



Fulfilling Their Potential

IRVING HARRIS FOUNDATION'S
EARLY CHILDHOOD WORK, 2004–2014



IRVING HARRIS
FOUNDATION

newventurefund

Executive Summary

METHODOLOGY

In January 2015, the Irving Harris Foundation engaged Arabella Advisors and the New Venture Fund to conduct a retrospective evaluation of the foundation's role in and impact on the early childhood field in the United States from 2004 to 2014.

The Arabella team conducted a document review and secondary data collection, interviewed foundation stakeholders as well as bellwethers, and surveyed both current and former foundation grantees.¹ Specifically, the Arabella team reviewed 329 documents, extracting findings related to the foundation's strategic decisions and outcomes over the past 10 years. It also collected existing data from the Foundation Center and from independent evaluations of some of the foundation's grantees to provide context and validate findings. Arabella researchers also interviewed 44 informants, gathering perspectives on the foundation's role in the early childhood field, its contributions to the sector, and thoughts about where the field needs to go. Lastly, Arabella administered a survey to 123 current and former grantees (43% responded) to better understand their experiences as grantees.

Over the past decade, the Irving Harris Foundation (IHF) has helped to drive sustained impact at significant scale within the field of early childhood development—impact much greater than what might be expected from a foundation of its asset size and grant making. It has achieved such outsized impact by using a multifaceted yet highly integrated and intentional approach to its philanthropy—modeled on the approach used by its founder, Irving Harris. Operating at different times as a “venture philanthropist”² and/or a “network leader,”³ it has taken the long view, built deep knowledge, and cultivated longstanding relationships with and between grantees, policymakers, funders, and other key stakeholders. By focusing on the earliest development of children, IHF has helped to improve the prospects of young children and families in its home state of Illinois and across the United States.

Based on an in-depth evaluation of IHF's early childhood work between 2004 and 2014, which coincides with the first decade after Irving Harris was no longer involved with the foundation, this paper examines IHF's approach, articulating its components and tracing its use through two complex, long-term efforts. These are but two examples of many we could have selected from the foundation's early childhood work. We selected them because we believe they clearly illustrate important points. By reviewing and examining the foundation's work in this way, we hope to identify practical insights that other funders can use to enhance their own philanthropic efforts, both within the early childhood space and beyond.

¹ Reproductive health and justice work, which is an integrated part of the foundation's early childhood strategy, was not prioritized in data collection efforts in order to manage the scope and focus of the evaluation. Survey and interview protocols were designed for early childhood-related programs and organizations, though some reproductive health and justice grantees completed the grantee survey as IHF treats the early childhood and reproductive health and justice fields as related and synergistic in some aspects. Strategy and grantee documents were reviewed to inform on progress against the foundation's reproductive health and justice goal.

² Venture philanthropy is an approach to building impact in which a funder “provides a blend of performance-based development finance and professional services to social purpose organisations.” http://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Skoll_Centre/Docs/Venture%20philanthropy%20in%20Europe.pdf

³ In a network leadership model, leaders “actively catalyze networks (or organizations that function like networks), leading to an exponential increase in growth and scale beyond what their own organization could accomplish.” https://ssir.org/webinar/network_leader

The Irving Harris Foundation's mission is to:

Enhance the quality of life for children, families, and communities by advancing human potential, social justice and equity, and creative experience and expression.

The vision for the foundation's early childhood work is to:

Promote equity of outcomes for all children by enabling access to comprehensive, high-quality care in nurturing environments for pregnant women, very young children, and families to ensure success in school and in life.⁴

⁴ This Mission and Vision were revised as of 2016 and partially based on the work conducted to create this report.

Background: Establishing the Early Childhood Field

To understand the foundation's work during the decade in question, it is first necessary to understand a bit about Irving Harris himself. Harris was more than just a philanthropist; he was also an early childhood visionary. During the 1960s and 1970s, Harris was often the lone voice advocating for the needs of infants and toddlers, and he worked independently for years to build what we now recognize as the early childhood field. Long before philanthropy began talking about "systems change," he took what amounted to a systems view of the infrastructure needed to ensure healthy, productive futures for low-income children ages zero to three and their families, and he worked to connect research to practice, advocacy, and policy. He seeded innovative organizations such as the Erikson Institute and the Ounce of Prevention Fund, which continue to be esteemed for their work and contributions to the field today. And he launched the Harris Professional Development Network (described in more detail below) to help build the field's infant and early childhood mental health infrastructure.

