

FIELD BUILDING WORKSHOP

Discussion with Place Matters community

October 21, 2024

Objectives for our time together

- Introduce Bridgespan
- Provide an overview of what we are learning about field building as an approach to equitable systems change and the critical roles of field building funders and NGO field catalysts
- Share insights about what it takes to develop a field level agenda
- Start to answer any questions that this sparks for you

Who is Bridgespan?



A **nonprofit** that works to build a better world by **strengthening the ability of mission-driven organizations, impact investors, and philanthropists** to achieve breakthrough results in addressing society's most important challenges and opportunities



Diverse team of 350+ with varied backgrounds and experiences including education, public health, public policy, and economic development



Have engaged with **1,000+** nonprofits/NGOs, philanthropists, and impact investors



Offices in Boston | Johannesburg | Mumbai | New York | San Francisco | Singapore

Founded in 2000, incubated at and close partner of Bain & Company

Overview of Bridgespan's approach

We seek to break cycles of poverty, meet basic human needs, and ensure core human rights



We seek to shine a light on field building and unlock capital needed for catalysts to achieve their systems-change goals

Bridgespan's Field Building for Equitable Systems Change Multi-Year Initiative seeks to achieve the following goals...

...through engagement with field catalysts, funders, and thought partners to advance the following activities:

- 1** Funders significantly increase their funding and support for field building for equitable systems change and the field catalysts who lead that work
- 2** Field catalysts are fully funded and equipped to sustain effective, adaptive field building efforts to achieve equitable systems change



Changing funder mindsets and practices through sector-wide thought leadership and dissemination and supporting peer learning

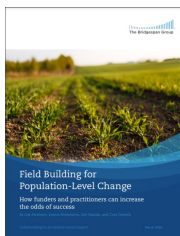


Amplifying field catalyst effectiveness and value proposition through facilitation of action learning communities and narrative-building around field catalysts as a critical ingredient in systems change



[How Field Catalysts Galvanize Social Change](#)

Winter 2018



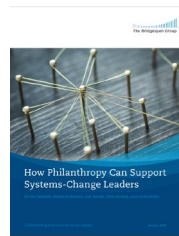
[Field Building for Population-Level Change](#)

March 2020



[Field Diagnostic Tool: Assessing a Field's Progression](#)

March 2020



[How Philanthropy Can Support Systems-Change Leaders](#)

January 2021



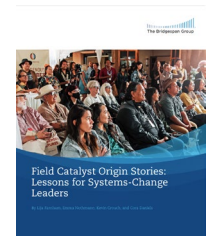
[Due-Diligence Guide to Support Systems-Change Leaders](#)

January 2021



[Funding Field Catalysts from Origins to Revolutionizing the World](#)

March 2023



[Field Catalyst Origin Stories: Lessons for Systems-Change Leaders](#)

March 2023



Overview of field building

Overview of field progression and characteristics

The unique and critical work of field catalysts

The approach of field building funders

Discussion

Field-building is one approach to equitable systems change, and field catalysts play critical roles leading the way to impact



Systems change



Is supported by
field building efforts



Often led by
field catalysts

- **Systems change** often requires a coordinated effort across many actors *and* the use of multiple levers (e.g., changing policies, shifting narratives) to address the root cause of social issues
- **A field** is a set of individuals and organizations working to address a common social issue or problem
- **Field building** is the activities and investments* that unlock a field's progress towards systems change¹
- **Field catalysts** are organizations that lead field-building work, **organizing field actors** and **coordinating various levers of impact** to strengthen the field's work such that the "whole is greater than the sum of parts"

Field building: Working definitions



FIELD

A set of individuals and organizations working to address a **common social issue or problem**, often building and using a common **knowledge base**



FIELD BUILDING

The **activities or investments** that **unlock** a field's progress towards **equitable systems change and impact at scale**

