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Evolution not Revolution:

Strategy, Learning, and Evaluation in The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities Initiative

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September 2023

This teaching case was sponsored by:

The California Endowment

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Sectoral Sea Change

Many philanthropic actors are currently seeking to deepen their commitments to supporting the aspirations of communities that are on the front lines of inequitable social outcomes and often left out of decision-making related to their communities' needs. In a recent article in *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (SSIR), Dr. Hanh Cao Yu, the former Chief Learning Officer of The California Endowment, surmised that the philanthropic sector is undergoing "a sea change" as many in the field transition to more systemic approaches and longer time horizons to address seemingly intractable social challenges. Moreover, Dr. Yu argued that this shift within philanthropy emerged, in part, due to a paradigm shift in our country which continues to uncover national and global histories of racism and other forms of oppression, highlighting the legacies of these histories on our current challenges of rising inequality, extremism, and persistent patterns of disenfranchisement.

This teaching case focuses on how learning and evaluation can guide those in philanthropy seeking to rise to the demands of more inclusive approaches to social change, especially with communities that have been historically marginalized. The case centers on the work of The California Endowment (TCE), whose mission is to expand "access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians." TCE is a health conversion foundation created in 1996 when Blue Cross of California converted to a for-profit corporation. Today, with more than $3 billion in assets, TCE is the largest private health foundation in the state.

In 2010, TCE established the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative, investing $1.78 billion over 10 years with an aim of advancing policy, systems, and narrative change and transforming 14 California communities devastated by health inequities into places where all people and neighborhoods thrive. Building on TCE's and other foundations' lessons, BHC focused on addressing upstream approaches—prevention and the social determinants of health, or the nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes—through the process of community change. By its end, BHC had supported the efforts of 743 grantees.

During BHC, TCE attempted to move away from a foundation-centered approach for advancing health equity and to pivot toward community-driven[1] efforts to build "people power," whereby people who are most impacted by policies and systems have the power to define and secure the changes they want for themselves and their communities.

As the case documents, BHC required a critical mix of responsive, collaborative, and community-driven leadership, technical skills, and an expansive base of learning and knowledge to feed into the practice of long-term and transformational systems change. TCE's Learning and Evaluation (L&E) function aimed to support an evolving BHC strategy while deepening TCE's commitment to working alongside communities.

Near the initiative's midway point, Dr. Hanh Cao Yu was hired as TCE's Chief Learning Officer. This case identifies the approaches employed by Dr. Yu and her team to lead the foundation's L&E efforts, challenging TCE to deepen its expressed commitments to shift power and to truly center community voice.

Learning and Evaluation During TCE's Early Years

TCE began to staff an L&E function as early as 2001. Several leaders contributed to the foundation's L&E approach in the years leading up to and during BHC. Dr. Astrid Hendricks served as Director of Evaluation from 2001 to 2010.

Astrid joined TCE after working as an evaluation officer for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF). After earning her Ph.D. in policy planning and evaluation from the University of Pittsburgh, she was recruited as part of a collaborative effort between universities and foundations to diversify the foundation space, increasing the number of people of color and women. She was recruited by WKKF specifically for the foundation's interest in developing a cadre of evaluators who would lend their expertise to philanthropy. Astrid recalls those early days when it was difficult for evaluators to gain internal buy-in, and budget allocation was small compared to what she felt evaluation could accomplish. "In a foundation, program officers are recognized as the leaders, and in the evaluation unit we have to advocate for our work."

She saw her role as connecting with leadership and program officers to help build trust in the evaluative function as a needed component for the foundation to assess the success of its strategies. Astrid also brought an interest in culturally competent forms of evaluation, which included expanding the pool of diverse evaluators rather than continually returning to the same firms or partners over and over again.

[1] Community in this case's context speaks to historically marginalized communities. These communities are varied and can include: "vulnerable populations, oppressed populations, underrepresented populations, or undercounted populations in community indicator projects and peer-to-peer research. These populations might include people of different races/ethnicities (as compared to the majority population in that region), low-income individuals, the homeless, youth, seniors, native people, GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender), families that have experienced domestic violence and child maltreatment, and people with disabilities in applied quality of life research, specifically in community indicator projects and peer-to-peer research." Source: Brutschy, S., Zachary, D. (2014). Marginalized communities. In: Michalos, A.C. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_1725

"We wanted to make sure we could consider other people with different perspectives and ways of thinking."

When she became Director of Evaluation at TCE, Astrid met an organization in flux with leadership transitions. Dr. Robert K. (Bob) Ross had recently begun his tenure as President and CEO. Astrid aimed to implement some of the methods she used at WKKF into her role at TCE. "We wanted to create a database to improve access to more evaluation talent across the state…it was the same situation at [TCE] as it was at [WKKF]." Despite this, the Evaluation Department didn't manage its own budget for projects meant to be cross-cutting to the foundation's mission, nor did it oversee the resources allocated for any funded evaluation initiatives. The Department's role required staff to support relevant projects on an as-needed basis based on TCE's broad funding areas and its regional offices. "We just worked with a regional office to build an evaluation portfolio around their regional work. Or if there was an initiative, we would try to support it in the big thematic areas like Health Access or Disparities."

Programs, strategy, and evaluation needed more integration, as evaluation was often treated as an afterthought. In preparation for a new way of working guided by an emerging strategic planning process, Astrid sought to bring some clarity to evaluation. When Astrid joined the foundation, TCE's focus and terminology emphasized multicultural approaches to health. Astrid aimed to acknowledge that evaluation should also incorporate methodological approaches that were culturally appropriate and more reflective of the communities the foundation supported. "We created [evaluation] guides that identified ways that grantees and funders could work together better, and we identified and disseminated methods for utilizing storytelling, and identified ways where the foundation could be more supportive of grantees."

At the same time, Astrid introduced and expanded her work on culturally-competent evaluation. "How do you approach evaluation when dealing with various communities? What non-traditional methods will you use to gather data consistent with a community's culture? If the program is well run, then evaluation fits in as a tool that helps the program be successful because it allows you to sort or gather data while also allowing the people whom the data serves to support and guide the development of the methodology."

Together with the Director of Public Policy, Astrid also co-led efforts to support evaluation of the foundation's policy work. At the time, she recalls, "Policy was very critical for strategy. TCE sought to understand 'How do we evaluate policy work in a way that is not burdensome to grantees and set some realistic expectations about what you're going to track?'"

Evaluation work was slow to gain traction, especially in the context of the foundation trying to make sense of, and build coherence around, their local, statewide, and policy work. During these early days, evaluation leadership and staff had different degrees of buy-in to evaluation work and were bringing various perspectives on how to develop a comprehensive evaluation system.

Astrid worked through these challenges by hiring two senior team members—Mona Jhawar and Lori Nascimento—who brought evaluative experience but were new to philanthropy. She also engaged the

organization in developing a strategy for evaluation. “We were developing a framework that would look at the big picture, as well as assessing how you look at outcomes at the neighborhood or regional levels.” However, there were challenges for the foundation to accept what Astrid thought was an appropriate budget for evaluation. “We had done much good evaluation work with cultural competency and policy advocacy evaluation. We had some really good partners to help us with this. However, we didn't have enough people on the board who were excited about evaluation and wanted to make the investment.”

Astrid also identified that as the foundation refined its strategy, there needed to be more of a connection between their strategic goals and the foundation's role in achieving those goals. “The metrics were huge and unattainable, we needed to be more grounded in a theory of change.” Astrid had previously introduced the idea of incorporating theories of change and logic modeling into the foundation's strategic process at multiple levels. “We needed to figure out systematic ways of capturing data and agree on what we were targeting at the end.”

Buy-in with theories of change and logic modeling proved challenging at times, but Astrid and her team focused on meeting those challenges. “You would have a project that might benefit from a logic model exercise. …. It was helpful for thinking, having a conversation, and articulating what you think you do, what you're coming in with, and where you want to go. The development of the foundation's theory of change was beneficial because it supported the idea of thinking through ‘if’ and ‘then’ statements.”

Even though there were some gains, she felt the work needed to gain more traction internally and externally. Astrid sensed that logic modeling helped with people who had some evaluation experience. Internally, she adds, “I wanted to build a learning community, and the key ingredients for this to occur require a strong culture, structure, and practices and buy-in from leadership. We were trying to build the culture and enhance the structure, but we were not quite there.”

Astrid participated in the planning work for BHC but left in 2010, right before the initiative began. “I’m so proud of our policy and advocacy work. We came up with many new methods that supported the field of evaluation, and we enhanced the field's thinking about culturally appropriate evaluation. As a result of my work at TCE, I participated in the American Evaluation Association's culturally competent evaluation standards, which I think are still there for the association. It was just hard to develop a learning approach for the foundation. I think it was episodic. It wasn’t foundation-wide, and we did not have the support that we needed to make it stick, which I think ultimately led to us not being able to convince folks that the strategy needed measurement to understand the impact of our investments.”

A New Chief Learning Officer Role is Created

After Astrid’s departure, Jim Keddy served as TCE’s Vice President (VP) and Chief Learning Officer (CLO) from 2011 to 2015. Jim began his tenure at TCE in 2009 and first worked as the BHC lead for Northern California.