More than a decade after his passing, the Irving Harris Foundation is still widely regarded as a leader in the early childhood field. Over the past 10 years, IHF has built on Irving Harris's legacy, positioning itself as a long-term investor in the development of evidence-based and effective program models, building relationships and networks between and among grantees, public partners, and fellow funders, advancing public policy and comprehensive early childhood systems reforms, and taking advantage of timely opportunities on the ground—all with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for very young children, especially ones from underserved backgrounds.



Early Childhood's Decade of Change

IHF's work from 2004 to 2014 took place in the context of—and in many cases helped to drive—significant growth and development of the early childhood field. During this period, support and funding for early childhood efforts expanded among both private- and public-sector entities. Based on an analysis of the Foundation Center's Foundation Directory Online, private grants awarded in the field of early childhood almost doubled from 2004 to 2012, jumping from \$113.6 million to \$205.6 million.⁵ In 2012, significant federal funding increased for core early childhood programs, including Head Start/Early Head Start (HS/EHS), the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV), as well as for early learning programs through the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grants (which we explore in greater detail below).

All of that additional investment led to numerous changes within the field, the most notable of which are summarized in the figure below.



⁵ This figure provides a reasonable proxy but actually underestimates total investments, since the Foundation Center's database captures only the investments of Foundation Center members and not all private grant makers.

During these years, the Irving Harris Foundation disbursed funds to its early childhood portfolio in the amount of \$74,644,410. After ramping up from 2004 to 2007, IHF's funding in this area has been relatively stable, between \$6 million and \$8 million per year. Despite this relatively modest amount of funding, IHF's approach has allowed the organization to achieve outsized impact.

Strategic Vision + Relationship Focus = Impact

Our in-depth evaluation concluded that the foundation used these funds to great effect, thanks to a consistent, integrated strategic vision and what we would describe as a multifaceted, deep-partnership approach to philanthropy. IHF's strategic vision centers on an overarching goal with three interrelated other goals supporting it. It typically pursues these goals through long-term relationships, investments, and interventions in which it plays multiple roles:

OVERARCHING GOAL

Narrow the developmental, achievement, and health gaps between low-income and more affluent children birth to age five and their families

GOALS



- Increase access to high-quality comprehensive early care and development and family engagement and support services
- Increase access to high-quality, integrated mental health services and systems for pregnant women, very young children, and their families
- Strengthen all people's rights and power to equitably access respectful, high-quality maternal and reproductive health care and make health care decisions that are best for them and their families⁶

Consistent pursuit of these goals, as well as a variety of sub-goals and strategies that advance them, has enabled the foundation to maintain its focus and deepen its impact without increasing its spend, even as the early childhood field has grown and changed rapidly over the past decade.

⁶ The Overarching Goal and Goals as listed here were revised as of 2016 and partially based on the work conducted to create this report.

Crucially, the foundation has pursued these goals not in isolation, but always as part of a larger whole. What's more, it has followed a set of core values in its work that prioritizes:

- **Persistence** in focusing on root causes rather than immediate symptoms
- **Partnership** to create shared goals and accountability as well as integrate the voices of those most affected by problems
- **Collaboration** to leverage resources, enhance network building, and encourage the spread of effective programs
- **Calculated risk-taking** to encourage the pursuit of potentially catalytic, sustainable change
- **Focus on justice** to foster diversity and inclusion and build a society where all children get the best possible opportunity to thrive

In pursuing its goals based on these values, the foundation has gone well beyond traditional, “isolated impact”⁷ grant making. Instead, it has employed a unique approach in which it plays a variety of leadership and support roles that tend to evolve over time and that collectively enable it to increase both its own impact and the impact of the grantees, partners, and others with which it works.

To elucidate this approach, we describe two exemplary cases below—then tease out five roles that the foundation has played that other funders may seek to emulate as they consider their own intervention strategies. It's important to note that the two cases we describe below are representative of the foundation's work over the 10 years in question, but they are only two interventions among many.