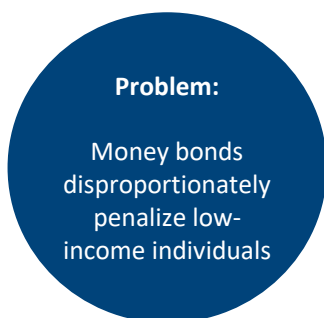
Field building: Two common field archetypes

PROBLEM-BASED FIELDS

Problem-based fields often drive toward **outwardly visible** and **measurable outcomes and solutions**, and can be a valuable unit of change when pursuing impact at scale

Illustrative examples

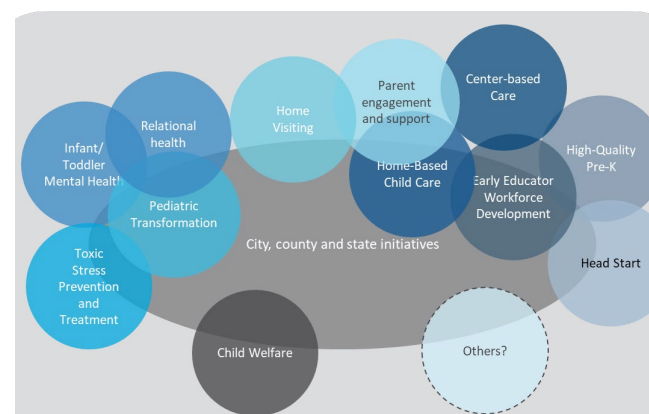
Bail Reform Field



ISSUE-BASED FIELDS

Issue-based fields frequently **operate beneath the surface** but are powerful undercurrents enabling problem-based fields to **overcome shared barriers, unlock resources, and draw powerful connections across fields**

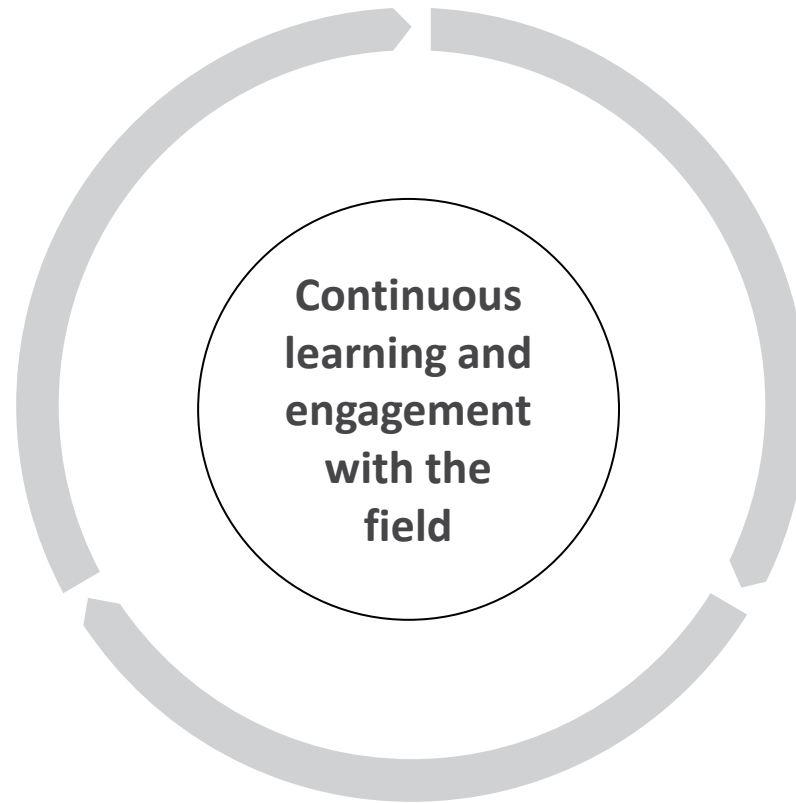
Early Childhood Field



Field building: Defining the field, assessing it, and aligning on an agenda are all interconnected components of field building

Defining the field

- What is the problem we seek to solve?
- What is our vision for what it looks like to solve it?