With over 20 years experience as a community organizer for PICO California, the largest faith-based community organizing network in California, Jim received his first grant from TCE to expand his local organizing work in 1998. Due to his leadership in leading organizing campaigns on health policy, Jim was nominated to join the board in 2005. At that time, Jim was unique in that he came from the community organizing field and brought his many years of experience to bear on TCE's interest in expanding their focus on policy and systems change work. Astrid's departure as Director of Evaluation in 2010 left a one-year gap, right as BHC was launching. President and CEO Dr. Ross selected Jim to serve as VP and CLO to fill the gap and expand how TCE approached L&E by extending the foundation's focus on learning.

When BHC began, Dr. Ross believed that TCE's approach to strategy and evaluation needed to be fully compatible with BHC's mission and goals, especially as BHC sought to meet communities' strengths and needs. Jim saw this new role as an opportunity to combine his interests and experience in organizing, training, and organizational development. "I was always intrigued in understanding, what's the underlying mental model in an organization? And how does that change? How do you create shared understanding with a group of people so that you can act together? So even though I had very little formal evaluation training, I said yes."

As VP and CLO, Jim reported to Dr. Ross. He was charged with supporting BHC by developing a plan for learning across departments and to deepen the foundation's recognition of community-based needs. "Bob wanted me to place a primary emphasis on increasing the organization's ability to learn and adapt in real time. And while evaluation is part of that, it involves a lot of other kinds of activities and a different orientation. Learning requires people getting together to learn from each other or identifying what they want to understand, and then trying to apply it."

Right before BHC began in 2010, the foundation restructured its divisions, creating two new departments—Healthy Communities and Healthy California. Each department maintained separate leadership, staff, and budgets. While Healthy Communities was established to make significant investments in 14 California communities, Healthy California was designed to address statewide policy advocacy and communications. Healthy Communities needed to have close and direct relationships with each of the BHC communities, and its staffing consisted of a Senior Vice President, two regional Directors (Northern and Southern California), 14 Program Managers who were embedded in the BHC communities, and 6 to 8 Program Associates. L&E was charged with supporting both departments.

After engaging in year-long planning processes, each of the 14 BHC communities created or selected a "hub" that would serve as a place where stakeholders could come together to coordinate their BHC activities and answer to each other. The role, purpose, and functioning of each hub was left largely up to the community, and BHC sites had different fiscal, organizational, and governance configurations (e.g., steering committees, work groups). Some BHC sites had a great deal of organizing infrastructure already in place when BHC began, and their challenge became where and how to situate BHC efforts as complementary and additive. Other sites used BHC as an opportunity to build new organizing infrastructure.

Amid this ongoing organizational development and restructuring, Jim focused L&E on bridging a few key areas of TCE's work. First, he ensured that the evaluation process would be locally driven. "We were all pretty clear from the beginning that one size doesn't fit all, and I made the decision to give sites a lot more flexibility and have it be more driven by the local community." In the early years, empowering local sites gave them the opportunity to define their own strategy and learning agendas, which was a "tension point" for the foundation. "There was the TCE framework versus the work being driven by the local community. In the early years, it was probably more of a traditional foundation initiative where you have a framework and a grantee would have to fit in it. And the better you fit in it, the more the foundation is happier with you. Then over time we realized that it was important to shift in recognizing that these local communities come up with good ideas and we needed to trust them and make the framework more flexible."

Jim also observed that another point of tension existed between the state level and policy work housed in Healthy California and the place-based work that operated out of Healthy Communities. The key question at that time was, "How do we do evaluation on state policy and do it on the local sites at the same time and have it all add up to something?" These tensions also arose due to concerns about how resources would be best deployed among the divisions.

To address these challenges, Jim took on a few strategic activities. Jim's team, which included Senior L&E managers Mona and Lori, commissioned several external research and evaluation projects. For example, Dr. Veronica Terriquez, then a professor at the University of Southern California, was commissioned to conduct a longitudinal study on how youth organizing impacts policy and systems change. This work allowed L&E to engage the foundation in recognizing how youth engagement was vital for community level change because as Jim notes, "Young people have to be part of defining what the change should look like and because they have a different point of view on what's going on in any community." The Equity Research Institute (formerly the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity) at the University of Southern California (USC) engaged in deep research on the role of power and healthy communities. In addition, his team contracted with the Center for Evaluation Innovation (CEI) to track progress over time on policy and systems changes in the sites and at the state level.

To begin to build more internal TCE learning infrastructure, Jim initiated strategic learning and implementation meetings (SLIMs) with program staff in an effort to bring the foundation's divisions together. SLIMs were designed to help foundation staff identify their individual and collective leadership capacities and to create synergy around the mission. Jim adds that SLIM meetings allowed L&E to "establish a rationale for continuing to bring staff together to do the difficult work of figuring out how to create synergy inside the foundation, and for increased coherence."

Early Issues Around BHC Coherence and Complexity

In 2013, three years into BHC, L&E commissioned FSG to help the foundation conduct a strategic review on what had been learned so far about BHC's theory of change and "the impact of building resident

power and collaboration on driving policy and systems change."[2] The process aimed to "capture what was happening and how the strategy [was] evolving."[3] The review indicated that local community trust was building based on the relationships between program managers and community residents, leaders, and organizations. The review also identified that it was valuable for TCE to remain committed for the long haul in working with each community due to the diverse range of issues and capacities of each site. Community organizing was also identified as an essential ingredient for power building for local community members. Finally, the initiative benefitted from a stronger relationship between its local and statewide work, especially when local and state staff and grantees found opportunities to work together and achieve gains on specific policy issues, such as their collaborative advocacy work on school discipline to address unnecessary and unfair suspensions and expulsions.

Developing those connections between Healthy Communities and Healthy California would also help to increase the connections between grassroots organizing and policy and systems change work. Jim notes, "In the community organizing field, there is a tendency to react to what's blowing up in front of you, versus thinking about investing in a 10- or 15-year campaign or identifying any root cause of what's happening around us. Most work on root causes takes a long time to address and requires a more sophisticated orientation to do long-term organizing on root causes versus organizing that can be reactive. Healthy California was funding the more traditional policy organizations, and Healthy Communities was funding grassroots local groups. They're more powerful together than they are apart."

L&E had achieved some wins, but there were still important issues to address. For one, while SLIMs were helpful, staff still felt disconnected, making "informal knowledge sharing and relationship building a challenge."[4] Also, while TCE's board members supported BHC's work, they had challenges identifying TCE's overall strategy and commitment to learning from community voices. Jim assesses this difficulty, "Most of the board got it. Some board members were pounding the table, asking, 'What are we getting for our money?' and wanting to see population-level change. So we were making the case that over time, we're going to see population-level change. However, it won't happen immediately because we're taking a longer-term policy and systems change approach." Three years into the initiative, community members at local sites still felt that the foundation needed to engage them more and to challenge its top-down accountability approach.

Jim surmises that recognizing and working with complexity was the most critical challenge for the foundation at the time. "At TCE, we're looking at local change in a local context along with a higher level of policy and politics in California. I wanted to support the idea of working with complexity. That's what we were dealing with in our approach to community change, which is the right way to do it. In order to not make it feel chaotic, it's helpful to be able to name what you're dealing with. And for foundations who love linear change, I think the whole notion of complexity is critical because there's no linear change in any of this. Everything is two steps forward, and then you have backlash, and then you deal

[2] Mack, K., Preskill, H., Keddy, J., & Jhawar, M. K. (2014). Redefining expectations for place-based philanthropy. *The Foundation Review, 6*(4). https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1224

[3] Mack, Preskill, Keddy, & Jhawar, p.35.

[4] Mack, Preskill, Keddy, & Jhawar, p. 39.

with the backlash. Then, when you start again in a proactive mode, all that work you've done is still there. There's been a narrative change. Some policies are put in place. And so you're building on a foundation, and you are able to hang in there and have folks in the mix who have some institutional knowledge."[5]

A New CLO is Hired with a Focus on Applied and Community-Engaged Learning

Jim Keddy left TCE in 2015, returning to organizing and nonprofit work, and TCE needed someone to continue to lead L&E's ongoing work. During BHC's first five years, community members at various sites had expressed concerns that the foundation's approach to BHC strategy felt like an imposition because the foundation's narrow construction of health access ignored the broader implications of health inequities embedded in every aspect of their lives. The foundation needed to continuously ensure that local voices were driving the agenda. This meant developing and sustaining the infrastructure to truly gain critical insights from their input, as well as connecting the broader statewide and policy-level work to identify valuable points of redirection for their overall strategy and to assess impact.

Dr. Hanh Cao Yu was identified as a strong leader to achieve those goals and was hired in the summer of 2016 as Chief Learning Officer (CLO). She had previously served as the local evaluator in BHC's Richmond and East Oakland sites and brought experience in responsive and community-centered evaluation and research as a part of her professional trajectory. After serving as a multicultural fellow at the San Francisco Foundation, she spent two decades as an applied researcher and evaluator at Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), ending her tenure there as Vice President. The time spent at SPR was formative for Hanh. "They were so open to my research agenda, my commitments to intergroup relations around cultural competency, multicultural education, and studying what diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) means within the context of philanthropy. They gave me so much latitude and freedom to be an entrepreneur," she recalls.