⁷ In “isolated impact” philanthropy, grantees work separately to achieve their own ends, even if they operate in the same issue area and have overlapping impact goals. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work

THE PDN NOW

Over the years, the PDN has grown into a critical training ground made up of diverse leadership institutions and organizations—some in medical settings, some in social service agencies, some in academic institutions—all of which touch children's lives at a critical time. PDN grantees have trained hundreds of fellows (pre- and post-doc), doctors, clinicians, therapists, and other professionals, building the leadership bench of professionals working in the trenches with families every day. They have also developed and replicated several program models and pioneered efforts to more intentionally integrate infant and early childhood mental health into child- and family-serving systems. Current PDN sites are listed below.

PDN Sites

- BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY
Ramat Gan, Israel
- BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER
Boston, Massachusetts
- ERIKSON INSTITUTE
Chicago, Illinois
- FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
Tallahassee, Florida
- HEBREW UNIVERSITY
Jerusalem, Israel
- THE JEWISH BOARD
New York City, New York

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CASE EXAMPLE 1

The Professional Development Network (PDN)

FOUNDING A NETWORK

Like many effective networks, the Harris Professional Development Network (PDN) began informally, with a small group of motivated people working together to address a glaring gap in the early childhood field: the lack of capacity of professionals to provide mental health services to children under the age of five and their families. During the early 1990s, Irving Harris himself was a founding board member of the National Center for Clinical Infant Programs (now Zero to Three),⁸ which was focused on infant mental health. He recognized a critical lack of infrastructure in the emerging field and sought to strengthen it through multidisciplinary training and leadership development. Seeking to move the field forward, Harris wrote letters to a small group of experts, asking what they would do to build the needed infrastructure if they had the money. Replies to that letter led to proposals, which in turn led to grants that launched the PDN—and ultimately helped establish and scale the new field.⁹

Soon participants in the PDN, called “sites,” were receiving grants with broad goals and built-in flexibility, designed to enable each to use IHF funds to create multidisciplinary training and leadership programs. Often sites used their PDN grants as “glue money”—dollars that enabled them to invest in long-term needs rather than simply respond to short-term objectives. Engaging as a long-term partner, the foundation worked closely with sites to co-create goals and to provide the support needed to achieve them.

⁸ <https://www.zerotothree.org/>

⁹ <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/683-vol-33-no-2-emerging-issues-in-infant-mental-health>

PDN Sites Continued

- **LSU HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER**
New Orleans, Louisiana
- **SOUTHWEST HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**
Phoenix, Arizona
- **TULANE UNIVERSITY**
New Orleans, Louisiana
- **UCSF BENIOFF CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OAKLAND**
Oakland, California
- **UCSF CHILD TRAUMA RESEARCH PROGRAM**
San Francisco, California
- **UCSF INFANT-PARENT PROGRAM**
San Francisco, California
- **UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**
Chicago, Illinois
- **UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO**
Denver, Colorado
- **UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**
Minneapolis, Minnesota
- **UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON**
Seattle, Washington
- **YALE CHILD STUDY CENTER**
New Haven, Connecticut
- **ZERO TO THREE**
Washington, DC

GROWING A NETWORK

Crucially, that support has always included more than flexible grant dollars. In the beginning, the foundation convened the PDN's leaders three times per year, encouraging them to share ideas, learn from each other's work, and replicate best practices. As the PDN has grown, its members have met less frequently but in the same spirit. Participants now work closely with the foundation to co-create a shared agenda, convene once per year, and then collaborate between meetings to advance shared goals and address gaps and needs in the broader field, developing tools, journal articles, field guidance, and more. In effect, the foundation has facilitated the growth of a network that enables its participants to empower both themselves and each other, above and beyond the work it directly supports with grant dollars.

Not surprisingly, the PDN, and the foundation's work in relation to it, have changed significantly over time. In recent years, the foundation and PDN sites have worked to transform child- and family-serving systems by infusing them with best practice models and training that emphasizes a trauma-informed approach, identifying and spreading evidence-based interventions across the network. For example, when one PDN site developed an intervention integrating courts and child welfare systems to promote recovery from trauma in maltreated young children, other PDN sites were able to replicate the model and demonstrate similar success. In fact, there have been multiple evidence-based models that were developed by PDN sites, replicated within the network before being expanded nationally. The foundation has also recently added a component related to changing the influence strategy to reach beyond sites and affect larger systems, as well as components related to policy advocacy and, over the last nine years, an intentional focus on diversity and inclusion.

