



BUILDING POWER

One Foundation's Story of Funding
Grassroots Organizing and Engagement

Prepared by Algorhythm

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Algorhythm is an “impact science” company that combines rigorous research and evaluation methods, next generation analytics, and real-time technologies to deliver accurate and actionable answers and solutions to social change agents. We work with philanthropies, nonprofits, social impact companies and government agencies to equip social change agents with the knowledge, tools, and learning processes that will help them meet their mission.

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The Nellie Mae Education Foundation is the largest philanthropy in New England dedicated exclusively to education. Our mission is to champion efforts that prioritize community goals that challenge racial inequities and advance excellent, student-centered public education for all New England youth.

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INTRODUCTION

The Nellie Mae Education Foundation (NMEF) began an investment strategy in 2015 to ensure that 80% of the region’s students are college and career ready by 2030. NMEF focused on increasing equitable, student-centered learning (SCL) opportunities for secondary school students in New England, especially and essentially those who are underserved. The goal was to support these students to be ready for further education after high school and ultimately to earn a post-secondary degree or credentials. NMEF took a holistic approach focused on building the “engagement and support of the system ‘authorizers’ — its participants, decision makers, and the public that sustains it” — through four key grant-making strategies:

- 1 Build Educator Ownership, Leadership, and Capacity;
- 2 Advance Quality, Rigor, and Responsiveness of SCL Practices;
- 3 Develop Effective Systems Designs; and,
- 4 Build Public Understanding and Demand.

The Public Understanding and Demand (PUD) strategy emerged from a commitment to community participation and grassroots organizing with the goal of changing mindsets, policies, and power. At the center was a firm belief that the combination of local/bottom-up engagement and broad-based/top-down initiatives would result in pressure from multiple sources, leading to increased support for systems change within school districts and among various key stakeholders at the state and local levels¹. The Public Understanding and Demand’s theory of change (ToC) operates on two continuums: a progression of knowledge from awareness to understanding, and a progression of action from support to demand. The ToC argued that high support and high demand for rigorous, equitable, student-centered learning would ultimately shift mindsets, policies, and power across New England (see Figure 1). And it necessitated genuine and meaningful engagement of students, teachers, school boards, and others at the local level.

¹ NMEF Website: <https://www.nmefoundation.org/grants>

Figure 1: The Public Understanding and Demand Strategy's Theory of Change

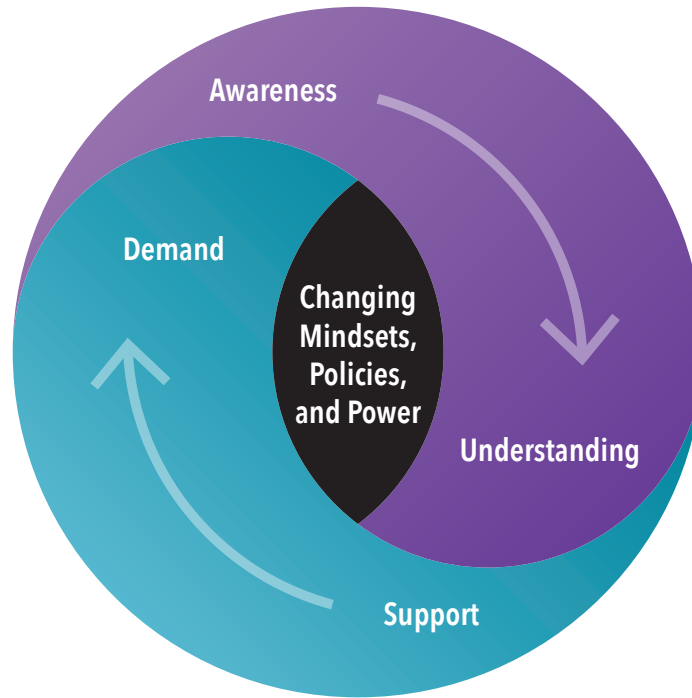
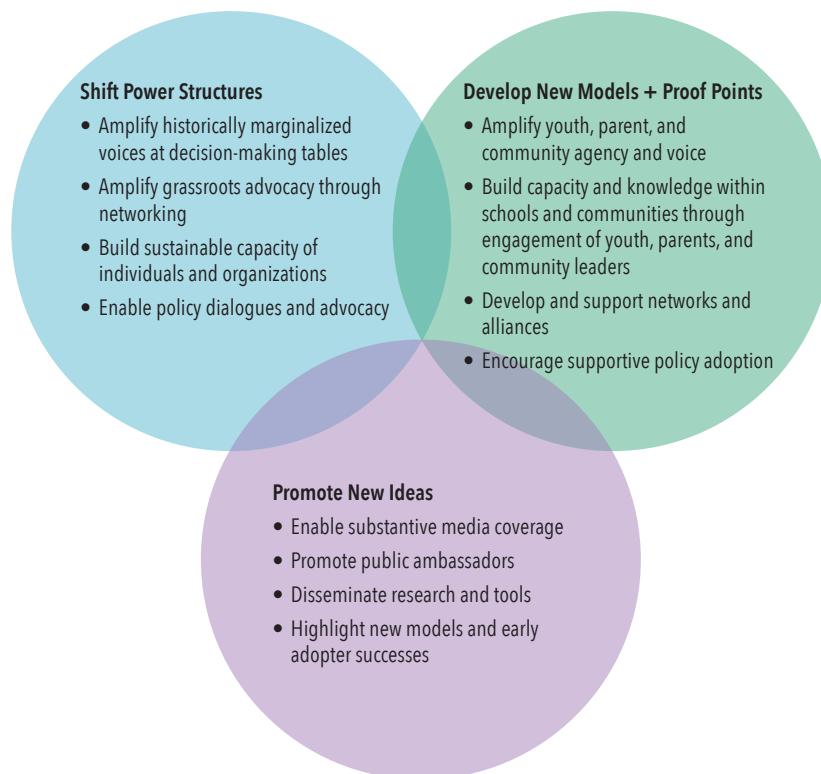