Diagnosing and assessing the field

- What is the state of the field today?
 - Knowledge base
 - Actors
 - Infrastructure
 - Agenda
 - Resources
 - Public sector systems
- What progress has been achieved?

Field-level agenda

- What are the shared priorities we will pursue to build the field and make progress toward our goal?

Field building: Defining the field involves various choices and considerations

Problem scope

More narrow problem statements are more concrete (including a clear measure of success), may require fewer actors to align; can be exclusive and miss broader opportunities/needs

Timeline

For some fields, the impact aspiration requires multi-generational work; for others, the population-level goal is visible within a shorter timeframe, and for still others, it may take years for field actors to even self-identify as working on a shared problem

Geography or altitude of the system

Many fields require change across multiple geographic areas and/or altitudes of the system; broadening necessitates including new sets of actors, figuring out the right balance to start with and how to grow/evolve over time is critical

Present/Future

Field actors need to navigate the current actors and systems as they are today while simultaneously imagining the “future possible”, which may necessitate different field definition and bounding (and actors)

“Moments of ripeness”

New research, policy changes, or other events can create unique opportunities for subsets of actors to make progress around specific problem statements



Overview of field building

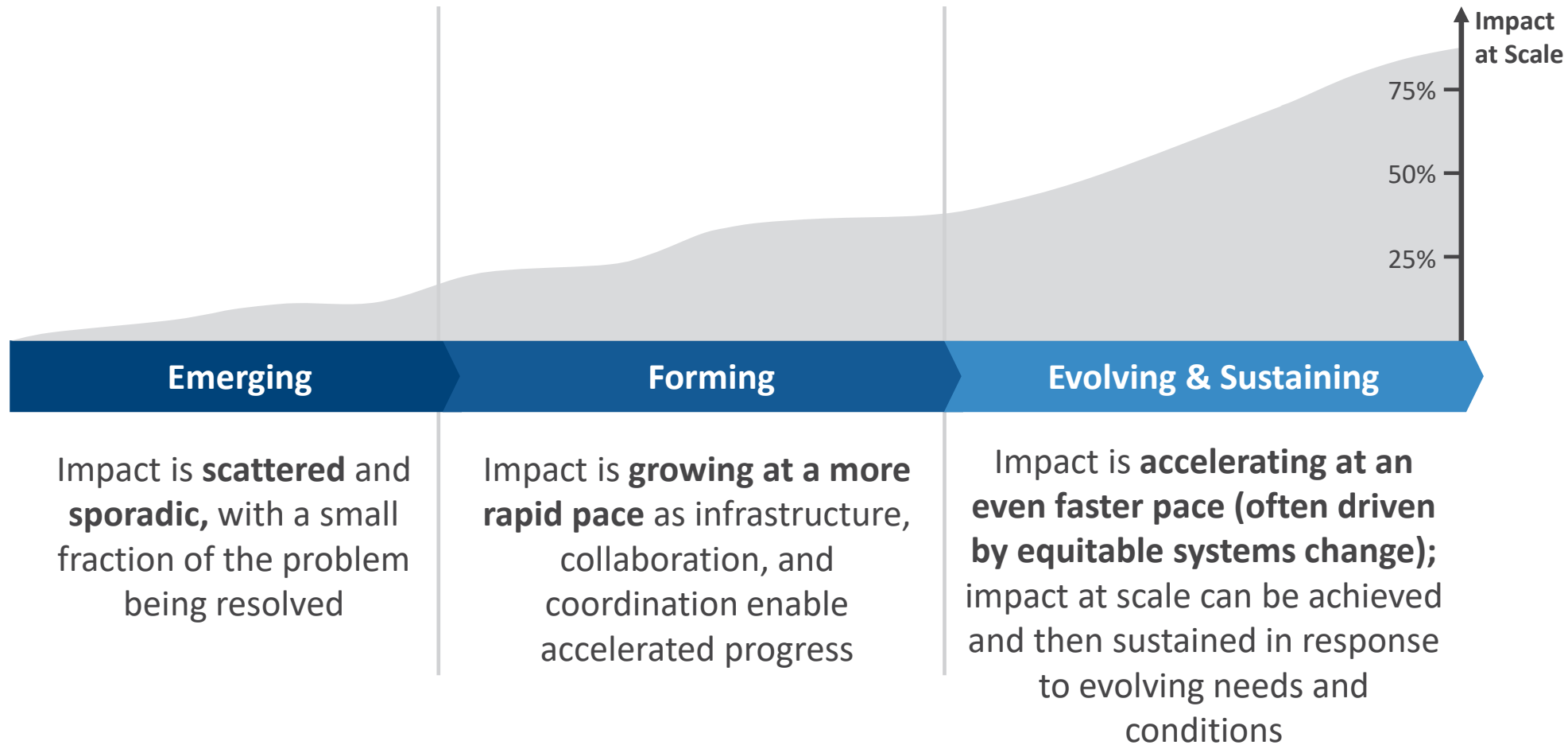
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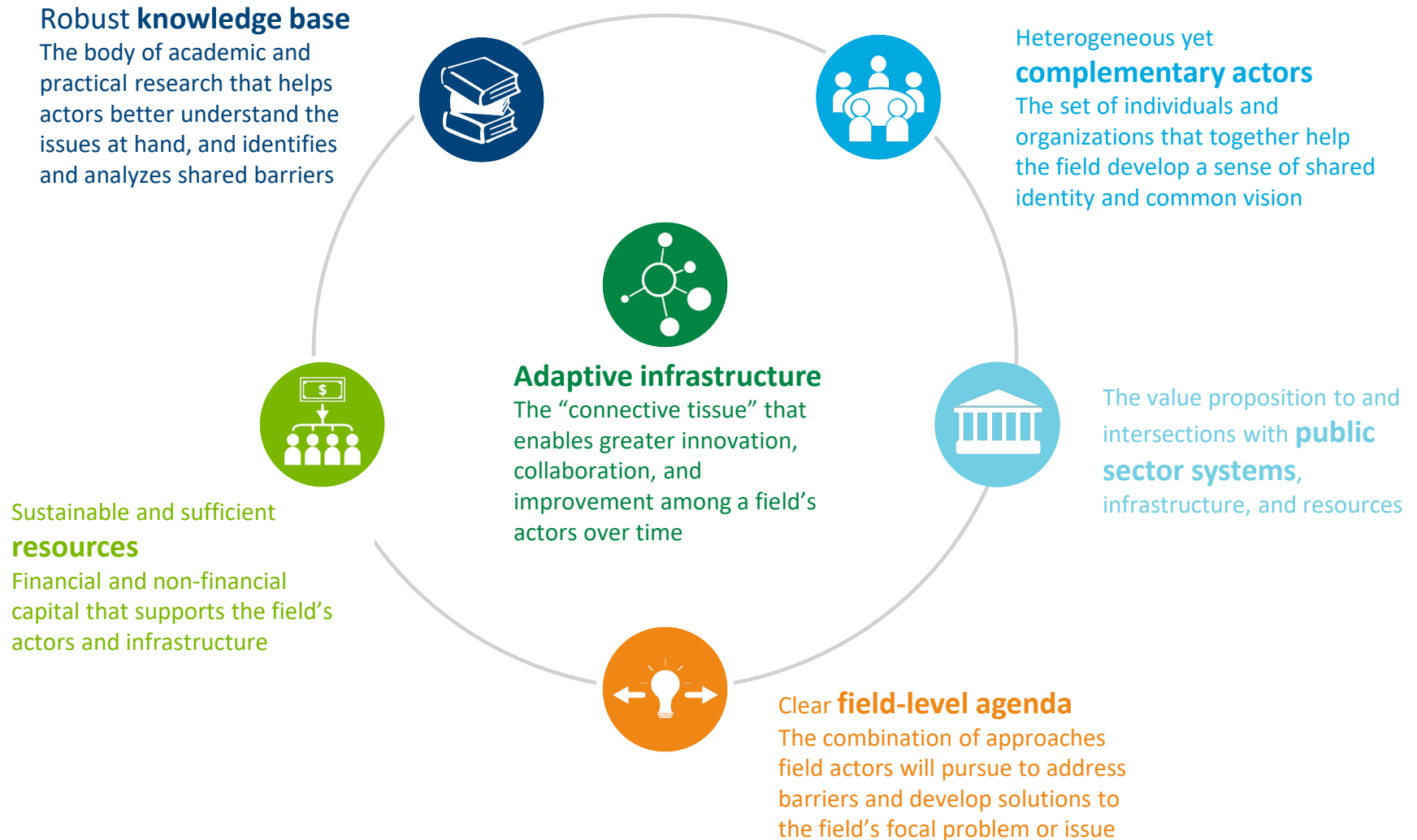
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Field progression: Common field progression towards equitable impact at scale



