbones align early childhood → college/career with shared indicators.

- **Harlem Children's Zone (NYC):** Original neighborhood pipeline model; deep services plus school reform within a defined geography.

- **StriveTogether Network** (national): Regional partnerships managing to population outcomes with continuous improvement methods.

### B) Neighborhood Revitalization (Quarterback Model)

- **Purpose Built Communities / East Lake (Atlanta origin):** Local nonprofit "quarterback" integrates **mixed-income housing**, **high-quality schools**, **wellness**.

- **HUD Choice Neighborhoods** (national): Housing-anchored, cross-sector redevelopment of distressed neighborhoods.

### C) Health-Anchored, Cross-Sector Place Initiatives

- **BUILD Health Challenge** (national): Hospital/public health/community partnerships retool upstream determinants in specific neighborhoods.

- **Accountable Communities of Health** (e.g., CA, WA): Regional health collaboratives aligning Medicaid, public health, and community-based organizations.

**D) Economic Mobility / Financial Security in Place**

- **Financial Empowerment Centers** (multiple cities): Free professional financial counseling embedded locally; municipal + philanthropy co-investment.
- **WorkAdvance / sector partnerships** (various): Workforce pipelines tied to employer demand in a geography.

**E) Civic Power & Youth-Led Practice**

- **Youth participatory grantmaking** (community foundations, collaboratives): Residents—often youth—set priorities and allocate funds; builds lasting civic capacity.
- **My Brother's Keeper Local Action Networks**: City/county collaboratives focused on boys and young men of color, anchored in specific places.

**F) Multi-Donor/Regional Collaboratives**

- **Living Cities' Integration Initiative** (select metros): Pooled funds + civic muscle to target systems barriers.
- **Regional climate or resilience collaboratives** (various states): Philanthropy + government align infrastructure, land-use, and workforce around vulnerable geographies.

**Use pattern logic:** Pick the **dominant anchor** (education, health, housing, economy), but still coordinate across systems—because residents don't experience life in silos.

## Traditional vs. Place-Based Philanthropy

| Dimension | Traditional Philanthropy | Place-Based Philanthropy |
|---|---|---|
| **Unit of action** | Issue area or program | **Geography** as a system boundary |
| **Time horizon** | 1–3-year project grants | **5–10+ years** with renewal/exit criteria |
| **Decision locus** | Funder staff/boards | **Shared with residents** (participatory governance) |

| Dimension | Traditional Philanthropy | Place-Based Philanthropy |
|---|---|---|
| **Primary grantee** | Individual nonprofits | **Community quarterback** + cross-sector partners |
| **Grant type** | Project-restricted | **Multi-year general operating** + flexible finance |
| **Success metric** | Outputs of funded projects | **Population-level indicators** & resident-reported outcomes |
| **Learning style** | End-of-grant reports; attribution focus | **Continuous improvement; public dashboard**; contribution focus |
| **Coordination** | Parallel portfolios; low alignment | **One calendar, one dashboard, one table** |
| **Risk posture** | Avoid policy/power shifts | **Tackle policy, budgeting, and power-sharing** |
| **Equity stance** | Fund programs serving target groups | **Change rules/resources** producing inequity in that place |
| **Exit** | End of grant term | **Institutionalization** into public budgets & durable governance |

## DESIGN CHOICES THAT MAKE OR BREAK THE WORK

- **Boundary discipline.** Resist “scope creep.” If it’s not inside the map or the outcomes framework, say no.
- **Visible authority for residents.** Publish which decisions residents control (criteria, awards, evaluation pivots) and how conflicts are handled.
- **Backbone resourcing.** Fund coordination at market rates (PM, data, community organizing, comms). Don’t starve the quarterback.
- **Anti-displacement policy:** Pair investment with right-to-return, CLTs, property-tax relief, tenant protections—so gains don’t push people out.
- **Government alignment.** Sync grant calendars with school/city/county fiscal cycles; co-fund line items that survive beyond the grant.

- **Write it down.** A one-page **Place Charter** (geography, outcomes, governance, finance, safeguards, renewal/exit) prevents drift.

### HOW TO DECIDE IF YOU'RE READY (FUNDER LENS)

- **Clarity of "place."** Can you draw the map without debate?
- **Staying power.** Do you have board alignment for a decade-scale bet?
- **Power-sharing tolerance.** Are you prepared to give residents real allocation authority?
- **Partner posture.** Are public agencies willing to adjust **policy/budgets** alongside grants?
- **Internal incentives.** Will you evaluate staff on **shared place outcomes** rather than grant counts?

### WHAT TO DO NEXT (PRAGMATIC STEPS)

1. **Commission a readiness scan** (assets, harms, partners, power).
2. **Identify or incubate a quarterback** with legitimacy and capacity.
3. **Co-design an outcomes framework** with residents; set 10–15 indicators and baselines.
4. **Publish the Place Charter** and a Year-1 Action Plan with owners and budgets.
5. **Fund the backbone + participation costs** (stipends, translation, childcare).
6. **Stand up the dashboard**; schedule quarterly learning reviews; adjust in public.

### FIELD SNAPSHOTS: HOW PLACE-BASED STRATEGIES WORK ON THE GROUND

**Promise Neighborhoods – Cradle-to-Career Continuity**
Launched under the U.S. Department of Education, Promise Neighborhoods link schools, housing agencies, and social-service partners around a single results framework—from prenatal care to college completion. Each site tracks about a dozen shared indicators (attendance, reading by grade 3, high-school graduation, postsecondary enrollment). Successful sites like **Hayward Promise (CA)** and **Northside Achievement Zone (MN)** show measurable gains in reading proficiency and parent engagement within five years.

**Purpose Built Communities – Neighborhood Revitalization with a Quarterback**
Originating in Atlanta's East Lake district, Purpose Built Communities use a locally

governed "community quarterback" to coordinate mixed-income housing, cradle-to-college education pipelines, and neighborhood wellness centers. The model has spread to 25+ cities. Early outcomes include reduced crime rates, improved school performance, and large-scale private-sector co-investment leveraged through the quarterback.

**BUILD Health Challenge – Health Anchored Systems Change**
A national funder collaborative (Kresge, RWJF, de Beaumont, etc.) supporting local partnerships among hospitals, public-health agencies, and community groups to tackle upstream determinants of health. Sites such as **Cleveland** and **Baltimore** used BUILD grants to align data systems and re-allocate hospital community-benefit spending toward housing and environmental remediation—reducing emergency-department use by double digits.

**Living Cities' Integration Initiative – Multi-Donor, Multi-Sector Alignment**
Living Cities pooled philanthropic and bank capital across five metros to test how civic leadership teams could dismantle structural barriers to economic inclusion. The initiative demonstrated how funders can standardize indicators, deploy recoverable grants and program-related investments (PRIs), and compel local governments to braid their own dollars with private financing.

**Youth Grantmakers Network – Resident-Led Philanthropy**
Community foundations in Michigan, North Carolina, and Washington operate youth-led grant boards that review proposals, make awards, and publicly evaluate impact. Average grant sizes range from $1,000 to $15,000, but the governance effect is outsized: teens learn philanthropic due diligence while institutions learn to share power and visibility with new generations.

### WHY THESE SNAPSHOTS MATTER

Each example translates the abstract logic of place-based philanthropy into concrete design choices:

- A clearly bounded geography
- Shared indicators tied to lived outcomes
- Long-term commitments (5–10 years)
- Resident or cross-sector governance structures
- Transparent data and public accountability

Together, they illustrate that "place-based" is not a brand; it's a **discipline**—of staying put, sharing control, and synchronizing systems until community outcomes improve and persist.

## SECTION 3 – MODELS AND VARIATIONS IN PRACTICE

Place-based philanthropy is not a single formula. It is a **discipline of concentration**—choosing where and how to stay, and through what institutional pathways to achieve durable, population-level change.

The most effective initiatives anchor their work in one dominant system (education, housing, health, or economy) but build concentric partnerships that address the interconnected drivers of well-being.

The following framework summarizes the principal *anchor models* currently in use across the field. Each represents a distinct entry point into systems change, but all share the same architecture: a **defined geography**, **resident participation**, **cross-sector governance**, and **multi-year resourcing**.

### Anchor Models in Place-Based Philanthropy

| Anchor Model | Primary Outcomes Targeted | Typical Funder Types | Example Programs / Networks | Typical Time Horizon |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Education-Anchored (Cradle-to-Career)** | Early learning readiness; 3rd-grade reading; high school graduation; postsecondary completion | National education funders, local community foundations, school districts | *Promise Neighborhoods*, *StriveTogether Network*, *Harlem Children's Zone* | 8–10 years |
| **Neighborhood Revitalization (Quarterback Model)** | Housing stability; safety; education quality; wellness access | Community development funders, CDFIs, place-based collaboratives | *Purpose Built Communities*, *HUD Choice Neighborhoods* | 10–15 years |
| **Health-Anchored Cross-Sector Models** | Improved population health; reduced ED use; housing and environmental reform | Health foundations, hospital systems, public health agencies | *BUILD Health Challenge*, *Accountable Communities of Health* (CA, WA) | 5–10 years |

| Anchor Model | Primary Outcomes Targeted | Typical Funder Types | Example Programs / Networks | Typical Time Horizon |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Economic Mobility & Workforce Development** | Income growth; employment stability; small-business creation; reduced poverty | Workforce intermediaries, regional economic funds, chambers of commerce | *WorkAdvance*, *Financial Empowerment Centers*, *JobsPlus* | 5–8 years |
| **Civic Power & Youth-Led Engagement** | Resident leadership; voter participation; equitable governance; belonging | Community foundations, participatory collaboratives, civic funders | *Youth Grantmakers Network*, *Philanthropy Together*, *MBK Local Action Networks* | 3–7 years |
| **Regional Multi-Donor Collaboratives** | Systemic integration; policy alignment; multi-sector co-financing | National/regional funders, corporate philanthropies, financial institutions | *Living Cities Integration Initiative*, | 10+ years |
| **Climate & Resilience Anchored Models** | Infrastructure adaptation; environmental equity; workforce transition | Environmental foundations, state/federal partners, sustainability funds | *Resilient Cities Network*, *Climate Resilience Hubs*, *Blue Meridian Climate Initiative* | 10–20 years |

## EDUCATION-ANCHORED (CRADLE-TO-CAREER) SYSTEMS

Education has long been the most intuitive starting point for place-based work because schools are the most visible civic infrastructure in any community. They reach nearly every household and already collect the data that drive accountability.
Cradle-to-career systems start by aligning early childhood, K–12, and postsecondary partners around a shared results framework: kindergarten readiness, third-grade reading, high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and workforce entry.