Figure 2: The Public Understanding and Demand Strategy's Theory of Action



Accordingly, in 2014 NMEF began funding three projects that together comprise the Grassroots Portfolio: Civic and Family Engagement (CFE), Community Organizing (CO), and Amplifying Student Voice and Leadership (ASVL). Since the beginning of each project, forty-six grantees across thirty-six communities were awarded a combined total of \$28.3 million dollars. These grantees worked in thirty-six communities across six states in New England (see Appendix A).

NMEF's Theory of Action (ToA) for the Public Understanding and Demand work, shown in Figure 2, highlights the tactics that Grassroots projects engaged to create change. The Theory of Action prioritized shifting power structures, promoting new ideas, and developing new models and proof points.

From the outset, NMEF was committed to learning from grantees and commissioned a number of studies to help both Foundation staff and grantees evolve the work. Additionally, following a Foundation-wide equity assessment in 2017, and a review of the Foundation's strategy, NMEF commissioned Algorhythm to examine all existing Public Understanding and Demand evaluation and grantmaking documents to help the Foundation better understand its role in this grassroots organizing and engagement work.

Algorhythm's study was meant to examine how and to what extent the Theory of Action was bearing out and it was intended that the findings would inform and evolve the NMEF strategy, moving forward. Through the process, NMEF learned a great deal about the impacts of their work – some purposeful, and many more unintended and driven by grantees' deep knowledge and commitment to their local communities. The journey has been humbling and has fostered a new appreciation for the effort necessary to support authentic participation: a deep trust in local community partners (both youth and adult) and increasing comfort with discomfort and ambiguity. This report is intended to share the lessons the Foundation learned along the way, using the Theory of Action as an organizing frame. NMEF has not chosen to share their learning because they have things all figured out. Rather, the Foundation is committed to engaging its peers in a dialogue about what it takes to effectively and equitably support grassroots organizing and advocacy.

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Civic and Family Engagement (CFE). This project provides coaching support and small implementation funds to districts in order to build their community engagement capacity. The goal of the Civic and Family Engagement project is to help districts become more comfortable with and better at engaging marginalized communities, ultimately engaging these communities as a way to improve education for their communities. In total NMEF supported 21 grantees that worked in 21 communities and six states. These grantees were awarded approximately \$15,000 per year.

Community Organizing – Lead Community Partners (CO-LCPs). This project builds parents' capacities to organize and engage in conversations about improving education through Lead Community Partners. The goal is to amplify voices of marginalized populations in order to: challenge the status quo, change the minds of key decision makers, and redistribute power which leads to changing policy and practices locally. In total NMEF supported six grantees working in seven communities and five states. These grantees were awarded approximately \$140,000 per year.

Amplifying Student Voice and Leadership (ASVL). The goal of this project is to amplify the authentic voices of young people, giving them a seat at the table around decisions that impact their future. These groups are culturally representative of the districts in which they operate and are highly skilled at engaging the most marginalized youth in their communities. The NMEF supported 19 grantees that worked in 14 communities across 5 states. These grantees were awarded approximately \$70,000 per year.



SHIFTING POWER STRUCTURES

Amplifying Historically Marginalized Voices at Decision-Making Tables

NMEF knew that a truly grassroots effort would need to engage all types of stakeholders, especially historically marginalized populations who were least likely to experience student centered learning in New England schools and districts. Therefore, the Foundation explicitly selected grantees who represented organizations that were deeply embedded within historically marginalized communities and/or districts that were intentionally seeking to engage their most marginalized students and families. While each grantee partner took a unique approach to the work, they were chosen based on their potential to build and sustain trusting relationships across a broad range of stakeholder groups. NMEF believed that partnerships with these types of community-based grantees had the potential to shift power dynamics between schools, districts and marginalized communities. However, the amount of time and skills necessary to build and sustain these connections was unexpected. Indeed, trusting bonds needed to simultaneously develop between stakeholders at multiple levels:



between NMEF and grantees, capacity building consultants and grantees, school/district staff and the Amplifying Student Voice and Leadership and Community Organizing grantees, and Civic and Family Engagement grantees and their local communities.