The opportunity to conduct applied research after her doctoral studies had allowed Hanh to use evaluation as a tool. "I couldn't stand just doing research for the sake of contributing to the theory; I wanted to make it applied. And being an evaluator helped me to do that." Trained in critical research methodologies, Hanh's approach to evaluation values the importance of valuing program participants' lived experience in the areas of education and philanthropy.

"Everyone has lived experience. But I think about lived experience of marginalization, whether it's economically, socially, culturally, politically, lived experience from being 'othered,' lived experience from being treated as less than human." As a Vietnamese immigrant and refugee, Hanh understood firsthand some of the challenges faced by marginalized communities and connected that perspective to her work in applied research and evaluation.

[5] Jim cites the following as influential in this thinking: Auspos, P., Cabaj, M, & Roundtable for Community Change (2014). *Complexity and Community Change: Managing Adaptively to Improve Effectiveness*. The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change.

"What is the value of research in helping people?" is the guiding question Hanh has asked throughout her career. Her research and evaluation practice paid specific attention to the lived experiences of historically marginalized groups in recognition that this kind of engagement and learning is essential for achieving increased racial and social equity. Her interest in philanthropy led her to design evaluation assessments that drew on "what communities need, prioritizing what they think is important to move from that philanthropic model of charity to one where we build social capital and power in [disinvested] communities."

Hanh envisioned that she would work directly in philanthropy later on in her career but was recruited at a critical juncture. TCE's responsiveness to communities through BHC was a powerful signal to Hanh that she was entering a space that matched her professional calling for an expansive vision of evaluation guided by authentic and community-engaged learning. "I never would have imagined that TCE would become one of the nation's largest investors in community and youth organizing. But that's what they became because of the learning and willingness to pivot and shift when communities were saying 'what's not working for us.'" She also welcomed the chance to work with Dr. Ross. "Robert Ross is amazing. And I wanted to learn from a BIPOC leader like him what it takes to transform elite philanthropy in a principled, value-based, and dignified way. I think he does all those things. He conveyed to me that he was a learner and that he valued learning and evaluation. It was rare to experience this kind of boldness and long-term commitment to historically marginalized communities."

In addition to Hanh's commitment to supporting and underscoring the capacities and interests of underrepresented perspectives and experiences in her work, coming into elite philanthropy also required her to lead as a bridge builder. She was aware that bringing people together across diverse class, racial, and gender orientations was vital for challenging dominant systems that are oppressive for many groups.

"Well, maybe it's the gift of having been an immigrant and refugee in this country where I learned to border cross to relate to so many different people who have different backgrounds," she reflects. Her ethos also identified how relationship building across divides of privilege and disadvantage was critical for evaluation that prioritized the goals of inclusivity. "We can go deeper than what's on our resumes to ask why this work matters to us and what are our personal backgrounds and histories. For my work in research and with data I sit down and listen with what I call a third organ, which means that it's not just with my two ears but it's with the heart. It's the heart connection."

This kind of bridge building work also requires a deep awareness of issues of privilege and disadvantage across groups. Community building requires facilitating conversations and activities that may make some participants uncomfortable. Hanh's leadership recognizes the significance of helping others, especially those with immense privilege, "not to become complicit in a system of oppression. By succumbing to conformism we are, in effect, trying to buy comfort for ourselves."

Six Strategy and Evaluation Frameworks and Counting

When Hanh joined the foundation, TCE was in the midst of continuously revising the BHC strategy to try to ensure it was coherent and cohesive and that it responded to the specific needs and capacities of local communities, while also attending to the achievement of broader and longer-term outcomes.

During the years that BHC launched until Hanh joined, the foundation had developed a series of evolving frameworks to help guide BHC strategy and its measurement, where each framework built on and then replaced the previous one. Between 2010 and 2015, at least six guiding strategy and evaluation frameworks had been rolled out to the BHC sites (in chronological order) (see Appendix A for more detail):

1. *The 10 Health Outcomes* drew on the social determinants of health and posited that a combination of these outcomes would contribute to achieving long-term success.
2. *The Four Big Results* represented a more concise way to describe the initiative's intended long-term success.
3. *The Three Campaigns* were a way to consolidate and more clearly describe the work that was happening in BHC communities.
4. *The Drivers of Change* offered four areas of capacity building deemed as essential ways of transforming communities. The Campaigns represented *what* BHC focused on, or the content of the work, and the Drivers represented *how* change would occur.
5. *The Transformative 12* identified a comprehensive set of local policy and system changes that the 14 communities were aiming to achieve.
6. *The 2020 goals* provided an overall picture of BHC progress based on select cross cutting priorities. This framework was designed to help the foundation transition from BHC to the next iteration of its grantmaking, referred to as "Beyond 2020."

In her new role as CLO and as part of the foundation's leadership team with regular access to the TCE board, Hanh sought not to start over from scratch but to capitalize on the strengths of the approaches taken by her predecessors while refining them to match her vision, which she believed should emerge inductively from local participants' feedback. "I still think of the learning and evaluation work as supporting not necessarily revolution but evolution."

This evolution of L&E activities allowed Hanh to draw on the work and wisdom of her predecessors. For example, when Astrid Hendricks was Director of Evaluation, the foundation was using the 10 Health Outcomes framework. Astrid recommended using logic modeling with the 10 outcomes to establish a sense of coherence among all the BHC sites. However, all the community sites did not respond positively to the logic model, citing the tool's lack of flexibility to meet the challenges that specific local communities face. While this approach was abandoned within some sites and kept for others, Hanh recognized that this form of evaluation had refined the foundation's attention to establishing clear hypotheses.

During Jim Keddy's tenure, TCE had moved to the Drivers of Change framework. He encouraged participatory and site-focused strategic learning around the drivers, through, for example, case study work. Case studies allowed local sites to document the unique factors that shaped the daily experiences of community members, described their capacities for leadership, and the structural challenges that created inequitable conditions. Case studies were also used to identify, track, and describe local policy gains. Hanh appreciated this approach, which she had frequently used as an evaluation tool in her previous work.

When Hanh began her tenure in 2016, the foundation had just decided to shift to a new strategy and evaluation framework called the North Star Goals and Indicators (NSGIs) (see Appendix B). Hanh joined TCE with the expectation that she would take the lead on their development, which included facilitating an iterative and intensive series of conversations with grantees, program staff, the executive team, board, and outside consultants. The NSGIs were developed after careful analysis of the primary areas of work underway across BHC communities and statewide, and they were an attempt to synthesize and streamline the frameworks and indicators that had been used previously.

Most significantly, the NSGIs were guided by TCE's vision that health equity is achieved by advancing "health and justice for all." In this sense, they clarified BHC's stance that health equity is achieved by building people power. The NSGIs positioned power-building as the central focus of BHC. While the foundation had long considered people power to be an important driver of the work to achieve policy and systems change wins, during BHC, the ultimate goal that TCE and its partners sought to achieve became building community power as both the means and the end for achieving health equity. In November 2016, TCE's Board approved the NSGIs as the leading framework to measure the progress of BHC. This framework endured through the initiative's end date in 2020.

According to Hanh, the NSGIs helped the foundation to more clearly articulate its BHC evaluation framework. It facilitated the development of critical questions like, "Did the investment in power building actually lead to our grantees' increased power? Did increased power support systems and policy change? And did increased power and policy change lead to long-term health status improvements in communities?" NSGIs were critical for "putting the building blocks together."

Sandy Chiang, a program manager who worked with the Santa Ana BHC site, and the Long Beach site before that, concurs that the NSGIs provided increased clarity for TCE to accurately assess its investments and how these investments supported community-driven goals and outcomes. The initial BHC logic model aimed to give BHC coherence, and the Drivers of Change identified a broadened set of mechanisms for achieving health equity. The foundation's strategic evolution to the NSGIs allowed the foundation to assess not only the breadth of BHC and community concerns, but also identify community-driven tangible pathways, processes, and outcomes for achieving those goals.

Mapping out L&E's Evolution

For Hanh, the ability to effectively support learning and evaluation is constrained when it has limited resources available at its disposal, maintains an unreasonable urgency to "be done yesterday," and fails

to account for power differences. Additionally, narrowly defined, evaluation's hyper-focus on metrics and measurement limits what she believes leads to robust evaluation, which should seek to build a "shared agenda of learning together." The NSGIs helped Hanh to apply a new approach. The NSGIs identified a broadened conception of health and wellness and matched her interest in expanding evaluative work to align with a more equitable approach, and to redefine notions of rigor, ability, and accountability.

Hanh's vision was to de-silo the L&E department and to recalibrate learning and evaluative work so that it was more integrated with the foundation's other departments and functions. These strong visions for a new learning and evaluation approach had to confront the realities of a department that needed more resources and to deploy them differently.