What distinguishes the strong models—*Promise Neighborhoods*, *StriveTogether*, *Harlem Children's Zone*—is not the number of programs but the *discipline of coordination*. They establish a central "backbone" entity (often a local nonprofit or consortium) that holds the shared measurement system, facilitates learning sessions, and drives policy alignment between schools, city departments, and social-service agencies.

Funders play a catalytic role early—financing the data infrastructure, paying for community engagement, and funding the coordinator—but their real contribution is staying long enough for public dollars to pick up these functions. After the first 3–5 years, durable sites move backbone funding into school district budgets or local government line items.

*Lessons for funders:* education-anchored efforts work best where there's a stable superintendent and civic partnership culture. Where political turnover is high, funders must underwrite governance continuity and build resident leadership early to avoid dependence on individual champions.

### NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION (QUARTERBACK MODEL)

The *quarterback or guardian* model is a full-system approach to community redevelopment. Originating from East Lake, Atlanta, and scaled through the *Purpose-Built Communities* network, this model coordinates housing, education, and wellness within a single geography. The quarterback or guardian—usually a community development nonprofit—acts as the project manager and convener. It controls the master plan, raises capital, and maintains accountability for both social and economic outcomes.

Housing is the anchor investment, but it is paired with cradle-to-college education and comprehensive health and wellness programs. The quarterback aligns developers, schools, healthcare providers, and local government, ensuring they move on one schedule with a unified communication plan.

This model demands patient, blended finance: philanthropic seed funding, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), city bonds, and private loans. Philanthropy's role is to absorb early risk and fund the coordination, planning, and resident engagement phases that conventional capital will not cover.

The greatest threat is **displacement**. Without resident voice, strong right-to-return policies, and early investment in community land trusts or tax relief mechanisms, revitalization becomes gentrification. Funders must explicitly budget for these protections.

### HEALTH-ANCHORED CROSS-SECTOR MODELS

Health-centered place strategies start from the insight that **zip code predicts health more reliably than genetic code**. Hospital systems and public health agencies increasingly realize that social determinants—housing, air quality, transportation, and income—are far more predictive of outcomes than clinical care.

The *BUILD Health Challenge* and *Accountable Communities of Health (ACHs)* demonstrate how funders can incentivize hospitals and community organizations to collaborate at the neighborhood or regional level. In these models, hospitals commit community-benefit funds, local health departments coordinate public data, and community groups design interventions based on resident-identified needs.

The funder's role is to finance backbone coordination and demand transparency: shared health dashboards, open data agreements, and joint governance boards. When done well, health-anchored place strategies shift millions in hospital spending from reactive charity care to preventive, upstream investments.

However, health funders must avoid "pilot disease." Medical systems are accustomed to grants with short reporting cycles and rigid compliance metrics. Funders must insist on multi-year budgeting and shared evaluation so the health system learns alongside the community.

### ECONOMIC MOBILITY & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Economic mobility strategies focus on helping residents build sustainable livelihoods and financial security within a defined geography. Models like *WorkAdvance* and *Financial Empowerment Centers* show how to integrate workforce training, financial coaching, and employer engagement locally. The strongest efforts align employers, workforce boards, and community colleges around real labor-market demand rather than generic training.

These initiatives often require **blended capital**—grants for coaching and data, coupled with federal workforce funds and employer contributions. Evaluation emphasizes employment stability, wage growth, and reductions in household debt.

For funders, the design challenge is coordination across silos: workforce boards report to state agencies, financial-empowerment centers to city government, and nonprofits to philanthropy. The funder must underwrite a shared data and governance platform that allows these systems to act as one.

### CIVIC POWER & YOUTH-LED ENGAGEMENT MODELS

This cluster of models—youth grantmaking boards, civic action collaboratives, resident leadership academies—anchors on **democratic participation** rather than a specific service sector. The unit of change is civic capacity: who decides, who participates, and whose stories are centered in defining success.

Examples include the **Youth Grantmakers Network**, the **YouthPower Fund**, and **My Brother's Keeper Local Action Networks**. Each channels a portion of philanthropic dollars directly through residents (often youth) who make real funding decisions. The process builds civic skill and redistributes power.

These models are often smaller in budget but catalytic in effect. They transform funder–community relationships, enhance legitimacy, and generate policy changes that ripple across systems.

For funders, youth-led or civic-power initiatives require a tolerance for ambiguity and a willingness to learn publicly. Success is measured less by outputs than by *shifts in power, narrative, and representation*.

### REGIONAL MULTI-DONOR COLLABORATIVES

Regional collaboratives—such as *Living Cities' Integration Initiative* or the *Central Texas Health and Wellbeing Network*—aggregate capital, data, and convening authority across institutions. They act as **"tables of tables,"** harmonizing the agendas of multiple funders, governments, and anchor institutions.

These initiatives typically adopt a "collective impact" or "systems alignment" framework, sharing a data infrastructure and a jointly governed outcomes dashboard. The aim is to transcend the project mindset by making system coordination the outcome itself.

Funders in these collaboratives accept diluted attribution but amplified impact. They gain efficiency through pooled administration and reduce burden on grantees, who report to one body instead of many. The challenge lies in governance: unless the collaborative has a strong backbone and clear conflict-resolution rules, decision paralysis sets in.

### CLIMATE AND RESILIENCE ANCHORED MODELS

Climate-focused place strategies are the newest wave, linking infrastructure investment, workforce transition, and community resilience. Networks like the *Resilient Cities Network* and *Blue Meridian's Climate Initiative* embed equity criteria in climate adaptation funding. These efforts use place-based methods—multi-sector alignment, local dashboards, and resident participation—to ensure resilience investments reach marginalized neighborhoods rather than amplify displacement.

Funders entering this space must learn from the last decade of urban redevelopment failures: climate money without community governance can accelerate inequity. The key design question is **"Who benefits when we build resilience?"**

### EMERGING HYBRID MODELS

A new generation of initiatives blends multiple anchors—recognizing that systems rarely change one at a time.

- **Health + Housing Hybrids:** Hospitals investing in affordable housing through CDFIs or community land trusts (e.g., Kaiser Permanente's *Thriving Communities Fund*).
- **Education + Workforce Hybrids:** Postsecondary institutions and employers collaborating on regional "talent pipelines" (e.g., *Cleveland Talent Alliance*).
- **Climate + Economic Mobility:** Foundations integrating workforce transition funding into renewable-energy investments, ensuring that climate adaptation creates local jobs.
- **Public Health + Civic Power:** Health funders underwriting participatory governance boards to democratize health-policy decisions.

These hybrid strategies signal where the field is heading: *toward integrated, resident-centered systems that treat place not as a program site but as the platform for governance itself*.

## SECTION 4 – PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING IN THE CONTEXT OF PLACE-BASED PHILANTHROPY

Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) is philanthropy's most direct experiment in **democratizing decision-making**. While place-based philanthropy centers *where* resources flow, participatory grantmaking focuses on *who decides* and *how decisions are made*. When combined, they form a deeper structural reform: power and resources aligned within the same geography, under the authority of the people who live there.

### FROM INPUT TO AUTHORITY

In traditional grantmaking, community "voice" is often confined to focus groups or advisory roles that inform priorities but do not determine allocations. Participatory models move past consultation into **decision authority**. Residents, youth, or local stakeholders set criteria, review applications, and make funding decisions—sometimes for small grant pools, increasingly for significant portions of philanthropic portfolios.

This is not simply a moral gesture; it is a **performance improvement mechanism**. Communities closest to the problems tend to make sharper, more contextual judgments about feasibility, legitimacy, and long-term impact. Decisions grounded in lived experience often outperform those made through external technical review panels.

## WHY PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING MATTERS IN PLACE-BASED WORK

Place-based philanthropy aims to align systems and resources to local realities. Yet even the most sophisticated place strategies can fail if they reproduce the same **power asymmetries** that created inequity in the first place.
Participatory grantmaking addresses that risk by embedding accountability and legitimacy directly into the funding process. It converts funders from directors to stewards, ensuring decisions reflect the composite knowledge of the community rather than the assumptions of external experts.

When integrated into a place-based framework, participatory mechanisms serve several critical functions:

1. **Legitimacy:** They signal that residents are not recipients but co-governors of the strategy.
2. **Learning:** They surface local knowledge about context, barriers, and unintended effects early enough to adapt.
3. **Equity:** They shift control toward those most affected by systemic failures.
4. **Sustainability:** They build civic infrastructure—leaders, processes, norms—that persist after the funder exits.

## TYPOLOGIES OF PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING

Participatory grantmaking is not monolithic. Across the field, several forms have emerged, differing by scale, structure, and intensity of resident power.

| Type | Decision Power | Typical Grant Size | Common Sponsors | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Advisory Influence Model** | Community members provide ranked recommendations; final approval by funder | $25K–$250K per cycle | Private foundations; health funders | *Community Advisory Boards*, *mini-grant review panels* |
| **Shared Governance Model** | Residents hold 50%+ of voting seats on allocation committees | $100K–$2M | Community foundations; | *Youth Grantmakers Network*, |

| Type | Decision Power | Typical Grant Size | Common Sponsors | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | pooled funds | regional collaboratives | *Participatory City (UK)* |
| **Resident-Led Model** | Residents have full decision authority for defined pool; funders provide support only | $25K–$1M | Social justice funds; grassroots collaboratives | *Disability Rights Fund*, *Red Umbrella Fund*, *YouthPower Fund* |
| **Hybrid Pooled Fund Model** | Multiple funders pool capital; shared resident board allocates across themes | $1M–$10M+ | Regional health & equity collaboratives | *New York City Communities for Change* |

The degree of participation depends on **trust maturity**—how long funders and communities have worked together, and how well the funder has institutionalized shared governance. Many start at the advisory level and progress toward resident-led control as confidence and capacity grow.