Lesson N°1 Listening To and Learning From Grantees

Funding authentic youth and community voice required that NMEF staff balance the Foundation's goals with the often-conflicting direction of stakeholders. It was difficult for NMEF staff to navigate these divergent agendas and hold space for grantees to experiment with grant guidelines and forge their own directions. Nonetheless, NMEF staff valued grantees' experiences and knew that, in the end, the benefits of this process were worth the effort. Staff focused on building trusting relationships with grantees, listening and learning along the way.

One major example of this is when NMEF staff began to realize that the youth and community organizing grantees were not interpreting student-centered learning as the Foundation had expected. NMEF had mistakenly thought that grassroots organizing and advocacy grantees would quickly adopt the Foundation's charge and take direct action to advance student-centered learning in the classroom. However, many youth and community organizing grantees naturally applied an equity lens to the concept of student-centered learning, which unearthed and highlighted a range of critical factors that needed to be addressed before organizers could ever expect student centered learning in the classroom. Across the three projects, grantees began working on issues such as: dismantling the school to prison pipeline, advocating for ethnic studies classes and curricula that represented the diverse cultural backgrounds and lived experiences of students, implementing restorative justice strategies within schools to ensure fewer youth of color would be "pushed out", and advocating for immigrant rights. Youth and community organizers were doing what they knew best: identifying and working to dismantle the systems of oppression that were excluding students from quality education and student-centered learning opportunities.

NMEF learned that they needed to relinquish their particular theory of how the work might roll out, and instead embrace the strategies that grantees were effectively implementing in the communities that mattered most to the Foundation's mission. NMEF's recognition that they did not fully understand grantees' everyday realities allowed them to step back and really listen to grantees. While this was sometimes uncomfortable, NMEF staff could also see that grantees were making the Public Understanding and Demand work their own and translating it into terms and actions that were having a real impact in local communities.

At the same time, NMEF was keenly aware that it did not know for sure where the Public Understanding and Demand work was headed. Prior to the initiative, Foundation staff had spent countless hours developing theories of change and theories of action, thinking through key performance indicators, and developing evaluation plans. They were quickly learning that these needed to become "living" documents – revised and updated along the way with grantee input. It took courage for the staff to place the participatory process ahead of the Foundation's pre-planned objectives and goals. When the staff followed the grantees' thinking, it began to allow for community-based interpretations of student-centered learning practices. And, more than that, it began to shift the power dynamic between the Foundation and grantees.

I can't change the community unless I have a lot of power. You always need people who are with you [...] People who can step when you step also.

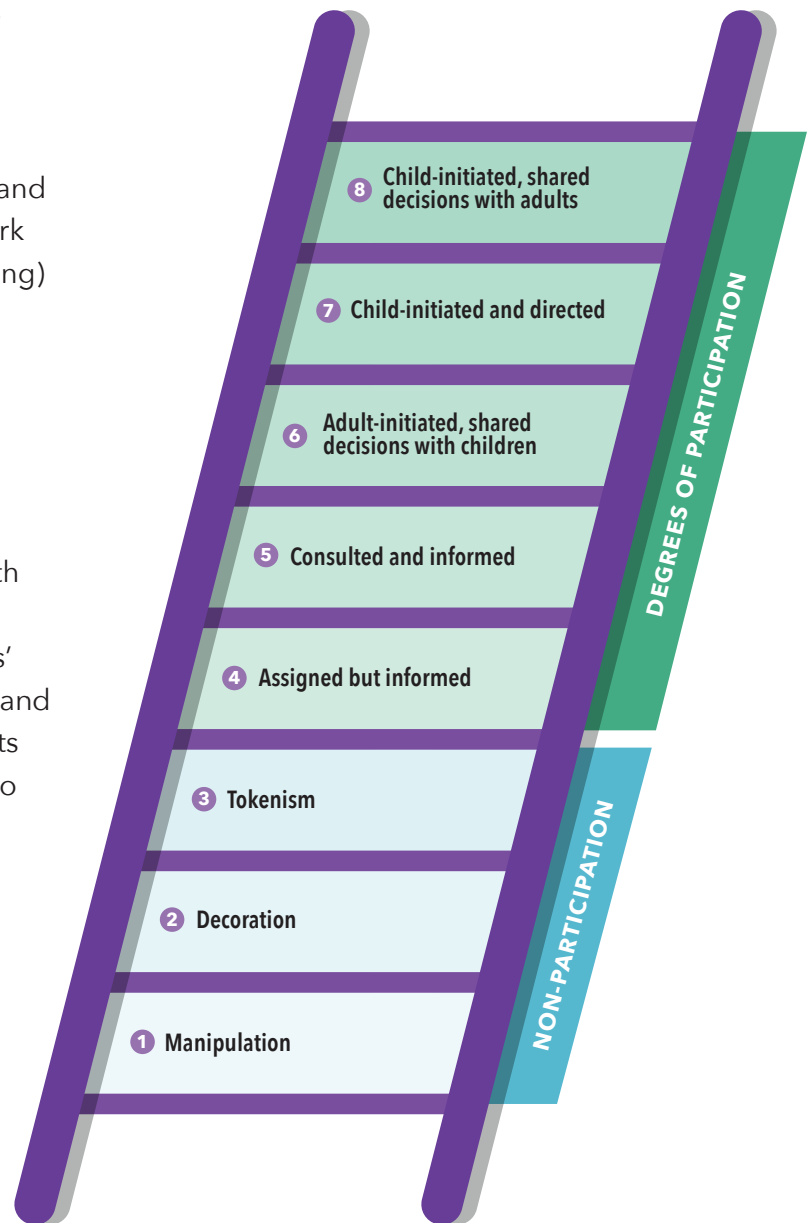
— Amplifying Student Voice and Leadership
Youth Organizer