Early on, she recognized that while TCE had made steady commitments to L&E work, several challenges still needed to be addressed. First, while there was a rich amount of evaluative activities and a range of learning opportunities for the board, leadership, and staff, the foundation needed to have well-established strategic priorities for the foundation's learning agenda. With over 50 learning and evaluation contractors, dozens of case studies, substantial data collection across the BHC sites, statewide data collection, secondary data analysis, and population data collection, there were still limited insights into the significance of each of these activities and what they meant for BHC's strategy. In addition, they did not identify how BHC was making an impact. Hanh wanted to identify how TCE's investments impacted long-term systems change, especially narrative change and power building. She also wanted to integrate it more fully into the BHC work on the ground.

With these goals in mind, Hanh had multiple priorities to manage. Among them, she wanted to:

- Continue to bring a community-centered approach to learning and evaluation, where people within their specific contexts took center stage in the planning and development of evaluative measures and approaches. This would include building stronger relationships with each of the BHC site's leaders. Hanh knew from her experience working previously as a local evaluator at BHC's Richmond site, that working closely with these leaders would help the L&E department to obtain reporting on the sites' progress toward outcomes in a way that felt more authentic and less top-down.
- Help the foundation to expand their deep learning and adaptation based on insights emerging within and across BHC's 14 communities and from its statewide work.
- Create a universal standard for coding the work that was happening, which required a systematic review of the 15,000 grants already made as a part of the initiative.
- Identify investments that were duplicative and needed refinement and reprioritization.
- Engage in evaluative work that explored the causal pathways and hypotheses embedded in BHC and its NSGIs.

A New Director of Learning and Evaluation Arrives

In addition to seeking external partners and consultants to support her team in meeting these priorities, about a year after her arrival, Hanh added to her leadership team, creating a new Director of Learning and Evaluation role. Dr. Janine Saunders was selected for the position and began her tenure at the foundation in late 2017.

Before entering philanthropy full-time, Janine had been trained in critical research theories and methods. Like Hanh, her lived experience and training led her to engage in inclusive evaluation practices. Experience teaching doctoral students guided her awareness of some of the assumptions about appropriate stances of research when working with communities. “Students often come thinking as a researcher that it’s their job to be unbiased and find a neutral place or somewhere in the middle where they don’t really have opinions about the work. But there is no such thing as objectivity. There’s no such thing as a lack of bias. So instead of trying to strive for those things, it was important to convey to them that it was valuable to be clear about their biases as a researcher and be honest about how you are situating yourself in the work. You may not be a member of the community that you’re studying. But as soon as you step into that community, you have influenced it, and you’ve changed that ethos.”

After her doctoral training, Janine worked as an evaluator in education, government, and nonprofits. Like Hanh, she had also worked with TCE as a local evaluator on an earlier program. While contracted to work with TCE, she saw the genuine enthusiasm and commitment of staff who were guided by the principles of equity and justice. During this time, she also learned that she would have to advocate for the importance and value of evaluation, unlike her experience in the fields of education, government, and nonprofits.

When she was recruited, she felt like TCE was a good fit with her professional commitments. Even more, the TCE community felt like a place where she could bring her lived experience into the workplace and use it to guide her work. “TCE saw that it was an asset that I am a queer Black woman having grown up in the U.S., in white supremacy, having grown up as a woman in this sea of patriarchy, having grown up here in a heteronormative society, all those factors about myself I could bring to my work in a way that felt authentic and real. I’ve been grateful to have been at TCE during 2020. Not just because I feel we were well supported during the pandemic, but also because when George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were killed, I felt there was an awareness and value for the global movement to honor and protect Black lives.” She felt like she could be her authentic self at TCE. “When you typically come to work, you try to be your ‘work self.’ During this time, I felt like there were moments that year when that felt hard for me, and I didn’t have to say that I was okay. It was not something I had experienced before, and I feel a close connection between the work I’m doing at TCE and the person I am outside of TCE; that strengthens the work.”

Hanh’s expansive vision for learning and evaluation as a comprehensive system required a co-partner. Janine filled this role. Janine managed internal learning with staff, oversaw summative assessments of BHC, commissioned specific evaluation measures, established and engaged advisory groups, and ensured there was a feedback loop with program partners. “Janine could manage complex contracting processes and evaluations and be able to step into a role where we could collectively provide guidance

synthesizing so many reports and data and share it back in a way [that was] accessible on multiple levels," Hanh noted.

Janine's role allowed Hanh to work closely with the executive team and the board and to do more external-facing work, amplifying the work of partners and identifying new ideas and to support the department's learning and evaluation approach.

Getting to Work on the New L&E System

Hanh and Janine quickly realized that re-orienting the L&E department would require substantial internal buy-in. The foundation's leadership (CEO, board, Senior Vice Presidents, and executive team) had created an authorizing environment for L&E that gave them sufficient authority to deliver on their vision. But TCE teams were not quick to welcome the L&E team into their meetings. Hanh needed a director who was skilled in building trust and community. Janine concurred with Hanh's initial experience and found that there wasn't strong clarity of purpose for the role of L&E at TCE. Internal constituents asked many questions related to the broad theme of "why are we doing this kind of work?"

Before Hanh and Janine's arrival, evaluations were often initiated after work was complete and the L&E department worked independently, with little organizational buy-in and responsiveness. There was a disconnect between community partners and varying internal departments. When Janine first sought to begin work on L&E's priorities for BHC, she observed a kind of "firewall" that the program officers kept with grantees. Janine understood that this approach was intended to protect grantees and community partners from burdensome reporting and from evaluative processes that were demanding and did not add much value.

Coming into the foundation space full-time also led Janine to observe that philanthropy appeared to need to "work as quickly as possible at all times," often foregoing the process of reflection. For example, she noted, "A program officer may be designing a new idea even before the grantee completes an existing grant." Building on her experience in school environments, Janine committed to building internal capacity that would better enable the foundation and its BHC partners to embrace cycles of work, deep engagement, reflection, and rest. Her training in critical research tradition guided her stance that reflection was essential to promoting equitable outcomes and a cross-community sense of belonging. Ultimately, Janine supported Hanh's goal to transform L&E at TCE from passive evaluation consumption where reports are produced and then sit on shelves, to active engagement in shared learning and adaptation. "How do we change this perspective to a process so that learning and evaluation is more integrated into the day-to-day work?"

Building a Platform for Evaluation using the Principles of Equity, Trust, and Emergence

As skilled evaluators, Hanh and Janine drew on the collective wisdom of practitioners working within philanthropy who seek more community-centered and equity-focused learning and evaluation. They

turned to the Equitable Evaluation Initiative (EEI)[6] and the principles of the Equitable Evaluation Framework™ (EEF)[7], Trust-Based Philanthropy[8], and Emergent Learning.[9]

- The Equitable Evaluation Framework™ helps foundations to assess their intended goals for achieving equity by critiquing narrow thinking around truth and evidence, challenging foundations to embrace community-derived, contextually based, and outward-facing standards of accountability, while recognizing, listening to, and tangibly supporting those who are doing grounded work to achieve equitable outcomes in society.

- Trust-Based Philanthropy offers foundations tangible practices that can guide them in their engagement with the nonprofit sector and, more broadly, underrepresented communities, to promote and achieve equity in these relationships and equitable outcomes in society.

- Emergent Learning offers a pathway for foundations to identify and create a more diverse cohort of learners who seek to achieve equitable outcomes, promote dialogue based on equitable evaluation and other forms of learning, including difficult conversations, to develop wider communities of learning and practice for those who seek to reconsider what counts as evidence and what works best in pursuing equitable outcomes.

Hanh and Janine drew on these principles and adapted them to TCE's needs. They saw the complementary thinking behind these "three pillars" as critical to their approach, guiding them to redistribute power, center relationships, and maintain accountability with communities while embracing learning and unlearning. Hanh notes, "The marriage of the principles…feels completely right to me because if you look at the Venn diagram, there is an intersection that creates an equity racial justice lens."

As they restructured the L&E department, their approach embraced "learning for long-term system impact."[10] These principles also helped Janine and Hanh move away from the idea of evaluation as an

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[6] "EEI offers funders and other actors in the philanthropic ecosystem the ability to envision and operationalize evaluation practices that are consistent with values and outcomes related to equity. The EEF also helps practitioners challenge cultural norms that continue to promote preferences for a singular type of truth, knowing and evidence, which often reinforces an existing narrative. The EEF considers equity as both means and end." Source: https://www.equitableeval.org/framework

[7] Dean-Coffey, J. (2017). *Equitable Evaluation Framework™.* Retrieved from Equitable Evaluation Initiative: https://www.equitableeval.org/framework.