Accordingly, it has adjusted its programs in crucial ways. The original PDN grants were five-year renewable grants, and each site got the same funding. Over time, the foundation has adjusted its grant-making cycle and its grant amounts to better match the needs of a growing and changing group of grantees. It has also conducted regular evaluation of programs, scaling support up in some areas and down in others—sometimes because sites have greater access to other funding or because they have reduced the work they do in areas that IHF supports.

Notably, even sites that have seen scaled down support typically continue to participate in the PDN's annual convenings and so continue to benefit from the additional value the network provides. What's more, in several cases IHF funding has helped PDN sites become established within their home institutions—and to thereby maintain a focus and commitment to this work even after IHF's grants to the site have ended.

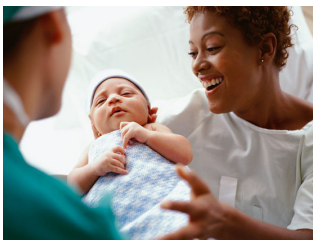
NETWORK EFFECTS

In the 25 years since Irving Harris sent his letters, the foundation has operated as both partner and leader within the PDN, evolving and adapting its grant making and deploying its influence to continually push the network and the larger field forward. Yet even as the PDN has changed, some things about IHF's support for it have not. The foundation strives to be a genuine partner and to maximize transparency. While it occasionally gives directive guidance, goals are co-created and accountability is shared. It employs a consistent, iterative, relationship-based approach, and it works to make the complex dynamic between grantees and grant makers as equitable as possible.

The results of the foundation's investments have been remarkable. Because of it, PDN sites have enhanced the skills of early childhood service providers across the country and been able to develop and scale a wide range of programs and best practices to support the healthy development of young children. Examples of this include:



[Child-Parent Psychotherapy](#) – a psychological intervention to support and strengthen the caregiver-child relationship as a way to restore and protect the child's mental health after the child experienced a traumatic event



[HealthySteps](#) – a program where specialists work alongside primary care doctors and staff to provide enhanced well-child visits and home visits that focus on the medical, emotional, and social determinants of health and well-being to ensure healthier, happier children and families



[Fussy Baby Network](#) – a prevention home visiting program for families who struggle with their baby's crying, sleeping, or feeding during the first year of life

[Minding the Baby](#) – a home visiting program that includes a pediatric nurse practitioner and a licensed clinical social worker to promote positive health, mental health, life course, and attachment outcomes in babies, mothers, and their families

What's more, the network has provided a structure that enables the entire field to better share knowledge and create shared standards, such as the recently developed [Diversity-Informed Infant Mental Health Tenets](#).

“The Early Learning Challenge was a dream come true for the BUILD Initiative. It was the federal victory for which we had long worked... The foundation’s influence was felt not only in winning the grants program, but in bringing together a huge range of organizations and leaders to ensure that states could craft great applications as well as have the technical assistance they needed to implement the funded plans. The Irving Harris Foundation repeatedly has shown great foresight in its investment strategies and a commitment and perseverance that generates results, and this dream would not have become a reality without the foundation’s strategic leadership.”

— SUSAN HIBBARD,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
THE BUILD INITIATIVE

CASE EXAMPLE 2

The Early Learning Challenge Collaborative (ELCC)

In launching the PDN, the foundation was effectively going where no funder had gone before. Working with other leaders, it recognized a crucial gap in a nascent field and moved to fill it. In so doing, it collaborated closely with grantees—the “sites”—but not with other philanthropic funders. Thankfully, sites have been able to leverage significant public funding—and, more recently, growing private support—as interest in this area is growing, but other funders were not initially focused on this space. In our second case example, the foundation took a different collaborative tack: working with fellow funders to leverage federal dollars.

CREATING A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Thanks to its work on multiple efforts, including the PDN, the foundation had emerged as a recognized leader in the early childhood field by the early 2000s. Meanwhile, an expanding body of evidence and advances in science were leading to an increasing federal policy focus on the early years—thanks in no small part to advocacy efforts the foundation and other philanthropists supported. One such effort was the First Five Years Fund (FFYF), an advocacy-focused organization launched by the foundation along with a handful of other funders and leaders. During George W. Bush’s presidency, action at the state level had increased. One purpose of FFYF was to strengthen federal advocacy capacity prior to the change in administration that would come following the 2008 presidential election.