Lesson Nº2 Shift Power Dynamics Between The Foundation and Its Grantees

The foundation continues to evolve their role and relationship to the grantees and the work. If we apply Roger Hart's *Ladder of Child Participation* (Figure 3) to the foundation's grassroots work – imagining grantees are the “child” and NMEF the “adult”, it would have begun at rung #4 – “assigned but informed”. NMEF set the agenda and informed the grantees both how they would work (community/youth engagement and/or organizing) and what they would focus on (SCL). Over time, as NMEF has learned to listen to and honor the grantees local expertise, they have moved to rung #5 – “consulted and informed”.

The Foundation is now exploring ways to move up Hart's Ladder and more fully share power with grantees. This is especially important because organizing agendas emerge out of stakeholders' ongoing political education, awareness-raising, and community engagement. If the Foundation wants to authentically support organizing, it will have to be willing to trust the power of that process (vs. prescribing an agenda).

Figure 3: Hart's Ladder of Child Participation



Lesson Nº3 When Supporting Equity In Communities, Be Prepared To Walk Your Talk

We cannot underestimate the profound role that one of the NMEF program officers played in this work. For example, as a Latina who grew up in similar circumstances, experiencing many of the same challenges as youth organizers, the Program Officer who ran two of the Grassroots Projects (e.g., the youth and community organizing projects) deeply understood the work that needed to be done. Her lived experience helped her build more immediate trust with grantees and motivated her to create spaces to listen to and “honor each grantees’ story” (NMEF Program Officer).

This Senior Program Officer brought a different set of lived experiences and sensitivities to the Foundation. Even though equity and inclusion were deeply embedded in NMEF’s vision, mission, and theory of action, the Foundation had not considered the ways in which they would need to evolve to truly support the work. In order to authentically and equitably collaborate with grantees around education reform – and not merely reproduce the power dynamics it sought to transform – NMEF needed to own its unique power as a funder and how this influence its work with grantees. To truly walk the talk of its commitment to equity, the Foundation now needs to examine and revise its own internal practices related to equity and inclusion.

I share similar life experiences with the youth organizers. I think it is important to think about that unique awareness. Because I hear the same stories, sadly enough, that are repeated decade after decade.

— NMEF Senior Program Officer

The impact of this work has expanded to [allow] me [to] sit on the Portland Planning Board for the city’s comprehensive plan when we were doing the community input process for our comprehensive plan ... because of the work I’ve done with Portland Empowered.

— Portland Parent

Building Grantee Capacity to Implement the Work

I realized that I have a voice for my children and nobody is going to stop me from advocating for them.

— Parent

The Foundation recognized that grantees would need a wide range of skills and abilities to execute the Public Understanding and Demand work — some of which they already had, and some of which they would need to develop. Therefore, Grassroots Portfolio grants were multi-year and came with deep capacity building support that included one-to-one coaching, workshops, trainings, and networking opportunities. Capacity building partners and coaches were, in large part, selected by the Foundation, not by grantees. This was necessary because there were not many organizations and/or consultants that worked with grassroots community and youth led groups in New England.

Lesson N^o4 Focus on Sustainability

With the support of NMEF, one of the capacity building partners – the Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE), formerly the Annenberg Institute for School Reform – successfully maintained its capacity as it transitioned to a new home. This was an important evolution because it positioned CYCLE to provide ongoing, sustained support for grassroots organizing and engagement work in New England.