[8] "Trust-based philanthropy is about redistributing power—systemically, organizationally, and interpersonally—in service of a healthier and more equitable nonprofit sector. On a practical level, this includes multi-year unrestricted funding, streamlined applications and reporting, and a commitment to building relationships based on transparency, dialogue, and mutual learning." Source: https://www.trustbasedphilanthropy.org/principles-1

[9] "Emergent Learning focuses on discovering a shared line of sight that allows everyone to find their place in the endeavor; posing questions that invite a wider, more diverse, circle into the thinking process; making thinking visible to encourage a learning dialogue; deliberately testing hypotheses in the work itself; and sharing patterns and insights across a team, network, or community." Source: https://emergentlearning.org/principles/

[10] Systems Change: "Shifting the way broader systems (e.g., health, public safety, local government) make decisions about policies, programs, and the allocation or use of resources. They may involve changes, for example, in power, authority, habits, or the use of ideas and skills." From: "There's Something Happening Here: A Look at The California's Endowment Building

afterthought, instead making it an integral part of strategy, and allowing the foundation to strengthen and fulfill its expressed commitments of inclusion and equity, leading with the belief that "evaluation is one of the ways that we learn together as an organization."

They created a process for using evaluation as a key component for identifying, clarifying, and refining BHC's strategy. Janine explains, "So, we decide we are going to enact a particular strategy. Every strategy is a hypothesis or a set of hypotheses. And then you go out, and you test them formally or informally. Evaluation creates a formal container for testing those hypotheses and then taking what you've learned and feeding it back into the strategy to improve, sharpen, pivot, or stop doing a particular thing because you're learning that an approach is not helpful in the way that you thought or that the hypothesis is not playing out in the way that you planned. This creates an explicit loop between our practice or strategy to an evaluation."

In blending previous work with new approaches guided by interconnected principles, L&E continued to use previously designed quantitative data collection along with qualitative assessments. Specifically, they worked with statewide and national evaluators and maintained data collection and analysis with evaluative tools like their youth survey, Collaborative Assessment Tool, policy inventory tool, and the organizing survey. They retained these quantitative measures, adding critical storytelling and interpretive evaluation methods, reaffirming the value of local evaluators.

Local Evaluation as Equitable and Foundational

A vital component of BHC's evaluative structure was local site evaluation. Starting in the initiative's early years, each BHC site had hired its own local evaluation partner to support the site's learning, evaluation, and reporting. Each local site worked out of a central hub with local grantees and other leaders on a locally-defined action agenda. The idea was for hubs to commission evaluations with the help of local evaluators, and then adjust their programming based on their findings.

The foundation learned early on that BHC communities and their evaluators did not appreciate the foundation's initial "one size fits all" approach to both BHC strategy and evaluation. The foundation's regular restructuring of BHC was confusing for the 14 sites and created tensions between the sites and the foundation. The series of frameworks that TCE rolled out, and the top-down tools for reporting on progress and outcomes, felt too forced and too burdensome. Local sites experienced these efforts as providing information that the foundation wanted to have, often for reporting to the board, rather than focusing on what the sites needed to know and document in real-time. Local evaluators expressed their frustrations when the foundation's approach did not speak to their communities' unique contexts and needs.

Based on feedback from the sites, TCE refined its approach about halfway through the initiative, recognizing how its actions were causing disconnection and frustration. Because the NSGIs reflected communities' priorities, they were helping to better align the local and overarching BHC evaluation work.

Healthy Community Initiative." Feb 2014. Source: https://dornsife.usc.edu/eri/publications/theres-something-happening-here-tce-bhc/

But the L&E team also wanted to tell an accurate story of what was happening in each community and to be more consistent with its commitment to community-driven learning and evaluation. Rather than identifying a uniform learning and evaluation approach across the 14 sites, which had different contexts and needs, the L&E team encouraged the local evaluators to represent the deep experience, needs, and interests of their specific sites. “The [local evaluators] knew the individuals in that community; they knew who to call for an interview.” Dr. Christine Petit, former Executive Director for the Long Beach hub, describes these convenings as places of deep learning and growth for hub leaders. “The opportunity to reflect was helpful and helped us create a cohesive narrative about where we had been, where we were going, and why we were moving in that direction. Our local evaluators would present these concerns at our meetings when we all get together. And it would be a good place to ask questions, talk about results and why they might look like that. It was valuable to reflect on what we were doing.” Ultimately, the local evaluators used a wide range of evaluation and learning tools to support and tell the stories of their communities. “They wrote case studies, they developed videos, they wrote graphic novels, everything you can imagine,” Janine adds.

Dr. Michele Darling, President of LPC Associates, an evaluation firm based in Sacramento, served as a local evaluator for the Sacramento site. Michele reflects on the need for an approach that fit with the variations across BHC communities. “The things that were important in Kern County may have been important up in Humboldt, but they weren’t the top priority. So, up in Humboldt, they’re dealing with some serious issues regarding education and keeping kids out of jail. They also had tribal connections and were working with tribal communities. Whereas, like, in Kern, they didn’t have clean water. People had to go and get water at the spigot in the park because their water was contaminated by all the agriculture. They didn’t have sidewalks. And so, there was a difference between the urban and suburban sites, or the frontier.”

These unique challenges led local evaluation to create a diverse range of evaluation activities. Michele describes some of the Sacramento site’s evaluations: “We did evaluations focused on food work. We did one that focused on the investment in the Sacramento City Unified School District. We also did a case study focusing on youth-serving programs and health access. There was a community survey. Our evaluation primarily focused on the work of the action team. And it was about understanding what the action teams were doing. We also had individual reporting for the grantees that we would aggregate to talk about the work that was done.”

Dr. Giannina Fehler-Cabral, a local evaluator with the Santa Ana hub, describes the value of having independence to create community-informed evaluation measures with limited oversight of the foundation. “I think it’s because of how that grant was structured and the indirect relationship with TCE, and I feel like that’s probably one of the factors related to the hub’s success. I know that sounds very odd. But you often hear it’s harder to do deep community work that’s truly inclusive and participatory when you have funder-driven timelines and agendas.” While Santa Ana was free to create their evaluation agenda, their engagement with TCE inspired its plans. Giannina adds, “The Santa Ana hub team heard about the Equitable Evaluation Initiative during a TCE convening when they would bring all the grantees across the different sites together. Again, this was pre-COVID. The hub team was very

excited to adapt Equitable Evaluation Framework™ (EEF) principles to the work at their site." Hub team members felt that prior evaluation work was not serving them. "It was very quantitative, it was more about meeting the mark, it was more about showing the funder that they were doing something, but it just wasn't helpful and meaningful to them," Giannina adds. With the EEF, they rethought their plan by asking, "What do we want to learn?" Giannina continues, "So we co-created learning questions. We did a lot of orientation about equity-focused approaches to evaluation. We did webinars to get everyone on the same page. We brought in the transformative principles that they were using. Then, we realized that instead of evaluating a particular initiative or project, they wanted to evaluate how the [transformative] principles appear in the work. We were aligning the EEF with understanding how the principles are guiding their organizing efforts, rather than picking a project and then learning about the outcomes of that project."

What Does it All Mean? Assessing People Power

While local evaluation work was foundational, TCE still needed a way to tell the story of what BHC was achieving as a whole. Evaluation outputs were robust, but there was little coherence across these efforts.

Throughout BHC, L&E had engaged numerous external researchers and evaluators to document the work that was occurring across BHC sites, including the progress being made and the lessons being learned (see Appendix C). The vast ecosystem of external BHC-related evaluations that had been completed or that were occurring when Hanh joined the foundation, included, for example:

- Case studies of individual policy and system change campaigns
- Statewide evaluations to capture population-level changes
- Inventories of policy and system changes
- Annual syntheses of evaluation findings into the CEO performance dashboard
- Individual cross-site initiative evaluations
- Narrative change evaluation
- Power building ecosystem and capacity assessments.

Some of these evaluations had been commissioned by L&E, while others had been commissioned by program staff. While a great deal of evaluative work was occurring, and dozens of reports were being generated, it was difficult to track all the work that was happening across BHC, and even more challenging to synthesize what it all meant. Hanh and Janine approached this challenge in several ways.

Using the recently formed NSGIs as a guide, the L&E team decided it needed to better coordinate the external evaluation work. They began by organizing it in a way that made sense with BHC's structure and with the NSGIs.

L&E also recognized that this abundance of evaluative activities required a universal coding system and a comprehensive frame to fully assess how BHC was serving communities and addressing inequity locally and, ultimately, across the communities impacting health equity throughout California.

They also clarified their thinking about what they wanted to test:[11]

> "We see the primary story of BHC as the developmental arc of building power among historically excluded people and communities, then using that power to change the dominant cultural narrative to one of inclusion and value for the contributions of those communities, reshaping policies and systems in ways that open new opportunity structures that advance justice and health equity."

And they identified their key learning and evaluation questions:

- About power: To what extent did BHC build power of historically marginalized communities?
- About narrative change: To what extent are public practices and policies shifting to reflect greater inclusion, shared responsibility (as it applies to equity in health care, education, and justice outcomes), and acknowledgement of the contributions of historically excluded populations?
- About policy and systems change: To what extent are policies, systems, and resource allocation within the key BHC sectors changing in ways that create opportunity environments, enhance equity, and promote health?