During that election, a group of early childhood funders—including the foundation—shared potential opportunities for further investments in early childhood and children’s mental health systems with all of the presidential candidates. Barack Obama, as a candidate, then incorporated a birth-through-five comprehensive plan in his platform. When candidate Obama became President Obama, a unique opportunity to advance early childhood efforts opened up.

REMOVING BARRIERS

Starting in 2011, the foundation's executive director worked with other early learning experts to help the federal government develop the Early Learning Challenge Fund—an effort designed to deliver grants that would improve early learning and development programs for young children within states, with awards ranging from \$30 million to \$70 million per state. This fund was a part of the overall Race to the Top Fund in which Early Learning Challenge Grants were competitively awarded to states. To help ensure that the government actually allocated funds to the effort, the executive director then worked with federally focused advocates to get the proper appropriations passed.

Those efforts put tens of millions of new dollars on the table but didn't quite put them within reach. Once the money was available, the funders realized that many states would not have the capacity or resources to complete high-quality applications under the government's program. This was a problem. In the words of one partner, "We wanted lots of high-quality fundable applications so we would be able to go back to Congress and say '36 states—half Republican—have submitted X applications and you need to fund this initiative again next year.'"

In response, the foundation's executive director led an effort to engage a team of funders that launched the Early Learning Challenge Collaborative (ELCC), which in turn enabled grantee organizations such as the BUILD Initiative to provide technical assistance to states planning to request funds. The team put together a tiered technical assistance package designed to offer a range of help to states based on their level of need, and forty-six states and territories submitted applications for the Challenge funding over the competition period.

CREATING SCALED IMPACT

Many stakeholders credit the foundation—and its executive director—for the success of this collaborative effort, which increased the number of high-quality applications and led to multiple rounds of funding from the federal government, totaling \$921 million across 20 states (see Figure 1 below). This was both an innovative way to capitalize on a public investment and, as one policymaker put it, "it was a case where philanthropy had to be very nimble and responsive in a very narrow time frame" to first increase demand for the funding and then help put it to good use.

Across the country, the early childhood field benefited even in states that did not receive funding, or did not receive it initially. In order for a state to satisfy the grant requirements, a wide range of stakeholders within the state had to collaborate, coordinate, and demonstrate how the state would use the grant. States also had to show what public and private funding and other support was in place and committed within the state. The coordination work they did, as well as the technical assistance they received from ELCC, meant that the early childhood field in each participating state came out more advanced than when it started. In the end, they also shared lessons learned and other resources to benefit early childhood systems in all 50 states.¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://www.buildinitiative.org/>

Figure 1. Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Funding, by Grant Period and State

Grant Period: Phase 1, 2012–2015		Grant Period: Phase 2, 2013–2016		Grant Period: Phase 3: 2014–2017	
California	\$53,372,935	Washington	\$60,000,000	Georgia	\$51,739,896
Delaware	\$49,478,774	Colorado	\$44,888,832	Kentucky	\$44,348,482
Maryland	\$49,999,143	Illinois	\$52,498,043	Michigan	\$51,737,456
Massachusetts	\$50,000,000	New Mexico	\$37,500,000	New Jersey	\$44,286,728
Minnesota	\$44,858,313	Oregon	\$30,763,353	Pennsylvania	\$51,734,519
North Carolina	\$69,991,121	Wisconsin	\$34,052,084	Vermont	\$36,931,076
Ohio	\$69,993,362				
Rhode Island	\$50,000,000				

Source: <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/awards.html>

Through years of building up relationships, networks, and organizations, the foundation had positioned itself to move quickly when a critical policy and funding opportunity opened. It then seized that opportunity—using its grant dollars, its networks, and its deep credibility to help the entire field move forward. By investing in core relationships and the capacity of the field, it had effectively helped to open a new door. By remaining nimble and recognizing the emerging opportunity, it helped a variety of partners walk through.

THE FOUNDATION'S FIVE ROLES



Role 1:
Long-Term Investor



Role 2:
Crucial Connector



Role 3:
Agile Opportunist



Role 4:
Effective Advocate



Role 5:
Infrastructure Builder
for the Youngest
Children

The Foundation's Five Roles

In both of these cases, as well as many others not described here, IHF has pursued philanthropic impact through an intentionally multifaceted approach. As we reviewed its work, we identified five roles it typically plays that have positioned it to achieve outsized impact—and that we believe may be instructive to other funders thinking about how to drive significant, scalable, long-term change.