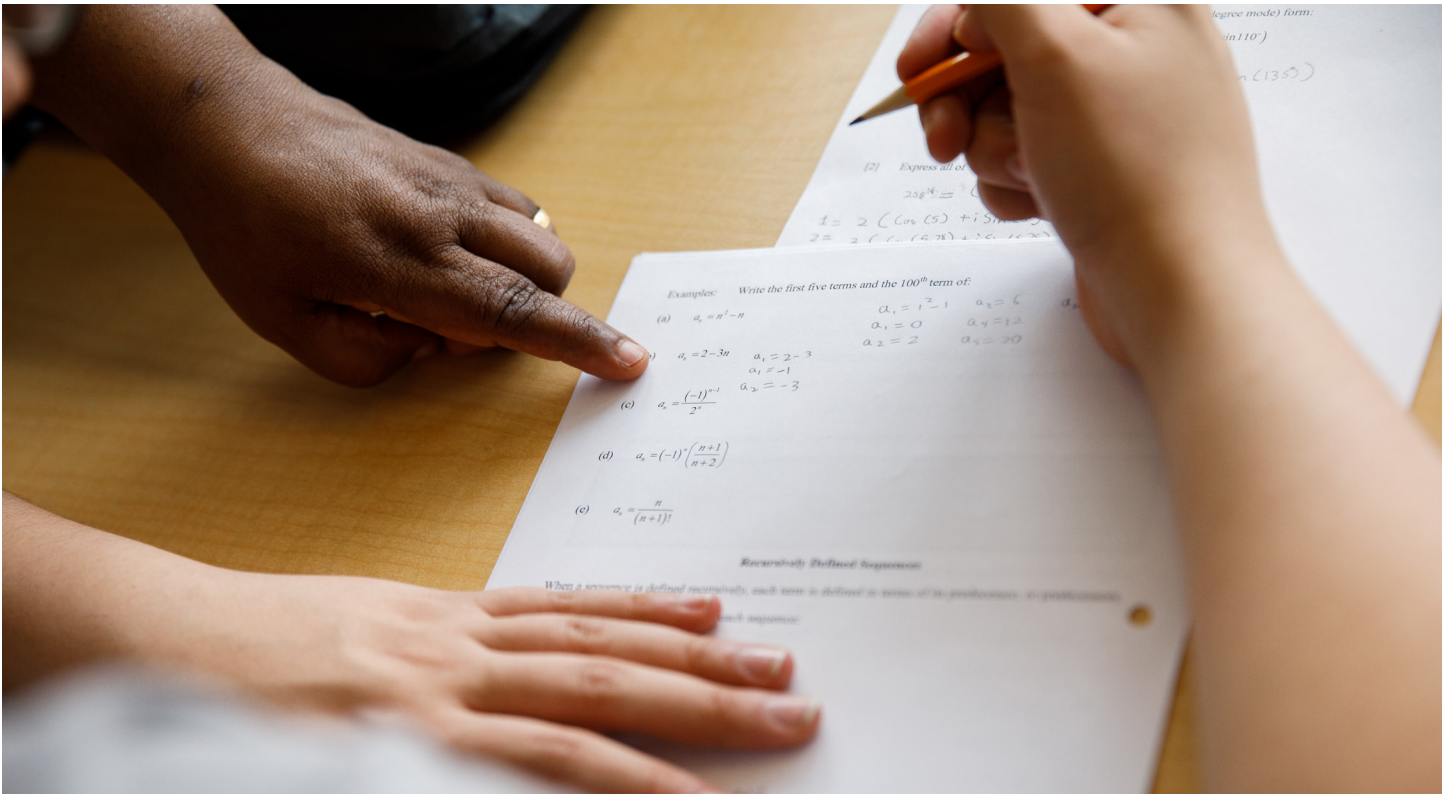
That said, grantee sustainability continues to be a challenge. Much of NMEF's grassroots work is

currently dependent on funding from NMEF. The Foundation has recognized the tenuousness of this situation and has begun to create sustainability plans with grantees. While a good deal of this work has focused on fund development, NMEF is also considering the health and effectiveness of the nonprofit overall. The Foundation is thinking more about how to leverage capacity building resources to promote long-term sustainability and how they might use their institutional power to influence and start conversations with other funders in New England who might also support Grassroots grantees' work.

Lesson Nº5 Meet Grantees Where They Are

To mitigate the power dynamic between local grantees and capacity building partners, these relationships needed to be reimaged. It took time for grantees to create trusting relationships with coaches and consultants – relationships that were needed to support sensitive dialogues about key challenges. Each grantee came to the table with a wide variety of skills and capacities, and their own distinct social, political, and economic contexts. TA providers and coaches quickly learned that they needed to strategically tailor their efforts to meet grantees' unique needs. This was especially true for the Community and Family Engagement (CFE) grantees who worked in schools and districts

with divergent politics, cultures, and personalities. When TA providers automatically framed the work of community and family engagement in terms of equity and inclusion, many district staff who were less familiar with these approaches and/or who didn't yet believe that TA providers understood their districts became overwhelmed and began to push back. They needed reassurance that TA providers truly understood the contexts in which they were working. And the relationship between the TA provider and the grantee had to be positioned as a two-way learning process to build the trust needed for everyone to move forward.



Amplifying Grassroots Advocacy Through Networking

NMEF embedded networking opportunities for grantees within each project. CYCLE was tasked with convening youth and community organizing grantees through a variety of events including annual retreats and an annual Youth Leadership Institute. They also helped launch a sustained network of youth organizing groups called #NEYON (the New England Youth Organizing Network). These events created critical in-person and virtual opportunities for grantees to support and learn from one another, despite the geographic distance that separated them.