In support of building a robust ecosystem during BHC's final three years, L&E also worked with national evaluators including from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), Center for Outcomes Research & Education (CORE), Center for Evaluation Innovation (CEI), and PolicySolve. These national evaluators conducted coordinated assessments of BHC's power building efforts overall, including BHC's impacts in communities. The intent was to use BHC as a tangible example of profound lessons about power building beyond the traditional foundation perspective of seeking shorter-term policy and systems change wins. This work also included a large retrospective assessment of BHC investments and outcomes.

After reviewing the broad repository of evaluation and using their universal coding system, the L&E team asked, "What's the big headline here?" What emerged is that the most impactful and successful outcomes occurred when communities who had been historically excluded from decision-making iteratively built, exercised, and expanded their people power.

Shifting Board Learning from Counting Wins to Deeper Insights

The desire for a comprehensive learning and evaluation framework and system led L&E to create an expansive system for engaged reflection and learning, all led by an L&E team of Hanh, Janine, Mona, Lori, and at times, multiple program associates and analysts.

[11] Hypothesis and key questions come from: L&E Team (2018, October). *BHC Evaluation Update*.

TCE's board and executive team were a key audience in L&E's approach. L&E recognized that the board needed more support in better understanding the link between power building and BHC's ultimate impact in terms of community health. They had to assess how the social determinants of health were rooted in deep structural inequities and had to look "upstream" to make deeper connections around community histories and inequitable health outcomes. "We had to convince them that the social determinants of health are connected upstream. What happens if you go upstream? You get to structural racism. You get entrenched patriarchy. You get to Native and Indigenous genocide and erasure. So, what does that mean for our work? If we really want to go upstream, that also means talking about racial equity," Janine noted.

The board had been used to getting periodic updates on the number of policy and systems change "wins" that BHC was achieving locally and at the state level as a key measure of success. This growing number was impressive and repeated often as testament to BHC's growing impact. By the initiative's end in 2020, TCE concluded that BHC had contributed to more than 1,700 local and state policy changes, system changes, and tangible benefits for communities.[12] This number provided a quantitative metric that board members could easily grasp. At the same time, Hanh and Janine acknowledge that this metric at times distracted the board from BHC's aim of building power.

To address the board's narrow focus on quantitative metrics, board members needed opportunities to stretch their thinking. Each board member was assigned to one of the 14 sites to learn alongside communities. Board members had an opportunity to learn firsthand about community challenges and successes, returning to board meetings and sharing what they learned with their colleagues. In her role reporting to the President and board, Hanh worked to create learning opportunities at board meetings that helped members make useful connections around what they were observing, complemented by learning opportunities structured around contextual and data-driven analysis and the skills of deep listening and humility. "I had all the chops around technical expertise. I was not a conventional learning and evaluation person. Learning and evaluation have allowed me in so many instances to change how people thought about the work, make space for, grow, and do the courageous unlearning," Hanh recalls. With a more eclectic approach, Hanh aimed to meet the diverse learning needs of Board members. She worked ahead to ensure that she had ample time on the meeting agenda and provided one-page memos that provided big picture highlights, identifying accomplishments, and offering key questions. Learning opportunities required time for journaling and reflection, and meetings always reconnected to previous discussions and topics to build a broad base of knowledge.

Hanh also pushed the board to consider how progress in communities was based on TCE's contributions to a broader ecosystem of power-building actors and efforts. BHC successes were attributable to the work of numerous partners, including other funders. In many instances, they had to come to terms with how communities were working on building power long before the foundation arrived and, in some instances, needed TCE to deepen and amplify their work rather than build something new.

[12] The California Endowment. (2020). *A decade of learning*. https://www.calendow.org/peoplepowerhealth/impact/

Reorienting Program Staff Learning to Hold Space and Build Community

Program staff were another major audience in L&E's learning system. Janine knew she had to build trust among her colleagues to make the redesigned L&E system work. Guided by the work of the USC Equity Research Institute, program staff had begun to think about the work occurring in BHC communities as a power-building ecosystem, where community organizing groups were centered and supported by complementary organizations "that focus on leadership development (e.g., political education, personal transformation and healing, trainings); research and legal support; advocacy and policy expertise; communications, messaging, and polling; and arts, culture shifting, and narrative change."[13] The ecosystem also included individuals, organizations, and programs that support the core operations and sustainability of organizations, including funders and evaluators. Famously dubbed the "power flower" (see Appendix D), program staff were thinking more deeply about the power dynamics within BHC's collaborative efforts and seeing their roles as helping to support the power-building ecosystem as, for example, capacity builders, connectors, and advocates. They were seeing themselves as actors in the ecosystem who could also influence how other actors oriented themselves to communities and organizing efforts.

As a complement to board learning and evaluation, Janine took overall responsibility for the SLIMs that were initially designed by Jim Keddy. Her first step was to ensure that SLIMs promoted a sense of welcoming and belonging. Held over two days and typically in person, Janine led bonding activities and provided opportunities to practice emergent learning. As a core principle, Janine believes building a sense of community leads to deep learning. The meetings had a short agenda, giving staff time for intentional listening and discussion. SLIMs allowed each department to present their goals concerning evaluation outcomes and receive meaningful and positive feedback.

Additionally, SLIMs were structured to help staff develop the capacity to have hard conversations internally to prepare them for more challenging external community conversations so that they could identify solutions, cultivate deeper collaborations, and pivot. Janine worked with program staff to set the agenda. "So instead of just having a presentation, we ask you to sit with your team and to think about a grant that you just ended and how this can inform this other grant or another portfolio of work so there's learning happening across the program team that was not led by L&E folks," Janine recalls.

SLIM agendas were flexible so that when challenging issues arose, staff could use the learning space to pause, reflect, and process difficult moments. Hanh held a healing circle in 2016 at the first SLIM she led. After the murders of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Philando Castile, George Floyd, and many other Black men and women, and during the racial reckoning in 2020, TCE staff experienced trauma with each incident of state violence and used SLIMs as a place to process their grief and fears. SLIMs were designed to be spaces that prompted openness, cross-community learning, truth-telling, and deep engagement with issues related to inequality and oppression and the impact that these issues placed on internal and external communities. After a major community engagement study conducted by CSSP and

[13] USC Equity Research Institute (2018). *California Health and Justice for All Power-Building Landscape: A Preliminary Assessment, p.8.*

coordinated by L&E at BHC's midway point, the executive team heard that TCE could do more to address racial equity in the work. Community perspectives that the foundation needed to center racial inequality were also confirmed by local evaluations and program staff offering the same recommendations. Tough conversations were necessary and vital aspects of internal learning.

Learning as Iterative and not Episodic

Local evaluators and local site hub managers were another audience in L&E's learning system. L&E tried to ensure that local sites had opportunities to provide regular feedback to the foundation and engage in substantive peer learning. Hanh used her own experiences as a former BHC evaluator to help design local evaluator and cross-hub convenings that addressed local evaluators' needs, frustrations, and emerging concerns about the foundation's strategies, while providing an opportunity for hub leaders and staff to learn from each other about organizing and base building.

During local evaluator and cross hub convenings, individual sites discussed their fears about what would happen to their progress on local policy, advocacy, and service delivery once BHC ended. L&E guided hubs in reflections on their sustainability plans, serving as thought partners for local sites. The storytelling, narrative shifts, and other data points developed by local evaluators were helpful for hubs in securing additional funding and for identifying next steps for their local site sustainability.

Janine discussed the challenges that BHC experienced in recognizing and responding quickly to political opportunities.[14] L&E tried to position evaluation and emergent learning to track the broader narrative in California and to gain clarity about political opportunities as they emerged. Janine describes the process and outcome of L&E's efforts to identify and document these new political opportunities and to guide local power building efforts: "When we were talking about power building, I think sometimes folks didn't understand. What does that actually mean, building power, and I felt like we all have these really beautiful examples. This is what power building looks like. It looks like more transparency from the police when something happens and with acts of violence perpetrated towards communities. It looks like people who work to change policies in their community. It looks like being able to divert resources from policing to preventive strategies that actually make communities safer than more police do. And so, I feel that identifying these broader narrative shifts has been really key and helpful in our work."

Using a long-term view of what it takes to enact social change and understanding that power building is an iterative process where one advocacy or systems change effort informs the next one, L&E wanted to ensure that the foundation and its partners could learn from each other through a process of continuous reflection, iteration, and response. This approach is what Hanh has described as part of "returning learning back to the system," which is a core Emergent Learning principle.

[14] Political opportunity is a social movement theoretical concept that describes the "consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements." Tarrow, S. (1996). States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements. In McAdam, D., McCarthy, J., and M. Zald (eds.), Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (41–61)

Returning Learning to the System

As part of their commitment to external learning, L&E also shared what they were doing and learning with the wider philanthropic sector and fields focused on health equity, especially those interested in the foundation's approach. "We wanted to develop a systematic way of getting the knowledge out to the field so that people are building learning and not making the same mistakes and not doing this work on the backs of Black and brown communities. In a concerted way, I've sought out creative ways to discuss how this work can be brought to scale and engagement in philanthropy and with policymakers," Hanh describes. Janine concurs, "One of the commitments that Hanh and I made when we came into TCE was to share what we were learning more broadly with the field because that wasn't really happening before we came. We thought about how we were learning some interesting things about power building, combining place-based work with policy advocacy work. We engaged in various roundtables because it was a great opportunity to be in dialogue," Janine adds.