### HOW PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES STRENGTHEN PLACE-BASED SYSTEMS

1. **Sharper Targeting of Resources.** Residents prioritize interventions that fit lived constraints—transportation, timing, safety, or stigma—avoiding elegant but impractical designs.

2. **Faster Feedback Loops.** Community decision-makers identify implementation breakdowns before reports are written.

3. **Broader Reach and Inclusion.** PGM boards diversify participation—youth, renters, elders, immigrants—making resource flow more representative.

4. **Institutional Learning.** Funders and public agencies gain direct exposure to local reasoning, recalibrating their own criteria and risk assessments.

These advantages convert participation from moral rhetoric to operational strategy. Over time, the participatory infrastructure becomes a **civic asset**, serving as an accountability mechanism even after funders leave.

## IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK: HOW TO BUILD PARTICIPATORY STRUCTURES

A functional PGM system within a place-based framework requires five design steps:

1. **Define Scope and Authority.**
   Specify what residents control: funding amounts, criteria, and post-award monitoring. Put this in writing—ambiguity breeds distrust.

2. **Recruit Representative Members.**
   Use transparent, open processes with stipends, childcare, transportation, and translation to ensure inclusion.

3. **Build Capacity and Confidence.**
   Provide training on grant evaluation, budgets, and equity principles—but avoid "professionalizing" residents out of authenticity.

4. **Institutionalize Transparency.**
   Publish decisions, minutes, and rationale publicly. Accountability builds legitimacy.

5. **Evaluate and Iterate.**
   Assess both decision quality and process quality—did the process distribute power fairly, reach marginalized voices, and change outcomes?

Philanthropy's role is to **fund both the process and the people**—resident stipends, facilitation, communication, and accessibility supports must be treated as core program costs, not overhead.

## FUNDER READINESS CRITERIA

Funders contemplating participatory grantmaking should assess internal and external readiness on four dimensions:

1. **Cultural Readiness:**
   - Does leadership accept that good ideas can come from outside institutional boundaries?
   - Can the organization tolerate slower, more deliberative decision-making?

2. **Structural Readiness:**
   - Are there flexible funds that can be allocated without excessive compliance barriers?

- Do staff and board understand fiduciary implications of shared authority?

3. **Operational Readiness:**
   - Can existing grant systems accommodate resident decision roles?
   - Are communication and accessibility supports budgeted?

4. **Relational Readiness:**
   - Has trust been built with the target community?
   - Have conflicts of interest and accountability structures been addressed in advance?

A readiness assessment often reveals that funders overestimate their capacity for power-sharing. The discipline of participatory practice begins with acknowledging these constraints and committing to reform them.

### FIELD EXAMPLES

**YouthPower Fund** (National, 2020–present)
A pooled fund led by 13 U.S. youth organizing groups. Youth representatives design criteria, vet proposals, and allocate unrestricted grants to youth-led social justice organizations. Early evaluations show higher satisfaction among grantees and more responsive funding cycles compared to adult-led foundations.

**Disability Rights Fund** (Global)
Pioneered a fully participatory global model: persons with disabilities hold majority decision authority on grant committees. The fund's transparency protocols and rotating representation structure have become a benchmark for participatory governance.

**Central Texas Health and Wellbeing Network**
A regional place-based collaborative linking nonprofits, community foundations, and resident tables. Pools of funding provided by the St. David's Foundation have been allocated to multiple intermediaries to support grassroots nonprofit capacity building and strategic investment in communities. Community-led funding rounds prioritize health equity and nonprofit capacity building. The participatory mechanism has been instrumental in aligning local community-benefit spending with resident-defined needs.

### RISKS AND MITIGATION

Participatory models carry predictable tensions:

- **Tokenism:** Funders convene resident panels but retain final authority. *Mitigation:* codify authority and fund stipends.
- **Process fatigue:** Residents face long meetings and limited impact. *Mitigation:* compensate time and track results visibly.
- **Elite capture:** The most vocal dominate deliberations. *Mitigation:* rotate membership, use small-group facilitation, and recruit broadly.
- **Administrative friction:** Foundation systems are not designed for shared governance. *Mitigation:* adjust internal workflows before launch.

The lesson is simple: participatory processes succeed not by perfect design but by **sustained humility and iteration**.

### LONG-TERM PAYOFFS

Over time, participatory grantmaking redefines philanthropy's role from benefactor to civic partner. It creates lasting civic infrastructure—a network of residents capable of agenda-setting, budget analysis, and systems monitoring. When funders leave, these structures often persist as advisory councils, neighborhood boards, or formalized governance bodies.

For place-based funders, this durability is the ultimate ROI. The dollars circulate and expire, but the **capacity to govern**—to deliberate, prioritize, and hold institutions accountable—remains.

Participatory grantmaking is not a peripheral innovation. It is a structural correction. It ensures that place-based philanthropy does not reproduce the inequities it seeks to undo. For funders, the question is no longer whether participation works—the evidence says it does—but **whether institutions are willing to be changed by it**.

## SECTION 5 – COMMUNITY-LEVEL REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS

Place-based philanthropy depends less on the size of a grant than on the strength of the **civic infrastructure** that can receive and use it. Money alone cannot substitute for trust, legitimacy, or coordination. Communities vary widely in readiness; the smartest funders adapt to that variation instead of forcing uniform implementation.

## WHY COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE MATTERS

At the core of every enduring place-based initiative lies a **backbone capacity**—the people and institutions capable of convening partners, managing data, maintaining accountability, and translating between residents and bureaucracies.
Without this backbone, collaborative tables become talk shops and dashboards gather dust. Community infrastructure is composed of five interlocking layers:

1. **Legitimacy:** Residents recognize the convening body as fair and trustworthy.
2. **Leadership:** There is a critical mass of people who can articulate shared priorities and broker conflict.
3. **Data:** Partners can generate, interpret, and act on local evidence.
4. **Coordination:** Institutions cooperate on a single plan and calendar.
5. **Capital:** The community can attract, absorb, and deploy blended resources.

Funders frequently misread readiness by focusing on paperwork capacity—budgets, 990s, audit status—while ignoring social capacity. A compliant but distrusted organization cannot function as a quarterback.

## BUILDING THE CONDITIONS FOR READINESS

### 1. Trust and Relationship Capital

Place-based work begins with relationships, not RFPs. Residents must believe the process will outlast a funding cycle and that their voices will influence real decisions.

- *Funders build trust* by showing up consistently, funding participation costs (stipends, childcare, translation), and sharing uncomfortable data publicly.
- *Trust decays* when funders change priorities midstream, fund competing intermediaries, or communicate through intermediaries instead of residents.

### 2. Leadership and Governance

Communities need visible, legitimate governance. The goal is not one charismatic figure but a distributed leadership network that can survive turnover.

- Funders should invest in *leadership pipelines*—training, peer exchange, and succession planning for resident and institutional leaders.
- Strong communities codify governance in MOUs or charters that specify who decides what.

**3. Data and Learning Systems**
Shared indicators are the backbone of accountability. Yet few communities have the technical or political capacity to manage them initially.

- Funders should underwrite *data stewards* embedded locally, responsible for agreements, dashboards, and privacy.
- Early evaluation should emphasize *learning cycles*, not compliance audits.

**4. Coordination and Execution Capacity**
Even when trust and data exist, partners may lack the project-management bandwidth to execute.

- Fund the *quarterback/guardian/backbone*—a staffed intermediary with authority to convene, track progress, and publish results.
- Require that partners adopt a **single calendar and dashboard** to prevent duplication.

**5. Financial and Capital Access**
Communities need flexible resources: operating support, recoverable grants, and small-grants pools residents can control.

- Establish *local capital stacks* that mix philanthropic, public, and private funds.
- Provide technical assistance on compliance, fiscal sponsorship, and co-financing with government.

**COMMUNITY READINESS MATRIX**

| Domain | Low Readiness Indicators | Medium Readiness Indicators | High Readiness Indicators |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Trust & Legitimacy** | High skepticism of funders; fragmented resident groups; history of extractive projects | Emerging resident councils; some co-planning; limited transparency | Shared vision statement; resident body recognized by multiple sectors; open data & communication culture |
| **Leadership & Governance** | Few recognized conveners; leadership | Informal leadership circles; early governance | Formal resident + institutional governance |

| Domain | Low Readiness Indicators | Medium Readiness Indicators | High Readiness Indicators |
|---|---|---|---|
| | turnover; no clear decision rules | drafts; funder-driven facilitation | body with codified authority and rotation |
| **Data & Learning** | Minimal shared data; competing metrics; no feedback loops | Initial shared indicators; manual data collection; occasional review meetings | Integrated dashboard with baselines/targets; quarterly learning sessions; data used for course correction |
| **Coordination & Execution** | Siloed programs; duplication; unclear roles | Regular cross-sector meetings; basic workplan; limited staff capacity | Dedicated quarterback organization with MOU authority, project management staff, and published workplan |
| **Financial & Capital Access** | Short-term project grants; no local fiscal agent; no leverage strategy | Some multi-year grants; emerging fiscal intermediary; limited co-funding | Blended capital stack (grants + PRIs + public funds); local fiscal infrastructure and pipeline for sustainability |

## HOW TO USE THE MATRIX

- **Diagnose before you invest.** Conduct readiness assessments with resident input before announcing major commitments.
- **Fund to level up.** Allocate early capital specifically to move the community one readiness tier higher in each domain.
- **Publish the baseline.** Making readiness scores public builds accountability and invites co-investment.
- **Repeat annually.** Reassess every 12 months to document institutional learning.