Most of the three Grassroots Projects' grantees worked independently of one another. This was due to the fact that each Grassroots project was organized as a unique portfolio with distinct program officers, grant making goals, and strategies. In other words, the Grassroots work was siloed with each subproject operating independently. This meant that some communities in New England had youth organizers working to build public

understanding and demand for student center learning, while others had community organizers driving toward the same goal, and still others had districts and schools that were working to more effectively engage their most marginalized students and parents. Rarely, did these efforts culminate in a single location. However, when they did, there were greater and potentially more sustainable outcomes.

Lesson N^o6 Leverage the Power of the Collective

These findings have helped ignite a new conversation within NMEF about the merits of working collectively. NMEF realizes that any meaningful change requires collective effort and shared problem-solving. In order to achieve that partnership with marginalized community members, a fundamental change in how they see their role is required, from discretely funding organizations to committing to

a long-term process of social change. The value the foundation has already placed on amplifying the voices of marginalized community members, building trusting relationships with grantees and community leaders, and focusing on igniting and sustaining community coalitions has laid the groundwork for a more equitable approach to their grantmaking.

DEVELOPING NEW MODELS AND PROOF POINTS

As the Grassroots projects evolved — and thanks to learnings provided by evaluations of each project — promising organizing and engagement models began to emerge. Findings showed that grantees that were implementing certain practices were much more likely to shift mindsets, create new policies, and begin to change power dynamics in schools and districts. These models were lifted up to help grantees identify a path forward and highlight the steps necessary to build a strong sustainable youth organizing program; an inclusive and equitable community organizing group; and/or deeply embedded, school and district level community and family engagement practices. The fact that these models emerged out of grantees' own work helped them to fully own the impact of their narratives and successes.

Lesson N^o7 Engage in Ongoing Participatory Evaluation

The evaluation partner in the Civic and Family Engagement project played a role from the very beginning by documenting the work. They soon moved into an evaluative role, providing data for ongoing review, and supporting intermediaries and NMEF to make mid-course corrections as needed. Community and youth organizing grantees were also evaluated, and while these approaches were participatory, the focus was summative rather than formative.

Taking a more formative and participatory approach to evaluation across the Grassroots projects would have paved the way for even more proof points and ongoing, inclusive discussions about overall goals,

objectives, and outcomes. This would have helped the Foundation:

1. Develop a shared decision-making process to use with grantees;
2. Make the goals and strategies of the work more transparent;
3. Quickly identify and lift up new models and proof points; and
4. Build grantees' evaluation capacity, which could have supported grantees' real-time learning about what it takes to shift power structures and implement equitable education policies and practices.

Amplifying Youth, Parent, and Community Agency and Voice

Because of grantees' organizing and community engagement work, there are now more opportunities for students and families to voice their opinions and concerns — and more institutional advocates to hear and act on them including Teacher and School Liaisons, District Engagement Coordinators, Local Advisory Boards and Community Engagement Coalitions. There is greater student representation on school committees and in district level decision-making bodies. Family and community members have an increased sense of social support and increased knowledge of key issues related to their children's education and, as a result, are speaking up more often and have reported taking on leadership roles. The latter include seats on Parent Teacher Councils, school councils and boards, leadership positions in local coalitions, and facilitation of trainings, workshops, and other initiatives.

Lesson N^o8 Choose Grantees Wisely

Factors that contributed to youth and community organizers' successes included: the degree to which the organization focused on developing the critical consciousness of its members (including examining the root causes and systemic issues that drive oppression); the organization's ability to build a base of members who were ready to act; the level of student or parent leadership within the organization; the ability of the organization to run campaigns on a single issue, targeting change at multiple levels (e.g., individual, school, community, and district); and the organization's ability to build partnerships and coalitions. Factors that contributed to success for Civic and Family Engagement grantees included their abilities to: develop a core coalition to drive change; build strong relationships

with all community stakeholders, including students; community members' ownership of and buy-in to the work; and whether they were thinking about and planning for long-term sustainability.

Almost all of the youth and community organizers that were implementing promising models came to the table with them: in other words, the foundation chose excellent grantees who already embodied quality organizing practices. Similarly, Civic and Family Engagement grantees that already had district and community buy-in, had a history of collaboration with diverse stakeholders (CBOs, youth programs, district leaders, and school leaders) and had preexisting initiatives with aligned goals were able to hit the ground running.

Lesson N^o9 Define and Disseminate Promising Practices Early and Often

Because models and frameworks emerged out of summative evaluation work – often five years or more into the work, grantees did not always know what “model” they were supposed to be using. Therefore, it is not surprising that most grantees were in different places and levels with their work. The Foundation is now in a much stronger position

to disseminate promising models that are grounded in knowledge gleaned directly from grantees’ work. Hopefully, this will result in more focused technical assistance, clearer measures of success, and less confusion. Ideally, promising models will be treated as “living documents”, and NMEF will support grantees to incorporate, test, and further develop them.