Source: [Field Building for Population-level Change](#) (The Bridgespan Group, March 2020).

Field progression: The six observable characteristics that together unlock a field's progress towards impact



Field progression: Example of the malaria eradication field



Emerging (1980s-2005)

Malaria deaths rose 3x through the 1980s and 1990s, peaking in 2004 at ~1m people (global malaria incidence rate of 70 per 1000 ppl at risk); RBM was founded in 1998 to galvanize a response, but its impact was not immediately felt as it focused on behind the scenes coordination, research, and advocacy

Forming (2005-2015)

Increased public awareness, global coordination, and nearly \$2 billion in new funding contributed to worldwide deaths from malaria dropping to ~400,000 people in 2015 and a global incidence rate of 59 per 1000 ppl at risk

Evolving & Sustaining (2015-Present)

Shifts and disruptions in public health infrastructure and services due to COVID and other events have created new challenges for the ecosystem to address (incidence rate rose 5%, deaths rose 12%); however, the partnership and dynamic response of the ecosystem prevented dramatically worse outcomes



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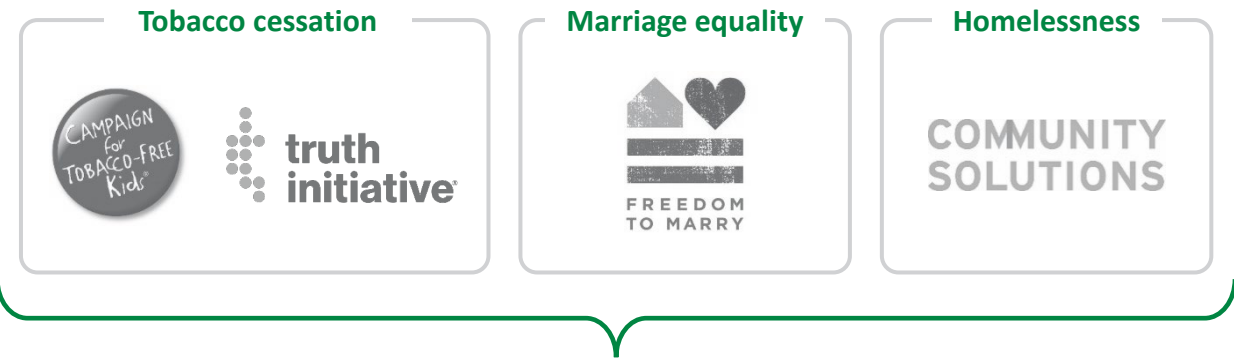
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Discussion

Field Catalysts are critical to population-level outcomes in our sector

Historical examples of population-level change reveal a set of (often) unseen intermediaries critical to the work



These organizations **amplify and harmonize** the work of the field's actors to achieve equitable systems change

Field catalysts have been crucial to population-level outcomes such as



Decline in teen smoking rates from 37% in 1995 to 8% in 2018



The U.S. Supreme Court ruling in **favor of marriage equality nationwide**



Driven overall **homelessness down to "functional zero"** in 14 U.S. communities

Field catalysts mobilize and galvanize ecosystem actors toward a shared goal of durable population-level change