## FIELD ILLUSTRATIONS OF READINESS LEVELS

### Low → Medium Transition: Rural East Texas (2018–2022)

A regional health foundation began in a three-county area with no data infrastructure and fragmented nonprofits. The first phase funded *relationship mapping, listening sessions,* *and stipends* for residents to design a shared outcomes framework. Within three years, the counties co-created a dashboard and secured joint funding from state agencies.

**Medium → High Transition: South Minneapolis (2015–present)**
Following early unrest, local funders aligned behind a neighborhood-led council managing education, housing, and small-business investments. A backbone nonprofit now coordinates eight agencies and maintains a public dashboard updated quarterly. Trust scores and participation rates have risen steadily, and the city has embedded several pilot programs into its general fund.

**Sustained High Readiness: East Lake, Atlanta**
Purpose Built Communities' flagship neighborhood demonstrates full readiness: clear resident governance, mixed-income housing, charter schools, wellness facilities, and a continuous learning culture. Philanthropic capital now plays a catalytic rather than sustaining role; local revenues and policy shifts maintain gains.

## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR FUNDERS

1. **Enter at the community's current level, not your own ambition.** Pushing for "collective impact" in a low-trust environment guarantees backlash.
2. **Resource the backbone first.** Coordination is infrastructure, not overhead.
3. **Share credit.** Publicly recognize resident and institutional partners to reinforce legitimacy.
4. **Budget for participation.** Stipends, translation, transportation, and communications must appear in every grant.
5. **Leave behind capacity.** Design every investment so that when philanthropic dollars end, some piece of local infrastructure remains stronger.

## LESSONS

Readiness is not a binary yes/no condition—it is a continuum that can be strengthened with time and intention. The funder's job is to **match ambition to capacity**, finance the civic muscles that make collaboration work, and hold space long enough for the community to govern itself.

## SECTION 6 – HOW FOUNDATIONS MUST ADAPT

For philanthropy, adopting a place-based approach is not a shift in portfolio—it is a **re-engineering of the institution itself**. The constraints that undermine place-based success rarely come from communities; they come from funders' internal systems: short cycles, narrow metrics, siloed teams, and risk-averse boards.

To practice place-based philanthropy credibly, foundations must treat their own operations as part of the system that needs change.

### THE CORE SHIFT: FROM CONTROLLER TO CIVIC PARTNER

Traditional philanthropy assumes control equals accountability: funders design logic models, set metrics, and hold grantees to them. Place-based practice demands the opposite—**accountability through shared power**.
The foundation becomes a civic investor and convener rather than a distant regulator. Its legitimacy derives not from money or expertise, but from the trust and consistency it contributes to a shared local agenda.

This requires three forms of transformation:

1. **Structural** – Redefining how decisions are made, how grants are structured, and how success is measured.
2. **Cultural** – Shifting internal mindsets from "funder as expert" to "funder as learner."
3. **Operational** – Aligning budgeting, staffing, and evaluation systems to long-term, cross-sector work.

### CONVENTIONAL VS. PLACE-BASED FOUNDATION OPERATIONS

| Dimension | Conventional Foundation | Place-Based Foundation |
|---|---|---|
| **Time Horizon** | Annual or 3-year grant cycles | 5–10+ year commitments tied to systems change |
| **Portfolio Structure** | Multiple issue silos (education, health, arts) | Integrated geographic portfolios coordinated across sectors |

| Dimension | Conventional Foundation | Place-Based Foundation |
|---|---|---|
| **Decision-Making** | Centralized; board and senior staff approve | Shared governance with resident or community representatives |
| **Staff Roles** | Program officers as subject experts | Program officers as *network weavers* and *stewards of collaboration* |
| **Grant Type** | Project-specific, restricted | Multi-year, general operating and capacity-building grants |
| **Evaluation** | Attribution-based outcomes; end-of-grant reporting | Continuous learning, contribution analysis, public dashboards |
| **Risk Posture** | Avoid controversy; prefer short feedback loops | Embrace uncertainty; prioritize adaptive learning |
| **Transparency** | Controlled communication; internal reports | Public data dashboards; open learning sessions |
| **Community Interaction** | Transactional; funder–grantee | Partnership; co-design with residents and institutions |
| **Board Behavior** | Focused on compliance and portfolio diversification | Focused on systems outcomes and local legitimacy |
| **Budget Allocation** | Overhead tightly capped; "program delivery" prioritized | Coordination and community engagement treated as core functions |

### GOVERNANCE REFORM: POWER WITH, NOT OVER

Boards must understand that **place-based work is governance work**. It requires rebalancing who holds decision rights. Practical steps include:

- **Resident or cross-sector representation** on advisory councils or even grant committees.

- **Delegated authority** to staff or local intermediaries for rapid decisions within an agreed framework.
- **Revised bylaws or investment policies** allowing flexible, multi-year commitments.

Some foundations, like the *California Endowment* and *Kresge Foundation*, have restructured board agendas around place outcomes rather than issue dockets. This keeps governance aligned with geography, not grant categories.

### STAFFING: FROM EXPERTS TO STEWARDS

Place-based work is relational, not transactional. Foundations must value **staff who can convene, translate, and build trust** more than those who simply manage grants.
Key competencies include:

- Systems thinking and facilitation.
- Cross-sector fluency (understanding city, county, state, and nonprofit ecosystems).
- Comfort with ambiguity and long feedback loops.
- Emotional intelligence and community listening.

**Staffing implications for funders:**

- Flatten hierarchies so program staff can act quickly in the field.
- Invest in professional development for adaptive leadership and racial equity literacy.
- Align staff incentives to **shared place outcomes** rather than portfolio metrics.
- Reward candor and course-correction instead of punishing risk.

### BUDGETING AND FINANCE: REDEFINING “PROGRAM COSTS”

Traditional budget models penalize collaboration. Foundations often treat backbone or guardian support, resident stipends, and translation services as “indirect costs.”
In a place-based system, these are **program essentials**.

To make that shift:

- Create **multi-year budget envelopes** that roll forward automatically unless red-flag thresholds are triggered.

- Allocate **10–15% of all grants** to community participation, communications, and shared learning.
- Establish a **flexible capital pool** (recoverable grants, guarantees, or low-interest loans) to support housing, small business, or infrastructure components.
- Co-fund with government—align fiscal calendars and allow grant funds to fill public gaps rather than duplicate efforts.

The most mature place-based funders publish *integrated capital tables* showing how grants, PRIs, and public funds combine in a given geography.

#### EVALUATION AND LEARNING: FROM PROOF TO IMPROVEMENT

Place-based strategies rarely produce linear results. Attribution-based evaluation models fail in complex adaptive systems. Instead, evaluation must:

- Focus on **contribution**, not attribution.
- Combine **quantitative population data** with **qualitative resident feedback**.
- Use **developmental evaluation** early and more rigorous quasi-experimental methods later.
- Build **public learning infrastructure**: dashboards, open data, and narrative reports accessible to residents.

The **learning rhythm** should be quarterly, not annual. Each cycle asks: What are we learning? What's changing in the system? What needs to shift?

#### CULTURE: THE HARDEST CHANGE

The technical changes—grants, dashboards, partnerships—are easy compared to cultural ones.
Foundation staff and boards must unlearn habits of control and perfectionism. Place-based philanthropy rewards humility, patience, and comfort with partial progress.

Culture shifts when:

- Leaders model vulnerability—acknowledging uncertainty publicly.
- Success stories highlight collaboration, not institutional heroism.
- Staff performance reviews emphasize partnership quality and adaptive learning.

As one funder in the *BUILD Health Challenge* put it, *"We stopped asking if a project worked and started asking if a community got stronger."*

### EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

- **The California Endowment** redesigned its 10-year *Building Healthy Communities* initiative by embedding staff in 14 local hubs and shifting funding decisions to resident tables. The foundation reoriented its structure around place rather than issue.
- **The Kresge Foundation** created interdisciplinary teams that combine health, environment, and economic opportunity specialists for each city-level initiative, aligning grants and investments within a single geography.
- **The Greater New Orleans Foundation** shifted to multi-year operating support for community-based intermediaries, funding the coordination and advocacy work typically unfunded in traditional models.

### THE BOARD'S ROLE: STEWARDSHIP OVER STRATEGY

Boards are the ultimate gatekeepers of risk and continuity. To enable place-based practice, they must:

- Approve long-term commitments and define **renewal/exit criteria** up front.
- Delegate authority for adaptive management to staff.
- Replace annual metrics with **rolling progress dashboards**.
- Use site visits and resident dialogues—not just reports—as oversight tools.

In other words, the board must act less like an investment committee and more like a civic council.

### LESSONS

For philanthropy, "going place-based" is not a communications pivot—it is a **structural, cultural, and moral shift**. A foundation can only support community transformation if it transforms itself first.
That means re-aligning everything—governance, budgeting, staffing, learning, and incentives—around shared accountability with the people whose lives are at stake.

## SECTION 7 – IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK (PHASED)

A place-based initiative unfolds in **distinct phases**, each with its own rhythm, risks, and milestones. Skipping or compressing phases is one of the most common—and most costly—mistakes funders make. The field's best practice is to **treat implementation as adaptive staging**, where each phase builds capacity for the next rather than treating early stages as mere planning exercises.

### OVERVIEW: THE LOGIC OF PHASED IMPLEMENTATION

| Phase | Focus | Approximate Duration | Primary Output |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Phase 0** | Readiness, Scoping, and Go/No-Go | 6–12 months | Feasibility and readiness assessment; "Place Charter" |
| **Phase 1** | Co-Design and Early Alignment | 12–18 months | Shared outcomes framework; governance charter; Year-1 action plan |
| **Phase 2** | Execution, Learning, and Adaptation | 24–36 months | Implementation underway; quarterly learning cycles; public dashboard |
| **Phase 3** | Scaling, Institutionalization, and Exit Planning | 24–36 months | Policy and budget integration; succession of resident and institutional leadership; sustainability plan |

### PHASE 0 – READINESS, SCOPING, AND GO/NO-GO

**Objective:** Determine whether the place has the trust, leadership, data, and institutional will to support a multi-year initiative.