Build Capacity and Knowledge Within Schools and Communities

As a result of the Grassroots projects, there are now more equitable educational practices occurring in thirty-six New England schools and communities across six states. These include pilot restorative justice programs in schools, new ethnic studies curricula, staff engaging in *Courageous Conversations*² to ignite dialogues about equity and school culture, and students driving conversations about culturally sensitive teaching practices, school pushout, and immigrant and student rights.

That said, NMEF found that all Grassroots grantees were having a difficult time bringing teachers to the table, especially during off hours. Sometimes this was due to competing priorities like extra-curricular and after school programs, teacher leadership activities, and professional development. And, while youth organizers were excited to be at the table with their teachers when this did happen, they also reported that systemic bias, including racism, sexism and adultism were the top challenges they faced in their work. Indeed, three grantees prioritized creating trainings and workshops for teachers to specifically address racism and adultism.

Lesson N^o10 Advocate for Teacher Engagement

There needs to be greater motivation for teachers to improve how they engage students in the classroom, and the incentives for this change likely need to be part of a top down approach because bottom up pressure does not seem to be adequate. As NMEF

considers how to approach this issue, it is clear that they will need to be strategic about how they wield their power and advocate for change with school boards and districts.

² Courageous Conversation: <https://courageousconversation.com/about/>

Encourage Policy Adoption and Implementation

Grassroots grantees' work has also resulted in new policies that are now being implemented in New England schools and districts. These include policies prioritizing student-centered learning specifically; school transportation policies that ensure all students can get to school no matter where they live in Vermont; a Family Engagement Manifesto that is driving improved community engagement in Portland, ME; new discipline manuals that reflect more equitable, less punitive systems for addressing infractions; a bill, passed into law, that established equal access to institutional aid for undocumented students in Bridgeport CT; a Community Safety Act that was passed into law in Providence RI; an All Students Count Act (ASCA) that now requires the disaggregation of data in Rhode Island Public Schools to better understand the educational experiences of subgroups; and a new Queer/Trans student policy.

Lesson N°11 Strategically Leverage The Foundation's Unique Power

While grassroots grantees were doing an amazing amount of work on their own, NMEF realized that they could be doing more to support efforts in policy adoption and implementation. They are now considering ways to: organize philanthropic peers to share findings and insights, advocate for grantees,

leverage the Foundation's reputation and influence to increase the awareness of racial equity issues amongst other funders, and incentivize districts and schools to change policies and build critical educator capacities like youth-adult partnership.



PROMOTE NEW IDEAS

NMEF is just now beginning to use their institutional power to engage in more participatory evaluation approaches and commission and disseminate briefs, like this one, that share the models and tools that are being generated through the Grassroots work. For example, Algorhythm’s evaluation results were shared back with grantees who participated in the evaluation (although not with all Amplifying Student Voice and Leadership grantees). Additionally, Algorhythm’s evaluation was translated into two short briefs — one for youth organizers and the other for funders — that shared proven models for youth organizing and lifted up key strategies to guide funders who want to support youth organizing. NMEF will continue to explore options to build out this aspect of their Theory of Action, in partnership with grantees.



CONCLUSION

Equity Minded Funders are... Engag[ing] with and solicit[ing] input from the communities they seek to benefit, going beyond the usual suspects. These funders understand that grant partners can provide insight into community conditions. They seek to deepen understanding and build new relationships by engaging directly with other community leaders too. These funders also practice the ultimate power-sharing strategy: sharing control of grantmaking decisions with community members.

— National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy

This quote from the National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy provides a North Star for NMEF, as they continue to advance and deepen their work in the areas of racial equity. And the Committee's toolkit *Power Moves: Your essential philanthropy assessment guide for equity and justice*³ both offers a helpful framework for thinking through the findings of this meta-evaluation and points a way forward to more equitable grantmaking. Power Moves tasks equity-minded foundations with implementing three interconnected strategies:

- **Build Power:** Support systemic change by funding civic engagement, advocacy and community organizing among marginalized communities;
- **Share Power:** Nurture transparent, trusting relationships and co-creating strategies with stakeholders; and
- **Wield Power:** Exercise public leadership beyond grantmaking to create equitable, catalytic change.

Build Power

The Grassroots Portfolio demonstrates NMEF's strong commitment to building power in marginalized communities. Overall, the Foundation funded civic engagement, advocacy and community organizing programs in thirty-six communities across New England. That said, grantees built more power when they worked together in the same communities, toward mutually beneficial goals, or when they built coalitions to advance shared goals. NMEF is now exploring how to strategically support these types of coalitions and partnerships.

Share Power

Power Moves suggests a number of ways that foundations can share power with grantees. NMEF has done an amazing amount of work on the first three suggestions but will need to go much further if they intend to share control of grantmaking decisions with grantees and/or community members.