Hanh and Janine participated in various learner-funding environments, including the National Academy of Science's Roundtable on Population Health Improvement where they were able to hear and learn from academics, public health leaders, and others working in the space of community health. L&E also worked with the Equitable Evaluation Initiative to support field building and the *Stanford Social Innovation Review to* disseminate a special 10-part series on people power that lifted up BHC lessons and included Hanh's own reflections on transforming foundation learning and evaluation into a power-building strategy. L&E also supported CSSP to hold Learning, Equity, and Power (LEaP) Initiative learning sessions that offered a public platform to discuss BHC shortcomings and describe the aspects of BHC that appeared durable and long-lasting with others interested in achieving and scaling health equity.

L&E Beyond 2020

As BHC ended in 2020, TCE's strategy built on its legacy and evolved to embrace three bold goals going forward: people power, reimagining institutions, and support for a 21st Century "Health for All" System. Hanh is excited about the possibilities for the future of L&E's work in helping the foundation to authentically center community strengths and needs and to champion authentic racial justice and systems change efforts. "I partnered with Tony Iton and Bob Ross, programs, and community leaders to tell the story of BHC to move folks in their thinking. I inherited many things when I came in, and I tried to do my best to tell a more comprehensive, thorough story of BHC, to talk about where we made a difference and where we still need to do work. And now, on to the next phase of work. Our previous work allows us to reset and do it even better."

Her assessment also reveals new pathways for L&E going forward, including playing a stronger contributing role alongside program staff. "Learning and evaluation has an important role to play in building influence and funding organizing, and we often leave that to the program staff." Hanh and Janine recognize the gains that L&E has made to become more embedded throughout the organization. "I'm excited that we're partnering so closely with Alex Desautels, Director of Strategic Alignment, Programs, and Partnerships, and Jennifer Chheang, who was the former Long Beach program manager and the former Director of Planning, Strategy, and Integration and now is Director of Grantmaking

Effectiveness. They oversee parts of the organization beyond direct grantmaking. This is how you build a learning organization."

One critique of foundations is that they tend to develop inward-facing accountability. In striving to fulfill the expressed goals of increased racial and social equity, learning and evaluation can create formalized accountability standards that invite critique and dissent, challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and biases, especially as philanthropy contends with the legacies of racism and oppression that in many ways have shaped the sector. These efforts open possibilities for "courageous" learning and "unlearning" and, even more so, create the environment for increased power and social change in marginalized communities and bridge-building across societal divides.

Challenges in the Pivot to Power

BHC's learning and evaluation trajectory provides rich lessons on the tensions and challenges that show up in this work. TCE sought to move away from a traditional approach of top-down and foundation-centered learning and evaluation. L&E tried to engage internal and external BHC constituents in deep listening, calling out and calling in,[15] sometimes in highly contentious ways, while grappling with regular organizational restructuring and a vast reset of systems that included grant reporting, communications, and programming.

Supporting meaningful learning and evaluation work, especially approaches that aim to shift power and move away from traditional rigor and objectivity standards, requires what Hanh described as "evolution and not revolution." Many challenges have emerged in TCE's journey so far, including departmental silos, board expectations, and local sites grappling with foundation power and shifts in foundation strategy. As L&E continuously attended to these moving parts, questions about their relevance and usefulness required regular recalibration.

A large-scale and broad-scope L&E practice to support internal and external learning and unlearning requires substantial resources, time, and patience. Yet, these investments may meet critique within and outside of the foundation. Learning may not feel fast enough or relevant enough or deep enough. Program manager Sandy Chiang recalls that program staff received consistent critique from the community members when they felt the foundation was not keeping up with the everyday stressors they encountered like police violence, eviction threats and notices, unjust school discipline policies, and deportation orders. "Community members would tell us that they did not feel the impact of these wins," she recalls.

Other departments internal to the organization, especially those with close connections to the same local communities, may join the chorus in suggesting that L&E and the foundation's strategies are too slow for the pace of progress. In this context, it is valuable to clarify who is best served by the various forms of evaluation. Hanh adds nuance by noting, "L&E's orientation is to be adaptive and build the

[15] "Calling out and calling in" is a concept developed by Dr. Loretta Ross. Ross, L. J. (2019). Speaking up without tearing down. *Teaching Tolerance*, *61*, 19-22. Also see: Bennett, J. (2020). What if instead of calling people out, we called them in. *New York Times*, *19*(11).

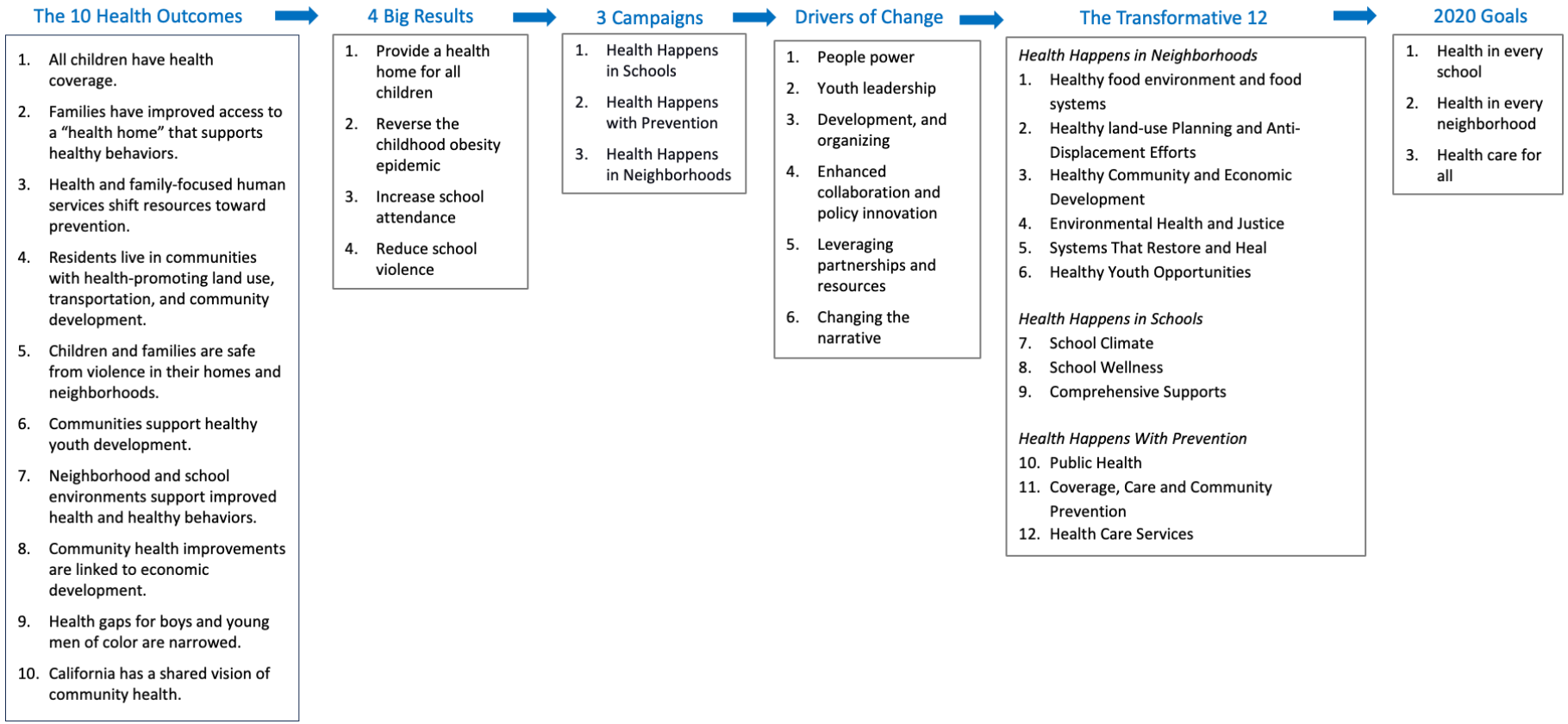
capacity of those closest to the ground to be reflective as they move to respond to crises. However, this is not enough. Being reactive to injustices in the learning cycles promotes short-term thinking rather than a vision and long-term structural changes through strengthened governing power, of which L&E can and should play a key role in supporting strategic thinking."

Furthermore, even though the learning and evaluation system for BHC was expansive and included a vast range of local and national evaluators, there were critiques that the system was not deep and connected enough. For example, Dr. Giannina Fehler-Cabral, the evaluator for the Santa Ana hub, describes the issue of balancing local site independence and sustainability with support from a major funder to propel community-based work. "I wish that TCE's evaluation division or other leaders would have taken more interest in our work. Maybe they weren't invited. I don't know any of that. But I think it would have been helpful if TCE leaders who had more power had the chance to come into our process and learn and not just those once-a-year updates. If they were able to really see what we were doing, I think they would understand the conditions that are necessary to sustain this type of practice. But for whatever reason, they weren't there to see it happen. And I know this maybe goes against what I was saying earlier in that it was nice to have that distance from the funder. But there was almost too much distance where there wasn't an opportunity for them to really say, 'This is amazing work.' If they don't know what's happening in Santa Ana, how do these innovative practices get shared with others? I think there's an issue of scaling and sharing, spreading that practice. I think this is a challenge, and there's a missed opportunity."