**Key Actions:**

- Conduct **30–50 resident interviews** and **stakeholder mapping** to understand networks, tensions, and existing initiatives.
- Commission a **baseline data scan**—population indicators, institutional assets, and previous investments.

- Facilitate **listening sessions** to test interest, expectations, and local definitions of success.
- Identify or incubate a **potential quarterback organization**.
- Draft a **Place Charter** outlining geography, population, outcomes of interest, and core partners.

**Governance Tasks:**

- Establish an interim steering group (residents, local government, anchor institutions, funders).
- Define early decision rules—what counts as consensus, how conflicts are resolved.

**Funder Role:**

- Fund the assessment, not the initiative.
- Maintain neutrality—avoid signaling pre-selection of grantees.
- Budget for stipends, facilitation, and translation from day one.

**Common Risks and Mitigation:**

| Risk | Mitigation Strategy |
|---|---|
| Overpromising before readiness | Communicate that Phase 0 is diagnostic, not a funding competition. |
| Consultant-driven process | Hire local facilitators or co-facilitate with residents. |
| Data gaps or political sensitivity | Use mixed methods; emphasize shared learning, not compliance. |

**Learning Checkpoints:**

- Is there a shared understanding of the community's boundaries, assets, and history?
- Is there a credible quarterback candidate with legitimacy across sectors?
- Are residents participating consistently, not just attending?

**End-of-Phase Output:**

A public **Readiness Memo and Place Charter** summarizing geography, data baseline, governance concept, and go/no-go recommendation.

### PHASE 1 – CO-DESIGN AND EARLY ALIGNMENT

**Objective:** Build the shared governance, data, and outcomes framework that will anchor the initiative.

**Key Actions:**

- Formalize the **resident governance body** (membership, authority, stipends, decision rules).
- Develop **10–15 shared indicators** with baselines and 3-year targets.
- Co-author the **Outcomes Framework** (education, health, housing, safety, economic mobility).
- Negotiate and sign **MOUs** among major institutions (schools, hospitals, city departments, nonprofits).
- Draft a **3-Year Implementation Plan** with budgets, responsibilities, and communication protocols.

**Governance Tasks:**

- Elect co-chairs (one resident, one institutional).
- Establish public meeting schedules and transparent decision logs.
- Adopt anti-displacement and equity safeguards early.

**Funder Role:**

- Fund backbone staffing and coordination (PM, data, community engagement).
- Shift from technical assistance to **facilitation and systems brokering**.
- Support early demonstration projects to build confidence and momentum.

**Common Risks and Mitigation:**

| Risk | Mitigation Strategy |
|---|---|
| Partner fatigue or role confusion | Publish a “who does what” matrix; refresh MOUs annually. |
| Unrealistic early indicators | Distinguish quick wins from long-term structural outcomes. |
| Unequal voice in co-design | Use small-group sessions and interpreters; pay stipends. |

**Learning Checkpoints:**

- Are governance and data systems functioning?
- Are institutional partners showing up consistently?
- Are residents seeing early wins or visible progress?

**End-of-Phase Output:**

A **Governance Charter, Outcomes Framework, and Year-1 Action Plan**, publicly endorsed by partners and residents.

### PHASE 2 – EXECUTION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION

**Objective:** Implement, learn, and adapt in real time while embedding habits of accountability and transparency.

**Key Actions:**

- Fund and launch **priority projects** within each outcomes domain.
- Publish a **public dashboard** with updated metrics and stories quarterly.
- Conduct **quarterly learning reviews** to interpret data and adjust strategy.
- Launch **resident storytelling and communication campaigns** to maintain legitimacy.
- Build mechanisms for **conflict resolution and course correction**.

**Governance Tasks:**

- Expand resident participation (committees, juries, storytelling).
- Refresh membership annually to avoid burnout.
- Document and publish minutes and learning memos.

**Funder Role:**

- Maintain multi-year general operating grants; minimize paperwork.
- Participate in learning sessions as a partner, not a judge.
- Align with public-sector fiscal calendars to co-finance at scale.

**Common Risks and Mitigation:**

| Risk | Mitigation Strategy |
| --- | --- |
| Overextension / too many initiatives | Apply "ruthless prioritization" – no more than 3–4 focus areas. |
| Dashboard stagnation | Designate a data steward; ensure updates are tied to public meetings. |
| Power drift back to institutions | Rotate meeting facilitation and decision authority. |

**Learning Checkpoints:**

- Are shared indicators improving or stable?
- Are residents leading discussions of progress?
- Are policy and budget alignments emerging?

**End-of-Phase Output:**
Visible systems changes—new policies, budgets, or institutional practices adopted—and a community capable of interpreting and owning its own data.

## PHASE 3 – SCALING, INSTITUTIONALIZATION, AND EXIT PLANNING

**Objective:** Transition from foundation-driven initiative to community-anchored system.

**Key Actions:**

- Integrate successful pilots into **public agency budgets** or policy mandates.
- Diversify revenue: CDFI loans, city/county allocations, earned income.
- Develop **succession plans** for resident and institutional leadership.
- Evaluate learning and codify institutional reforms in local ordinances, MOUs, or compacts.
- Communicate openly about **funder exit or evolution**.

**Governance Tasks:**

- Establish legacy governance structures (nonprofit coalition, public-private task force).
- Codify resident representation in formal policy bodies.
- Transfer data infrastructure ownership to local entities.

**Funder Role:**

- Gradually shift from grantmaker to co-investor and policy advocate.
- Fund end-of-phase evaluations and documentation.
- Recommit or exit transparently based on readiness metrics.

**Common Risks and Mitigation:**

| Risk | Mitigation Strategy |
|---|---|
| Dependency on philanthropic funding | Require sustainability planning from Year 1; tie renewal to institutional integration. |
| Loss of momentum post-exit | Establish annual public forums to monitor outcomes. |
| Staff/leadership turnover | Build redundancy and peer mentorship pipelines. |

**Learning Checkpoints:**

- Are core functions funded by local budgets?
- Are residents still engaged and exercising governance roles?
- Are systemic disparities measurably narrowing?

**End-of-Phase Output:**
A **Sustainability and Governance Transition Plan** with budget sources, leadership structure, and indicators for post-funder monitoring.

**TIMELINE: ILLUSTRATIVE 7-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP**

| Year | Key Milestones and Benchmarks |
|---|---|
| **Year 0** | Readiness scan, stakeholder mapping, baseline data, quarterback identified, Place Charter drafted |
| **Year 1** | Governance charter finalized, shared indicators set, first resident stipends issued, Year-1 Action Plan published |
| **Year 2** | Initial project launches; MOUs active across sectors; dashboard beta online; quarterly learning cycles begin |
| **Year 3** | Public dashboard live; first policy shifts visible; cross-sector budgets aligned; evaluation capacity embedded |
| **Year 4** | Midterm review; funder re-commitment or adjustment; new resident leaders recruited; communication campaign refreshed |
| **Year 5** | Institutionalization: successful pilots absorbed into public budgets; backbone financing diversified |
| **Years 6–7** | Exit/transition planning; sustainability plan published; funders redefined as policy advocates or investors |

## FIELD EXAMPLES BY PHASE

**Phase 0 Example: Appalachia Regional Health Collaboration (2018–2019)**
Initial diagnostic revealed low trust and weak data. Funders funded relationship mapping and local facilitators before launching formal programs. The go/no-go process built legitimacy.

**Phase 1 Example: Hayward Promise Neighborhood (CA)**
Used one year to align 20+ partners on indicators and shared governance. Published outcomes framework before funding new projects.

**Phase 2 Example: Greater Memphis Partnership (TN)**
Quarterback/guardian nonprofit maintained quarterly learning reviews that led to measurable reductions in youth unemployment and housing displacement.

**Phase 3 Example: East Lake (Atlanta)**
Purpose Built Communities' first site integrated funding streams into city and school budgets; philanthropy's role shifted to innovation capital and advocacy.

## PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR FUNDERS

1. **Resist premature scale.** Replication before readiness dilutes quality.
2. **Budget for backbone growth, not shrinkage.** Coordination needs increase as systems align.
3. **Institutionalize learning.** Fund data stewards and public evaluation forums.
4. **Communicate honestly about exit.** Transparency builds, not erodes, trust.
5. **Celebrate persistence, not perfection.** Systems change is measured in decades.

## LESSONS

A credible implementation framework is not a project plan—it is a **learning architecture**. The funder's discipline is to sequence action, hold space for adaptation, and finance the invisible work—coordination, trust, data, governance—that makes visible progress possible.

## SECTION 8 – RESOURCING A PLACE-BASED APPROACH

Place-based philanthropy requires **patient, blended capital**—a mix of grantmaking, investment tools, and public co-financing that can sustain coordination and adapt over time. The greatest barrier to success is not lack of money, but **misalignment of money**—short-term grants funding long-term systems work, and restricted funds that cannot flex when the system learns.

### WHY RESOURCING STRATEGY MATTERS

Place-based work is expensive, but its costs are front-loaded in coordination, not programs.
Funders must internalize a new rule of thumb: *You are funding a civic system, not a project portfolio.* That means underwriting the people, relationships, and infrastructure that make execution possible.