³ National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. (2018). *Power Moves Your essential philanthropy assessment guide for equity and justice* (p. 77). Retrieved from <http://www.ncrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Power-Moves-Philanthropy.pdf>

1. **Engage with and solicit input from the communities you seek to benefit, going beyond the usual suspects.** NMEF has not only awarded grants to nonprofits serving the most vulnerable populations, they have also ignited new 501c3s and/or advanced work in communities with few resources. And they actively encouraged grantees to seek out and include a wide variety of stakeholders in their communities.
2. **Understand that grant partners can provide insight into community conditions.** The Grassroots Portfolio Program Officers honored community leadership and knew that grantees and their stakeholders understood their lived experience better than she or other Foundation staff. While the Foundation valued this approach, it fundamentally challenged the assumptions underpinning their theory of change. Findings from this study and others are helping NMEF to both value grantee input and develop foundation-wide strategies to support the flexibility necessary to act in concert with community stakeholders.
3. **Seek to deepen understanding and build new relationships by engaging directly with community leaders.** The Grassroots Portfolio Program Officers nurtured transparent and trusting relationships with grantees, capacity builders and community leaders. Additionally, they put relationships front and center in the work, ensuring that all partners worked together with honor and respect. Without these personal relationships, the grassroots work could not have advanced. For example, if NMEF had stuck to its pre-planned path, despite the new directions that were being forged by

grantees and their communities, one can only imagine the level of mistrust that might have festered between the Foundation and grantees. Instead, the Program Officers and the grantees saw and took advantage of an opportunity to begin a conversation about the gap between the Foundation's understanding and community realities.

4. **Practice the ultimate power-sharing strategy: sharing control of grantmaking decisions with community members.** At this point, NMEF does not share grantmaking decisions with grantees of the communities in which they work. It is recommended that the Foundation consider how far it is willing to go in terms of involving grantees/community members in decision-making and be transparent about what roles grantees – and the communities they support – might play in decision-making processes. This can be accomplished by bringing community members onto the board and staff or onto grantmaking and advisory committees; and by fostering community-led planning processes to guide grantmaking decisions.

While not everything went according to the NMEF's plan with the Grassroots Portfolio, the unintended outcomes of the work have been overwhelmingly positive – impacting schools, local communities, and students across New England. Moreover, the NMEF has been significantly impacted by the work. After examining how traditional approaches to grantmaking reproduce the power dynamics they are seeking to transform, they have realized that – to authentically and equitably collaborate with grantees around education reform – they will have to forge a new path forward.

The Grassroots Portfolio: An Overview

	Civic and Family Engagement – Community Engagement	Community Organizing – Lead Community Partners	Amplifying Student Voice and Leadership – Youth Organizing
Description	<p>This project launched in 2015 and provides coaching support and small implementation funds to districts in order to build their community engagement capacity. The goal of the Civic and Family Engagement project is to help districts become more comfortable with and better at engaging marginalized communities, ultimately engaging these communities as a way to improve education for their communities.</p>	<p>This project launched in 2011 and builds parent’s capacities to organize and engage in conversations about improving education through Lead Community Partners. The goal is to amplify the voices of marginalized populations in order to: challenge the status quo, change the minds of key decision makers, and redistribute power which leads to changing policy and practices at the local level.</p>	<p>This project launched in 2010 and amplifies the authentic voices of young people, helping youth organizers to secure seats at the tables where educational decision-making happens and developing them as leaders in the process. These groups are culturally representative of the districts in which they operate and are highly skilled at engaging the most marginalized youth in their communities.</p>
Summary of Technical Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint coaching by The Great Schools Partnership and Everyday Democracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching/ongoing support provided by the Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE), formerly the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. • Coaching on sustainability and development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching/ongoing support by CYCLE • Social Media Training support by Power-Labs • Most groups were given the opportunity to have professional videos made of their work. • SCL school site visits led by the Institute for Democratic Education in America
Number of Grantees	21	6	19
Average \$ Per Year	\$15,000	\$140,000	\$70,000

Total Funding

Total investment of over \$28.3 million

Geographic Reach**21 communities across 6 states:**

- 6 districts in Massachusetts,
- 4 in Connecticut,
- 4 in Maine,
- 3 in Vermont,
- 2 in New Hampshire, and
- 2 in Rhode Island.

7 communities across 5 states:

- Hartford, CT;
- Meriden, CT;
- Revere, MA;
- Portland, ME;
- Pittsfield, NH;
- Burlington, VT; and
- Winooski, VT.

14 communities across 5 states:

- 6 grantees in Massachusetts;
- 5 grantees in Connecticut;
- 4 grantees in Rhode Island;
- 2 grantees in New Hampshire; and
- 2 grantees in Maine.

* Amplifying Student Voice and Leadership grantees rarely work in the same cities, but several work state-wide.

Geographic Overlap

The three Grassroots Projects overlap in just six communities: Meriden, CT; Hartford, CT; Holyoke, MA; Lewiston, ME; Portland, ME; and Pittsfield, NH.



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