Notably, the foundation often plays many if not all of these roles simultaneously. It also moves fluidly between them, engaging its staff as well as its grant-making resources when needed and in the most effective ways.



ROLE 1: LONG-TERM INVESTOR

Too often in philanthropy, there is a mismatch between the long-term systemic changes a foundation seeks to influence and the short-term nature of its investments. Unlike many of its peers, the foundation has taken a long-term view, seeding organizations and programs that create change, helping them grow, and bringing them to scale over a long period. Some of the grantees it has seeded—such as the Ounce of Prevention Fund, BUILD, the Alliance for Early Success, and the First Five Years Fund—are now considered by experts to be among the field's most influential drivers of public policies and systems affecting young children and their families. The foundation has also taken the long-term view in using field leadership to influence the early childhood conversation, especially around the particular parts of the field that were underserved or underappreciated, such as a zero-to-three focus, infant and toddler mental health and trauma, high-quality and comprehensive systems and services, and diversity and inclusion in the field. It has pushed critical issues to the forefront both through strategic grant making and its own leadership, and by engaging funders, policymakers, communicators, and others.



ROLE 2: CRUCIAL CONNECTOR

The foundation has frequently provided essential connective tissue linking grantees, peer funders, experts, and policymakers. As it has with the PDN, the foundation convened partners, enabling them to learn from and build upon each other's work as well as to identify new collaborative opportunities. Through its partnerships with peer funders, such as the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, it has also created and supported field leaders. What's more, it has worked to connect the many systems that affect children—including education, health, mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, and social services—and that are normally siloed.



ROLE 3: AGILE OPPORTUNIST

Though the foundation is a small funder compared to some of its peers, its size has not limited its ability to be a field leader. In fact, thanks to its deeply knowledgeable staff members, the foundation has been able to quickly identify and capitalize on emerging opportunities on the ground and to be nimble in responding to them. Staff members have used the close and collaborative nature of their relationships with grantees, funders, and policymakers both to help create opportunities and to take advantage of them, and the foundation's ability to adapt quickly—while maintaining its long-term focus—has led to outsized impact, as it did in the case of the ELCC.



ROLE 4: EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE

The foundation has also used the relationships and networks it has nurtured to garner significant policy wins during the last decade. It has done so both by leveraging its connections within and across the public and private sectors to educate policy makers and by funding advocacy to expand access to strong models of early care and development. Foundation staff members, for example, educate and inform policymakers and funders in Illinois about best practices and effective models in infant and early childhood mental health and early care and development by serving on its Early Learning Council and elsewhere. They participate on committees, advisory boards, and working groups, often functioning as highly valued and credible thought leaders within those bodies.



ROLE 5: INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDER FOR THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN

The foundation has been a constant and resounding voice for birth-to-three as a distinct and crucial time for effective intervention in a child's life, especially underserved children. It has done so by supporting and advocating for access to targeted interventions that require child- and family-serving systems to collaborate in order to promote healthy attachment, socio-emotional development, and early learning experiences. For instance, the support of the PDN has produced a number of evidence-based practices that do just that. Despite significant changes to the field in which it works—as well as because of adaptive, intentional changes to the ways in which it works—the foundation has consistently used its multifaceted approach to grant making and field leadership to help build the infrastructure needed to serve the youngest and most vulnerable children. It regularly adjusts its direction to stay on course to this end.

Conclusion

The foundation's efforts over the period we evaluated—as well as in the years prior—provide what amounts to a proof point of the potential of foundations to drive systemic impact through long-term engagement, relationship building, and intentional leveraging of multiple assets: grant funds, knowledge, voice, field leadership, and ability to move quickly and adaptively in response to changing circumstances on the ground. In part, its effectiveness is tied to recognition of a deep parallel between the trajectory of its own work and that of the young children and families it ultimately serves. As Phyllis Glink, the foundation's executive director, has noted previously: “Long-lasting and significant change often takes a development trajectory much like that seen in human development. We invest early, and then we nurture, support, respond to our grantees as they and the field develop the capacity to transform practice, systems, and we hope, policy.”

Other foundations can accomplish similar impact by engaging for the long term, seeking to build and empower networks that transcend them, maintaining the flexibility to respond to emerging opportunities, and advocating for far-reaching policy changes—all while staying focused on the needs of their ultimate beneficiaries.