Traditional foundations often underfund these functions, then blame "capacity gaps" on communities.
A credible place-based approach budgets for:

1. **Backbone operations and coordination.**
2. **Resident participation and communication infrastructure.**
3. **Data and evaluation systems.**
4. **Programs and pilots aligned to outcomes.**
5. **Blended finance mechanisms and leverage strategies.**

### TYPICAL COST STRUCTURE BY PHASE

| Phase | Primary Cost Drivers | Typical Annual Range (Mid-Sized Region) |
|---|---|---|
| **Phase 0 – Readiness** | Facilitation, resident stipends, baseline data, legal and fiscal setup | $250K – $500K |
| **Phase 1 – Co-Design & Early Alignment** | Governance building, MOUs, data-sharing systems, backbone hiring | $1M – $1.5M |
| **Phase 2 – Execution & Learning** | Program funding, communications, learning cycles, resident leadership | $2M – $3M |

| Phase | Primary Cost Drivers | Typical Annual Range (Mid-Sized Region) |
|---|---|---|
| **Phase 3 – Scaling & Institutionalization** | Policy integration, system alignment, evaluation, transition planning | $1M – $2M |

**Total Typical 5-Year Cost:** $8–10 million for a mid-sized metro or multi-county rural initiative. Rural settings may operate at lower cost but higher travel and time intensity. Urban projects may scale higher depending on partner size and data needs.

## ANATOMY OF A BLENDED CAPITAL STACK

No single funding source can sustain place-based work. Blended stacks distribute risk, match tools to needs, and build staying power.

| Instrument | Purpose | Duration | Source Examples | Risk/Return Profile |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grants** | Fund coordination, participation, learning, and early pilots | 1–5 years | Foundations, United Ways, corporate giving | High flexibility; no repayment |
| **Recoverable Grants** | Test revenue-generating components (e.g., workforce training, housing rehab) | 3–7 years | Foundations, donor collaboratives | Principal recoverable if revenues materialize |
| **Program-Related Investments (PRIs)** | Bridge or guarantee for housing, small business, or infrastructure | 5–10 years | Private foundations, health systems | Low-interest, subordinated debt |
| **Community Development Finance (CDFI)** | Long-term lending for housing or small business expansion | 5–15 years | CDFIs, banks, federal programs | Market-rate or blended finance |
| **Public Co-Investment** | Align public budgets, grants, or ARPA/state/federal funds | Annual/biannual | City/county agencies, federal programs | Political risk; sustainable scale potential |

| Instrument | Purpose | Duration | Source Examples | Risk/Return Profile |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Corporate/Anchor Investment** | Align procurement, employment, and capital spend | Multi-year | Hospitals, universities, utilities | Strategic alignment; potential in-kind leverage |

| SAMPLE CAPITAL STACK (MID-SIZED REGIONAL INITIATIVE, $10M OVER 5 YEARS) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Source** | **Instrument Type** | **Amount** | **Purpose** |
| Regional Foundation Collaborative | Multi-year general operating grants | $3,000,000 | Backbone staffing, coordination, governance |
| Health System Partners | Program-Related Investments (PRIs) | $2,000,000 | Affordable housing and health infrastructure |
| City/County Governments | Public co-investment (budget alignment) | $2,000,000 | Infrastructure, youth employment, policy integration |
| Corporate/Anchor Institutions | Blended in-kind + direct funding | $1,500,000 | Workforce development, procurement reform |
| National Funder | Recoverable grant | $1,000,000 | Pilot projects with revenue models |
| Community Foundations/Resident Fund | Participatory microgrants | $500,000 | Resident-led allocations and civic participation |

**Total:** $10,000,000
**Projected leverage:** $25M+ in public and private matching by Year 5

## DESIGNING THE FUNDING MECHANISM

| Mechanism | When to Use | Funder Roles | Advantages | Tradeoffs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Single-Funder Model** | Pilot stage or small geography; limited partners | Foundation provides 100% funding and oversight | Speed, clarity | Low diversification; perceived ownership risk |
| **Pooled Fund Model** | Multi-sector collaboration across multiple funders | Create joint governance and learning framework | Reduces duplication; unified reporting | Complex governance; slower startup |
| **Challenge Fund Model** | Incentivizing innovation or local match | Funders co-invest with community foundations or cities | Encourages creativity and local buy-in | Uneven participation; requires technical assistance |
| **Regranting Intermediary Model** | When funder lacks local presence | Delegate to trusted intermediary with resident advisory board | Builds local capacity; lowers admin burden | Less direct funder control |
| **Regional Endowment or Trust Model** | Long-term institutionalization (10–20 years) | Establish dedicated corpus for place | Sustains funding post-exit | Requires large initial capital and strong governance |

## BUDGETING PRINCIPLES FOR PLACE-BASED FUNDERS

1. **Fund coordination as infrastructure.** Treat staff, convening, and learning as core programmatic expenses.
2. **Front-load flexibility.** Early-stage funding should be least restricted to enable adaptation.
3. **Institutionalize participation costs.** Stipends, translation, childcare, and communication are not add-ons.
4. **Build matching incentives.** Require public agencies to commit dollars or policy shifts, not just in-kind support.
5. **Finance learning and transparency.** Allocate at least 5–10% of total costs to data, evaluation, and public reporting.

6. **Plan for renewal and exit.** Build rolling 3-year budget windows and define renewal triggers in advance.

### FUNDER CASE EXAMPLES

**Kresge Foundation – Mixed Capital Integration**
Kresge combines grants and PRIs to fund both nonprofit capacity and physical redevelopment. Its investments in Detroit's neighborhood initiatives blend $100M in grant capital with over $350M in loans and guarantees—leveraging public infrastructure budgets for sustainability.

**The California Endowment – Long-Term Place Commitment**
Through its 10-year *Building Healthy Communities* strategy, TCE allocated nearly $1 billion across 14 communities. Each local site had flexible funds for organizing, advocacy, and systems change, not just programs—illustrating the scale of patient capital required for deep transformation.

**Greater Twin Cities United Way – Community Impact Accelerator**
United Way restructured its grant programs into a pooled regional investment model that funds shared infrastructure, data systems, and resident governance across multiple counties.

### FUNDING SCENARIO: MID-SIZED REGIONAL INITIATIVE ($10M OVER 5 YEARS)

| Year | Major Funding Activity | Amount | Key Outputs |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Year 0** | Readiness and co-design grants to quarterback/guardian and partners | $1.0M | Place Charter; baseline data; governance setup |
| **Year 1** | Launch backbone operations and resident governance; early wins | $2.0M | Shared indicators; dashboard beta; pilot programs |
| **Year 2** | Expansion of program grants, data systems, and evaluation | $2.5M | First policy alignment; quarterly learning reviews |
| **Year 3** | Deepening partnerships and capacity; PRIs initiated | $2.0M | Cross-sector budget coordination; mid-term report |
| **Year 4** | Institutionalization and sustainability planning | $1.5M | Transition plan; policy integration; funder renewal decision |

| Year | Major Funding Activity | Amount | Key Outputs |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Year 5** | Evaluation, documentation, and transition to local funding | $1.0M | Public learning report; sustainability structure finalized |

### SAMPLE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIS)

- 90% of partners aligned on shared indicators by Year 2
- 60% of backbone/guardian budget sustained locally by Year 5
- Resident governance active and compensated throughout
- At least 3 local policy or budget reforms institutionalized

### RISKS IN FUNDING DESIGN AND MITIGATION

| Risk | Description | Mitigation Strategy |
|---|---|---|
| **Underfunded coordination** | Grants focus on direct service, not convening | Require a funded quarterback line item in every plan |
| **Fragmented funding cycles** | Partners operate on misaligned calendars | Align multi-year cycles and shared reporting dates |
| **Funder fatigue** | Early enthusiasm fades before systems change matures | Create joint dashboards and renewal criteria; celebrate milestones |
| **Data invisibility** | No budget for tracking and communication | Minimum 5% of funds earmarked for learning and transparency |

### LESSONS

Money in place-based philanthropy is not a transaction—it is a **governance instrument**. Where and how resources move determines who holds power, who learns, and whose priorities drive change. Funders who align money with mission, method, and timeline create the financial scaffolding that lets systems—and communities—change for good.

## SECTION 9 – MANAGING RISKS AND AVOIDING FAILURE TRAPS

Every long-term place-based initiative eventually encounters friction. What separates resilient systems from failed ones isn't the absence of risk, but the ability to **see it early, name it, and respond fast**.

Across two decades of field practice, most breakdowns fall into four categories—**organizational**, **financial**, **political**, and **relational**. Within those categories lie ten recurring failure modes.

**TEN COMMON FAILURE MODES**

| Category | Failure Mode | Early Signal | Corrective Action |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Organizational** | 1. *Weak or contested quarterback/guardian* | Partners stop attending coordination meetings | Commission a governance review; re-bid backbone role if legitimacy is lost |
| | 2. *Mission drift* | New projects added without alignment to shared outcomes | Enforce scope discipline through annual charter reaffirmation |
| **Financial** | 3. *Underfunded infrastructure* | Staff turnover, missed reporting deadlines, burnout | Reallocate 10–15 % of all funding to coordination & data systems |
| | 4. *Funder exit shock* | Grant cliff approaching, no replacement plan | Require sustainability benchmarks by Year 3; build local budget adoption plan |
| **Political** | 5. *Leadership turnover in government or institutions* | New mayor, superintendent, or CEO withdraws | Establish MOUs that bind institutions, not individuals |
| | 6. *Policy capture or opposition* | Politicization of outcomes; narrative backlash | Engage bipartisan messengers; ground rhetoric in local data |

| Category | Failure Mode | Early Signal | Corrective Action |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Relational** | 7. *Resident disengagement* | Meeting attendance drops; cynicism resurfaces | Reset expectations; show visible wins; rotate leadership; fund stipends |
| | 8. *Funder mistrust or competition* | Parallel initiatives emerge; joint tables dissolve | Re-convene funders; re-negotiate pooled fund governance |
| **Cross-Cutting** | 9. *Data paralysis* | Dashboard not updated; arguments over indicators | Simplify to 10–12 metrics; publish quarterly; prioritize learning not proof |
| | 10. *Narrative failure* | Public confusion about purpose or impact | Invest in storytelling and communications as strategic functions |

## THE RISK RADAR

Funders should treat risk management as a **standing agenda item**, not a crisis response. The following matrix helps partners track which risks are intensifying and where corrective action is overdue.

| Risk Domain | Low (Green) | Moderate (Yellow) | High (Red) | Recommended Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Governance & Legitimacy** | Stable participation; clear decision rules | Occasional absences or contested authority | Persistent absenteeism; public disputes | Commission governance audit; re-establish resident mandate |
| **Financial Health** | Multi-year funding secured | Upcoming grant expirations within 12 months | No renewal prospects; cash-flow stress | Convene funders; activate sustainability plan |
| **Data & Learning** | Dashboard current and used | Delays or inconsistent updates | Data abandoned or politicized | Assign data steward; re-focus on adaptive learning |

| Risk Domain | Low (Green) | Moderate (Yellow) | High (Red) | Recommended Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Community Engagement** | Diverse resident leadership active | Declining participation in one demographic | Widespread fatigue; disengagement | Rotate members; celebrate milestones; adjust cadence |
| **Partner Alignment** | Shared outcomes reaffirmed annually | Minor side projects outside scope | Fragmentation or rival tables | Facilitate re-alignment workshop; re-sign MOUs |

Maintain a **quarterly risk review** scored Green / Yellow / Red. Treat Yellow as the danger zone—waiting for Red guarantees crisis.