Core field catalyst roles:

Diagnosing and assessing the field

Connecting actors around a shared goal

Advocating or shining a spotlight on the issue



Filling critical gaps

Adaptive levers to fill critical gaps:

Direct Service

Providing direct services as a complement to field building efforts, leveraging on the ground engagement with proximate communities and practitioners to bolster field and systems change capabilities
(E.g., Solutions Journalism Network, Transcend Education)

Regranting

Pooling funds and regranting by attracting resources into the field and deploying nimbly and equitably based on field needs, redistributing power from philanthropy and modeling new grantmaking approaches
(E.g., Liberation Ventures, Mosaic Momentum)

Advocacy via direct political engagement

Directly influencing policymakers and government officials by deploying advocacy capabilities such as policy and regulation advocacy and development, grassroots organizing, narrative change, etc. (501c4)
(E.g., Let's Grow Kids)

Field catalysts bring four distinctive assets to their roles



DEEP
UNDERSTANDING OF
THE PROBLEM AND
ECOSYSTEM



VISION FOR
EQUITABLE AND
DURABLE
POPULATION-LEVEL
CHANGE



AN
ORGANIZER'S
MINDSET



TRUSTING
RELATIONSHIPS AND
CREDIBILITY WITH
THE ACTORS
REQUIRED TO
ACHIEVE CHANGE



Field catalysts frequently develop these assets through their lived and professional experience working proximate to the problem, working alongside other field actors, and using a systems lens to identify, understand, and address the root causes of the inequities they seek to address

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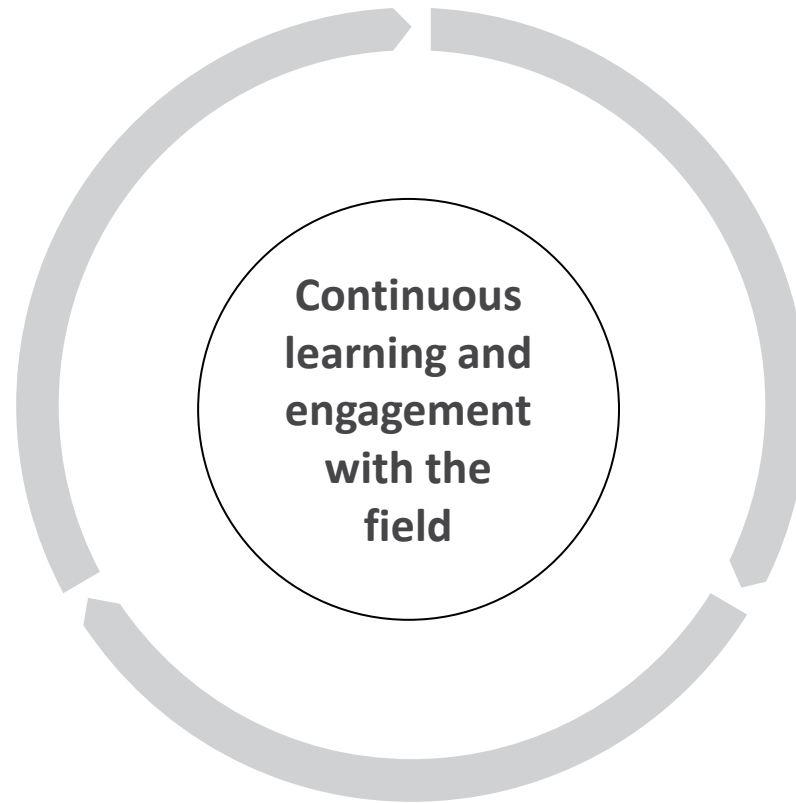
Field building funders also have critical roles to play