The case showcases how foundations require agility and adaptability to address complex and regularly shifting scenarios, along with the creative embrace of both/and thinking. Yet, at times, even the best efforts to redesign based on significant learning and unlearning can later be interpreted as a knee-jerk reaction instead of strategic recalibration. TCE's case reveals that when a foundation aims to challenge its conventional approach to strategy, learning, and evaluation during a time of sectoral sea change and with the intent to shift power and advance racial equity, a complex mosaic that requires the regular navigation and refitting of disparate parts and discordant goals will be required.

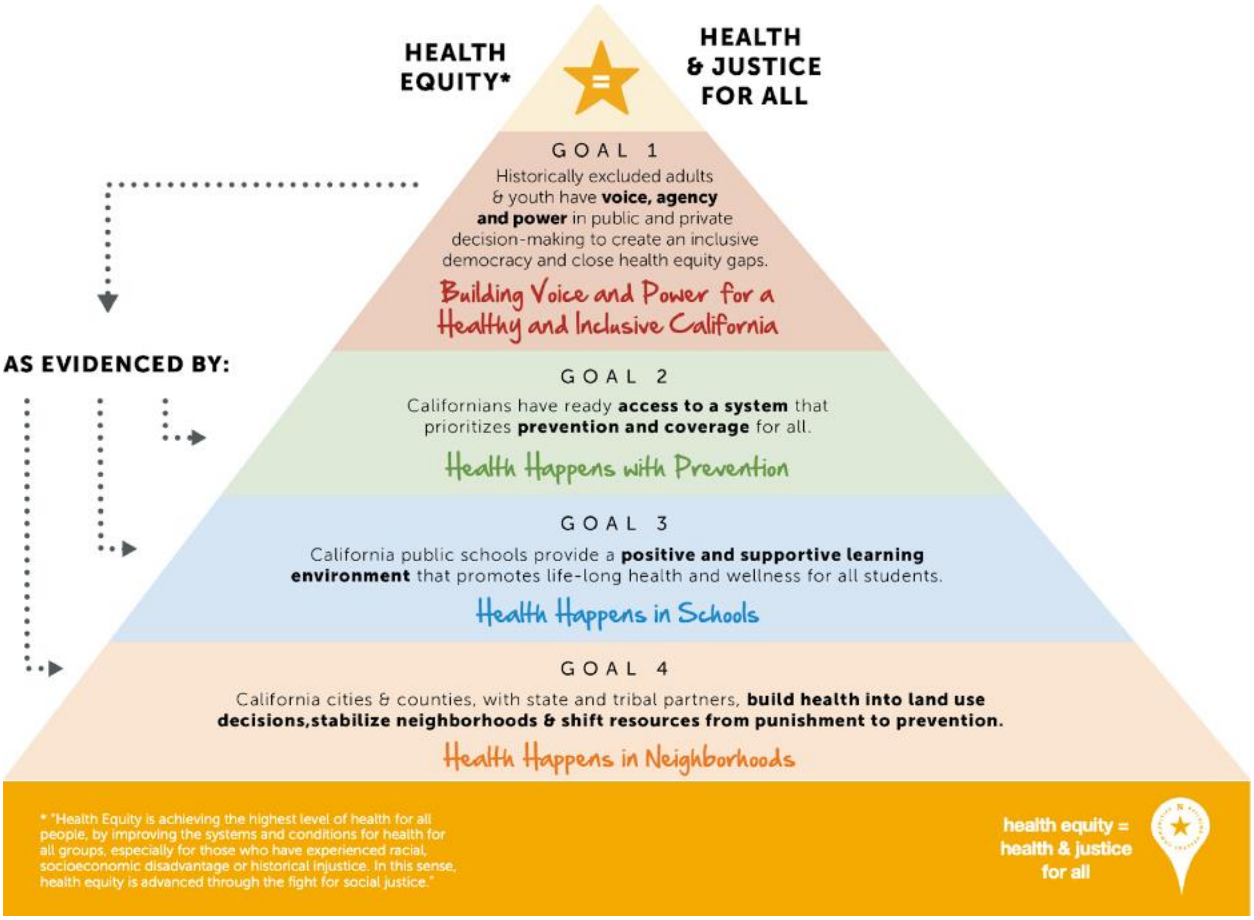
APPENDIX A

BHC Strategy and Evaluation Frameworks



APPENDIX B

North Star Goals and Indicators (NSGIs)

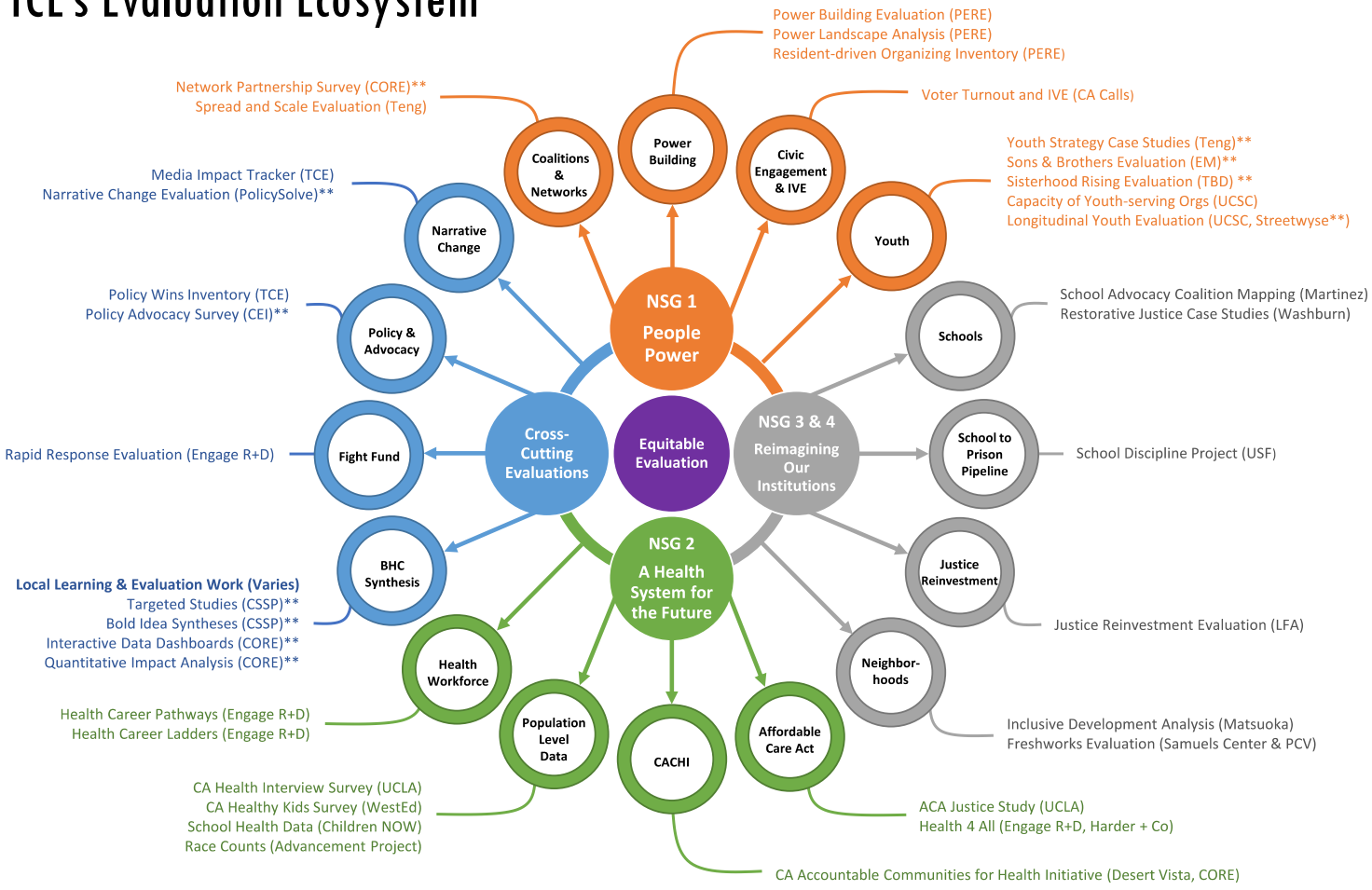


Source: *Building Healthy Communities: A Decade in Review*. November 2020.

APPENDIX C

TCE's Evaluation Ecosystem During BHC

Mapping TCE's Evaluation Ecosystem



Source: *BHC Evaluation Update.* October 2018.

APPENDIX D

Power-Building Ecosystem (Power Flower)

Source: USC Equity Research Institute (2018). *California Health and Justice for All Power-Building Landscape: A Preliminary Assessment*.