### MINI-CASE 1: THE LOST QUARTERBACK/GUARDIAN

**Scenario:** A regional foundation funded a single nonprofit to coordinate housing, health, and workforce alignment. The organization had the technical skill but weak community legitimacy.

**Signals Missed:** Resident attendance declined; other nonprofits created parallel meetings; the dashboard stopped updating.

**Correction:** After a governance audit, the funder transferred the coordination role to a community-based coalition with rotating leadership. Within a year, participation rebounded and municipal co-funding resumed.

**Lesson:** *Legitimacy beats capacity. Fund both if you can, but never capacity without legitimacy.*

### MINI-CASE 2: THE CLIFF GRANT

**Scenario:** A five-year, $15 million place initiative assumed continuation funding but failed to negotiate renewal triggers.

**Signals Missed:** Year-4 budget projections showed a 60 % shortfall; local partners delayed hiring.

**Correction:** The foundation created a one-year transition fund and required government line-item adoption of backbone functions. Two counties absorbed 70 % of costs into their budgets.

**Lesson:** *Design exit criteria in Year 1, not Year 5.*

### MINI-CASE 3: THE NARRATIVE VACUUM

**Scenario:** A citywide education-health partnership made measurable progress but never communicated publicly. When new political leadership arrived, the initiative was labeled "elitist."

**Signals Missed:** No media plan; dashboard hidden behind logins.

**Correction:** Partners funded a communications manager and launched quarterly community briefings. Public understanding improved and the city reinstated funding.

**Lesson:** *If you don't tell your story, someone else will—and they'll get it wrong.*

### HOW FUNDERS CAN INSTITUTIONALIZE RISK MANAGEMENT

1. **Build risk reviews into governance.** Require a standing "Risk & Resilience" agenda item at every board or steering-committee meeting.

2. **Diversify dependence.** No single organization should hold more than 30 % of total funding.

3. **Require learning memos, not just reports.** Each partner documents what failed and why—shared within the network.

4. **Protect the truth-tellers.** Create psychological safety for staff or residents who surface early warnings.

5. **Reward adaptation.** Renewal decisions should favor those who learned and adjusted, not just those who "hit targets."

### LESSONS

Failure in place-based philanthropy rarely comes from bad intent—it comes from **blind spots**. The most effective funders institutionalize curiosity: they build systems that detect drift early, correct quickly, and share lessons publicly. Risk management is not about avoiding mistakes; it's about ensuring that every mistake becomes data for collective improvement.

## SECTION 10 – FIELD EXAMPLES AND CASE SNAPSHOTS

Place-based philanthropy lives or dies in execution. The following cases show how communities, intermediaries, and funders have attempted to make systemic change visible at the neighborhood, city, and regional levels. Each demonstrates how power, time, and capital alignment determine success more than grant size or institutional pedigree.

## CASE 1: HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE (NEW YORK CITY, USA)

**Context & Geography**

Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) covers nearly 100 blocks in Central Harlem—one of the most studied place-based initiatives in the world. Founded by Geoffrey Canada in the 1990s, HCZ's goal was to end generational poverty by wrapping children and families in continuous support from "cradle to career."

**Initiative Design**

The model integrates early childhood education, K–12 charter schools, family counseling, college readiness, and health programming—under a unified organizational structure. HCZ became the intellectual foundation for the federal *Promise Neighborhoods* program.

**Funding Structure & Governance**

- $100+ million annual operating budget, primarily private philanthropy (Carnegie, Robin Hood, Edna McConnell Clark, Open Society).
- Fully vertically integrated governance—one nonprofit as both quarterback and service provider.
- Continuous internal data collection and evaluation.

**Results & Outcomes**

- High school graduation rates exceeding 90%.
- Neighborhood crime reduction and stronger college persistence.
- National replication of the model through Promise Neighborhoods.

**Lessons for Funders**

- Integration and proximity create results, but **vertical control risks dependency**.
- Future models must diversify governance beyond a single charismatic leader or entity.
- Sustainable versions embed "the zone" into public funding, not perpetual philanthropy.

## CASE 2: PURPOSE BUILT COMMUNITIES (ATLANTA, GEORGIA, USA)

**Context & Geography**

Originated in the 1990s East Lake neighborhood of Atlanta—once known for concentrated poverty and crime. The East Lake Foundation and its partners redeveloped the community using an integrated model combining housing, education, and wellness.

**Initiative Design**

Purpose Built Communities (PBC) scaled the East Lake model nationally, emphasizing a local “community quarterback” that coordinates across mixed-income housing, cradle-to-college education, and community wellness anchors.

**Funding Structure & Governance**

- Funded initially through philanthropy (Cousins Foundation, Woodruff Foundation), then leveraged public and private financing including LIHTC, bonds, and developer equity.
- Each PBC affiliate maintains its own nonprofit governance, with residents on boards.

**Results & Outcomes**

- East Lake: Crime dropped 73%, school performance doubled, and $175M+ in private investment leveraged.
- 25+ cities adopted the model nationwide (e.g., Charlotte, Birmingham, New Orleans).

**Lessons for Funders**

- Blended finance and strong governance drive results.
- Resident leadership and anti-displacement safeguards must evolve alongside capital investment.
- A well-funded quarterback/guardian is a **public good**, not administrative overhead.

### CASE 3: BUILD HEALTH CHALLENGE (NATIONAL – USA)

**Context & Geography**

Launched in 2015, BUILD (“Bold, Upstream, Integrated, Local, Data-Driven”) is a collaborative of major health funders (Robert Wood Johnson, de Beaumont, Kresge, etc.) funding local partnerships between hospitals, public-health agencies, and community organizations.

**Initiative Design**

Each grantee partnership focuses on upstream social determinants of health—housing, transportation, food access—and requires **joint governance** between hospitals and residents. The model's hallmark is its insistence on data transparency and local policy change.

**Funding Structure & Governance**

- National pooled fund (~$100M since inception).
- Local sites receive ~$250K–$500K seed grants, matched by hospital community-benefit dollars.
- Shared learning network managed by a national backbone team.

**Results & Outcomes**

- Over 55 communities funded.
- Documented policy shifts in local health departments and hospital spending patterns.
- Published evidence base showing measurable reductions in emergency-department utilization and cost.

**Lessons for Funders**

- Collective governance between hospitals and residents increases system responsiveness.
- Central learning infrastructure accelerates replication.
- Funders must remain patient—policy shifts take 3–5 years to mature.

### CASE 4: CENTRAL TEXAS HEALTH & WELLBEING NETWORK (BASTROP–CALDWELL–HAYS-WILLIAMSON COUNTIES, USA)

**Context & Geography**
A regional initiative linking rural and semi-rural counties east and south of Austin, focused on creating community capacity and sustainable infrastructure for informal systems of care and wellbeing. Anchored by local foundation (St. David's Foundation and partners).

**Initiative Design**
Built around "Healing Tables" and "Collective Strategy" convenings—resident-led forums, executed by the guardian organization (HEAL Alliance), identifying local priorities such as

mental health access, youth opportunity, and economic resilience. The funder provides governance power to residents through a structured participatory grantmaking system.

**Funding Structure & Governance**

- Funds provided by the St. David's Foundation located in Austin, TX.
- Funds distributed via resident-led shared gifting processes; the rest supports guardian coordination and systems alignment.
- Semi-annual resident summits (i.e., Rural Reckoning, Disproportionality Gathering, Network Summits) drive agenda-setting and resource reallocation.

**Results & Outcomes**

- Informal systems of care and wellbeing are expanding with over 90 community-led projects over the past five years focused on strengthening community-based prevention and support systems.
- Resident networks formalized into recognized community infrastructure influencing civic health and engagement.
- Strengthened trust between philanthropy and communities, increasing relational capacity and connection to networks of organizations and residents.

**Lessons for Funders**

- Resident-led governance can operate at regional scale when funders commit to shared decision rights.
- Rural settings require slower pacing but offer higher relational durability.
- Funders must visibly align their own institutional behavior with the principles they preach.

### CASE 5: PARTICIPATORY CITY (LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM)

**Context & Geography**
Founded in Barking and Dagenham, London—a borough characterized by high poverty and rapid demographic change. Participatory City explores how everyday participation, mutual aid, and community-led micro-projects can transform local well-being.

**Initiative Design**
The initiative operates as a civic platform: residents design and run small projects

(gardens, tool libraries, neighborhood repair shops) supported by shared infrastructure—training, mini-grants, space access, and peer learning. The focus is on **density of participation**, not programmatic outputs.