- Diagnose and assess the **current state of the field(s)**
- Conduct a **power analysis** to determine where and how to:
 - **Build** the power of actors who have been historically marginalized and underinvested in
 - **Share** power with field actors to co-create a path forward that trusts and makes use of the collective's breadth of knowledge, expertise, and perspectives
 - **Wield** institutional power (e.g., capital, voice, influence)
- As part of wielding funder power, **align grantmaking** to the needs and opportunities surfaced in the field assessment; for example:
 - Fund field catalysts, if they exist, as a front row seat to learning about the field's progress and needs and to support them in harmonizing the work of the field as a whole and amplifying its impact
 - Invest in activities and enablers that help fields build relationships, deepen trust, start to coalesce around a field-level agenda
 - Fund activities that are providing critical learning about what works, data and measurement of progress, narrative change work to build public will, etc.
- **Shift measurement, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approaches** to encompass the complexity and nonlinearity of systems change

Diagnosing and assessing the field is a critical starting point for field building funders

Defining the field

- What is the problem we seek to solve?
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Field-level agenda

- What are the shared priorities we will pursue to build the field and make progress toward our goal?

Diagnosing and assessing the field

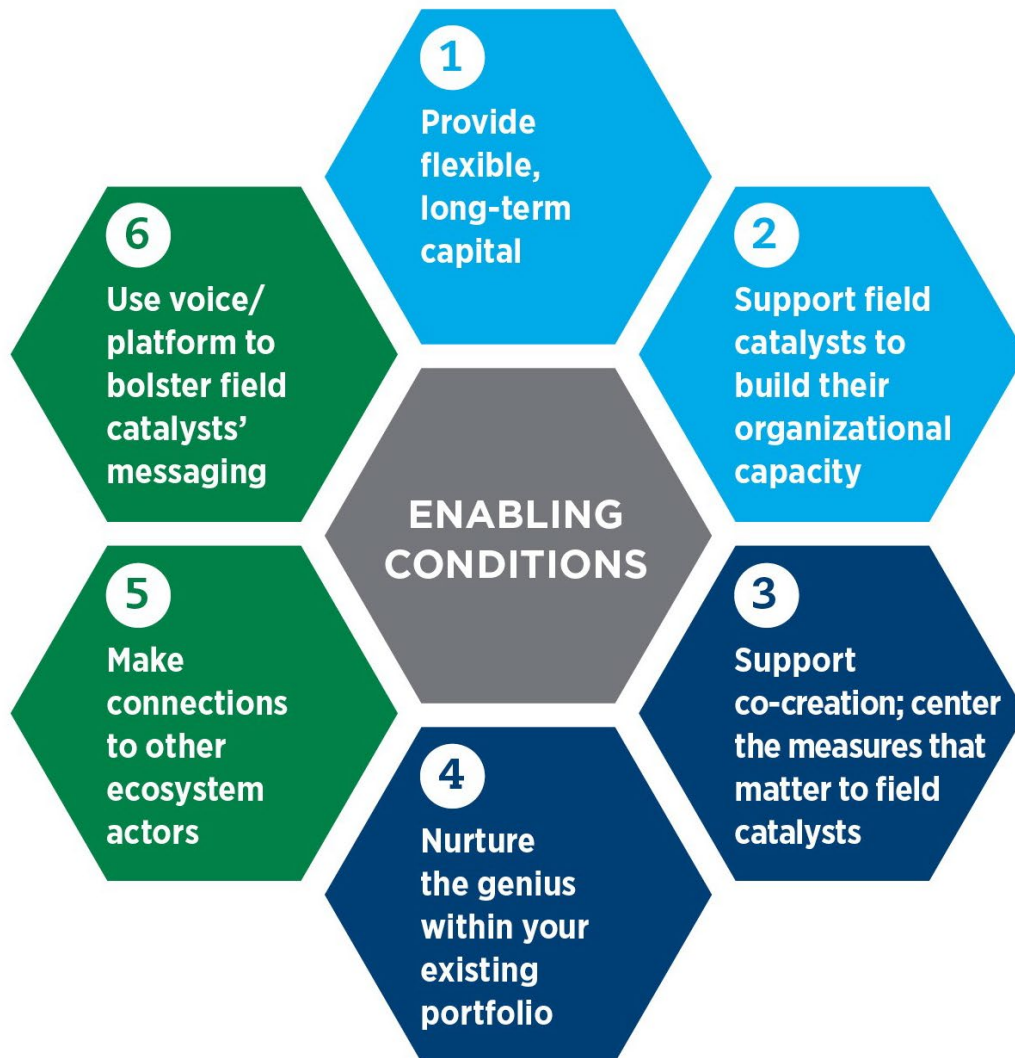
- What is the state of the field today?
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 - Public systems
- What progress has been achieved?

Note: it is important that this diagnosis and assessment is undertaken in ways that interrupt entrenched and historical power dynamics, build relationships and trust, and set the foundation for collaboration going forward

Field building funders can build, wield, and share power to create the enabling conditions for field catalysts to thrive

Enabling Conditions for Field Catalysts to Thrive

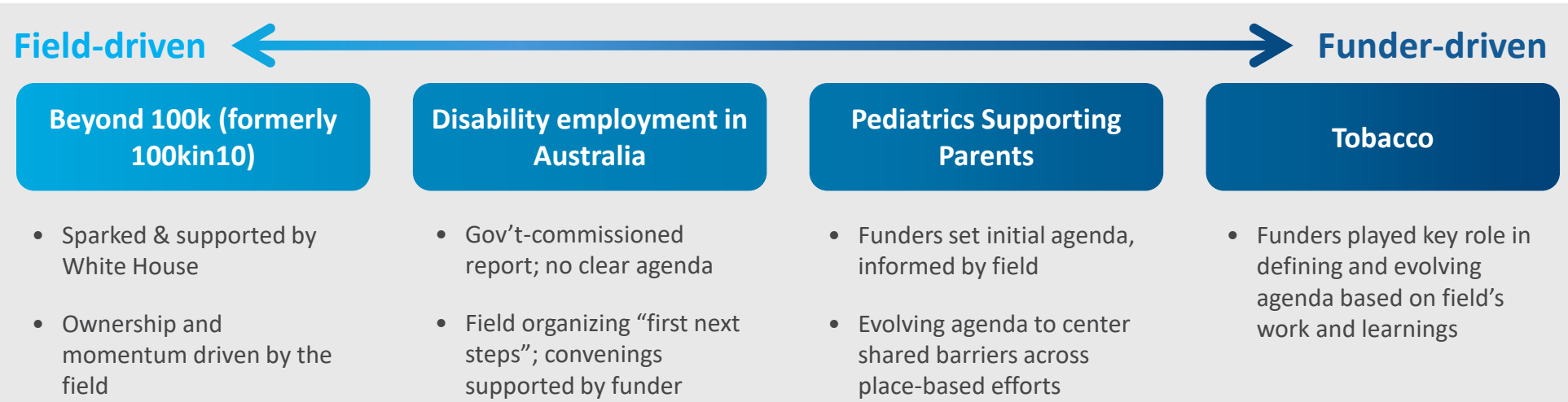
Conditions to thrive fall into three categories: building power, sharing power, and wielding power



These areas are not mutually exclusive; they are complementary and mutually reinforcing

- Building power
- Sharing power
- Wielding power

There are different approaches that **field building funders** can take to supporting field actors develop a field-level agenda



Key enablers



Convenings that bring various groups together to identify field-level needs/barriers, connect across siloes



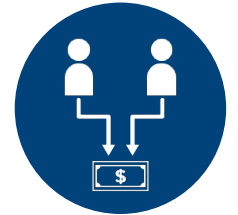
Incentives to collaborate and learn together



Research/new knowledge that helps clarify the problems and opportunities; sometimes elevates a **common goal/measure**



Sociopolitical context, e.g., policy or administrative shift, public will



Funder **collaborative bringing new resources** to the field

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Questions for discussion

- What does a field building approach mean to you?
- What could a first step/next step look like for you?
- What feels harder to address?