**Funding Structure & Governance**

- £7M blended capital over five years: Big Lottery Fund, Barking Council, local philanthropies, and private partners.
- Governed by a hybrid nonprofit–council partnership with resident majority on steering group.

**Results & Outcomes**

- Over 250 community-led projects launched within three years.
- Strong gains in social cohesion, mental health, and local employment.
- Model replicated internationally in Canada, Australia, and Korea.

**Lessons for Funders**

- Small investments in participation yield exponential civic return.
- Funders must finance *process infrastructure* (facilitators, spaces, materials) rather than top-down programs.
- The Participatory City model shows that **community imagination is a renewable resource**—if funded consistently.

### CROSS-CUTTING INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

1. **Longevity builds legitimacy.** Every durable model operated for a decade or more.
2. **Infrastructure beats innovation.** Data stewards, facilitators, and communicators matter more than new program designs.
3. **Money follows trust.** When governance is credible, co-investment multiplies.
4. **Leadership turnover is survivable—if governance is codified.** Charisma is not strategy.
5. **Transparency converts skeptics.** Public dashboards and open meetings are the cheapest trust-building tools available.

### LESSONS

Across geographies and sectors, successful place-based initiatives share one DNA sequence: **staying power, shared governance, and disciplined transparency**.The most innovative funders are not those that design the smartest models—but those that **design themselves out of central control** so that communities can govern their own long-term futures.

## SECTION 11 – IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDERS

The ultimate test of place-based philanthropy is not what communities do with the money, but what the money does to philanthropy. Every authentic place-based effort eventually forces a reckoning inside the foundation itself: *Who decides? Who stays? Who learns?*

Becoming a place-based funder requires changing the organization's metabolism — from episodic grant cycles to continuous learning; from compliance to shared accountability; from distant oversight to proximate stewardship.

### GOVERNANCE: SHIFTING DECISION AUTHORITY

Boards must treat community representation as a governance reform, not a public-relations gesture.

- Add **resident or practitioner seats** to advisory or allocation bodies.
- Empower **local steering councils** to make or co-sign grant decisions within agreed parameters.
- Approve **multi-year place commitments** with defined renewal and exit criteria rather than annual grants.
- Measure the board's own performance by **community trust scores** and cross-sector alignment, not only portfolio metrics.

When governance reflects the community, legitimacy replaces benevolence as philanthropy's core asset.

### INVESTMENT STRATEGY: FROM PORTFOLIOS TO CAPITAL SYSTEMS

Traditional portfolios divide by topic; place-based funders organize by geography.
That means every decision — grant, PRI, or advocacy — must be traceable to the same map.

**Key actions:**

- Create **integrated geographic budgets** that braid grant, PRI, and public co-investment.
- Allocate **10–15 % of every grant** to backbone and participation infrastructure.
- Build **rolling three-year envelopes** to avoid cliff effects.
- Redefine "program cost" to include translation, data, and community leadership stipends.

Philanthropy's comparative advantage is not size but **flexibility**: it can take the first loss, fund the connective tissue, and finance what others cannot.

### LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Place-based philanthropy replaces post-hoc evaluation with **real-time learning**. Funders must retool how they know whether progress is happening.

Actions that embed learning:

- Fund **data stewards** and **public dashboards** as civic infrastructure.
- Replace year-end reports with **quarterly learning memos** shared publicly.
- Evaluate success through **system contribution** (policies changed, alignments achieved) rather than isolated outputs.
- Treat negative results as **strategic intelligence**, not failure.

When learning is public, accountability becomes collective rather than punitive.

### PARTNERSHIP AND PRESENCE

Place-based work demands proximity. Funders cannot delegate relationships entirely to grantees.

- **Be physically present**: attend resident meetings, not just conferences.
- **Co-brand initiatives** with community leaders to signal shared ownership.
- **Co-fund** with government, health systems, and business; refuse to act alone.
- **Practice transparency**: publish budgets, decisions, and lessons learned.

The funder who stays visible earns influence that no grant announcement can buy.

### CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

No structural reform matters if institutional culture remains extractive. Leadership must model humility, patience, and moral clarity.

- Hire and promote staff for facilitation, not control.
- Build incentives around collaboration and adaptive learning.
- Normalize candor about uncertainty.
- Protect internal dissent and external feedback loops.

In place-based philanthropy, **how** a foundation behaves is as consequential as **what** it funds.

## Ten Commitments of a Place-Based Funder

**Stay long enough to matter** — minimum five-year horizon, ideally ten.

**Define your geography** — clarity beats ambition.

**Share power** — residents must co-create and decide, not only advise.

**Fund the Guardian** — coordination is infrastructure.

**Pay for participation** — time, translation, and access cost money.

**Publish your data** — transparency is non-negotiable.

**Align with government** — braid budgets, don't duplicate them.

**Reward learning, not perfection** — adapt publicly.

**Exit responsibly** — institutionalize what works before you leave.

**Model the behavior you ask of others** — collaboration, patience, and trust.

## CLOSING REFLECTIONS (FOR PROGRAM OFFICERS)

The preceding cases—from Harlem to East Lake—demonstrate what happens when philanthropy chooses to stay long enough for systems to realign around community priorities. They also reveal a quieter truth: sustained impact depends less on institutional wealth than on the daily decisions of program officers who translate commitment into practice. The following closing reflections speak directly to those professionals. They are written for the people inside foundations who are striving to bring their institutions closer to the places they serve—and who understand that how philanthropy shows up may matter as much as what it funds. The reflections below distill what this Field Guide means for your daily practice: how to realign time, power, and accountability so philanthropy works with place rather than on it.

### 1. Reframing the Program Officer's Role

In place-based work, program officers stop curating projects and start cultivating systems. The role shifts from expert to connector—to the person who can align school districts, health departments, local government, and resident leaders around a common geography and shared outcomes. The essential skill becomes translation: turning institutional language into civic alignment.

That requires comfort with ambiguity, negotiation across hierarchies, and the discipline to keep partners at the same table when momentum stalls. The most effective program officers function as civic entrepreneurs, designing conditions for collaboration rather than programs to fund.

### 2. Shifting from Control to Stewardship

Traditional philanthropy equates control with accountability. Place-based philanthropy equates *stewardship* with impact.
Program officers must learn to hold space rather than hold the reins—funding coordination, resident participation, and communication with the same rigor once reserved for deliverables. This is not loss of control; it is control redefined as coherence and continuity.

Stewardship also means accepting slower timelines and public learning. Systems rarely move cleanly; they adapt through iteration. Your task is to protect that adaptive space from premature judgment.

### 3. Practicing the Discipline of Staying Put

Time is the most under-leveraged resource in philanthropy. Three-year grants cannot repair decades-old systems. The real art of place-based practice lies in persuading your institution to stay—ten years if necessary—long enough for coordination to take root and results to stabilize.

Staying put does not mean doing nothing; it means working with a rhythm of **patient capital and impatient learning**: testing, adjusting, and communicating progress quarterly, not once a grant ends. Presence over time is what converts philanthropy from visitor to civic partner.

**4. Building the Infrastructure of Trust**

Every successful place-based effort rests on invisible infrastructure—people who convene, translate, collect data, and tell the shared story. Yet these are often dismissed as "overhead." Program officers must fund these functions deliberately: quarterback/guardian staff, resident stipends, translation, childcare, data platforms, and storytelling. These are not administrative costs; they are the infrastructure of trust.

When internal budget codes say otherwise, push back. Coordination is capital. Without it, no community system can hold alignment.

**5. Navigating Internal Culture**

Inside the foundation, program officers are often the hinge between aspirational rhetoric and institutional constraint. Boards want clean metrics; communities need time and iteration. Bridging that tension is part of the job.

Model transparency by publishing dashboards that include disappointments, hosting open learning reviews, and reframing risk as the tuition cost of improvement. The credibility of a place-based strategy depends on staff willing to learn in public and let communities watch that learning unfold.

**6. Measuring What Matters**

Evaluation in complex systems is about contribution, not attribution. The job is to document how alignment grows, how resident authority expands, and how public systems start to behave differently—not just to count outputs.

Pair quantitative indicators with resident narratives. Track trust, participation, and policy integration as seriously as service numbers. Program officers who help boards see these as legitimate metrics create the space where long-term work can survive.

**7. The Professional and Ethical Payoff**

Place-based practice restores meaning to philanthropic work. It lets program officers witness the full arc—from community frustration to shared agency—and to see their grants become civic infrastructure rather than transactions. It is slow, sometimes messy, but profoundly satisfying work.

This approach also reclaims philanthropy's legitimacy. Communities no longer need temporary benefactors; they need consistent partners. The staff who can stay proximate, share authority, and navigate complexity will define the next generation of credible philanthropy.

**Final Thought**

The shift toward place-based investment is not about where you fund—it's about how you show up. Program officers who adopt this stance stop measuring success by the number of grants moved and start measuring it by the strength of the systems left behind.

The invitation is clear: stay longer, listen harder, and design every grant as an act of shared ownership and governance. The future of effective philanthropy belongs to those willing to trade control for connection—and to remain present long enough for trust to turn into transformation.

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28. The Bridgespan Group. (2022). *Funding Systems Change: The Funder's Role in Long-Term Impact*. Boston, MA.

29. PolicyLink. (2021). *The Equity Manifesto: Advancing Belonging and Power in Place*. Oakland, CA.

## ABOUT THE SOURCES

All sources cited in this Field Guide were drawn from publicly available, field-tested sources published between 2018 and 2024. They represent a blend of foundation learning reports, academic analyses, evaluation studies, and practice briefs produced by leading organizations in philanthropy, public health, and community development.

Priority was given to materials that:

- Document measurable place-based implementation experience (not just theoretical framing).
- Reflect cross-sector and participatory approaches, particularly where residents held decision-making authority.
- Offer replicable tools, frameworks, or evaluation findings for funders and community intermediaries.

The list is not exhaustive; it reflects those sources most relevant to funders seeking to operationalize place-based and participatory philanthropy as long-term institutional practice.