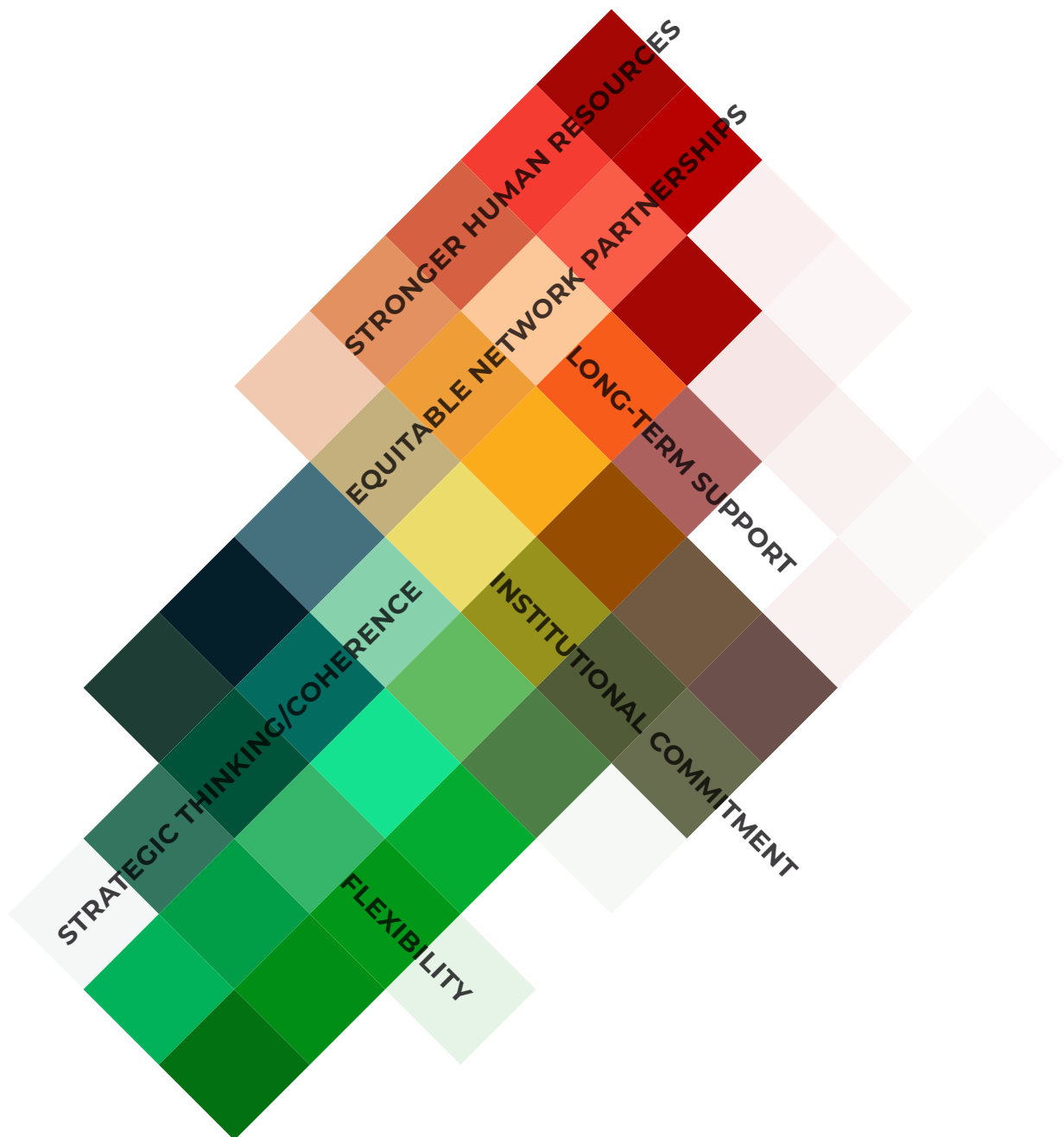




# Interim Report

## BUILD Developmental Evaluation

September 2020



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*To the memory of Peter da Costa*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

BUILD's goals are to strengthen the long-term capacity and sustainability of social justice organizations around the world so that they can more effectively achieve their core missions and to reduce inequality in all its forms. In February 2018, the Ford Foundation commissioned a Developmental Evaluation to assess whether and how BUILD is achieving these goals. The Evaluation aims to foster understanding within the Ford Foundation and throughout the field of philanthropy about how BUILD can advance social justice. A multidisciplinary and multinational team was engaged by NIRAS to undertake the task.

This Interim Report, which refers to the Evaluation's first phase of data collection, summarizes the initial mid-term findings of the Evaluation, which will continue into 2021. Its purpose is to provide evidence and analysis to support real-time learning for the current iteration of the BUILD program and for the design of its second iteration (referred to as, BUILD 2.0). A modest adjustment has been made to the original purpose, which was to provide a reference point for analyzing the 'distance travelled' of the grantees that have been employing their BUILD support since the start of their respective grants. Given the tumultuous events that took place during the first half of 2020, the Evaluation Team has repurposed this Interim Report as a point of departure for learning about and understanding grantees' resilience and reassessment of the 'direction they need to travel' during the remainder of the BUILD program and afterwards.

The Evaluation's mid-term findings are analyzed through the lens of the four Learning Questions that have guided the inquiry.

1. Has BUILD been organized and implemented optimally to achieve the desired impacts?
2. How has BUILD strengthened grantees?
3. Did BUILD impact grantees' roles in leading or participating in networks in a way that strengthened those networks?
4. Does strengthening key institutions and networks advance (or consolidate past advances in) social justice?

Findings are the product of a contextually framed analysis of the contributions that BUILD has made to ongoing change in the grantee institutions and their mission impacts<sup>1</sup>. The following data sources were used in the analysis:

- Seven case studies that looked into selected types of organizations and/or key issues, based on data collected via visits and interviews with 56 grantees (the large majority face-to-face, but some partially or entirely virtually).
- A set of standard questions asked of the 56 grantees for comparative analysis.
- An online survey completed by 136 grantees about their uses of the BUILD grant, its effects on institutional strengthening and on mission impact, and grantees' experience with BUILD components.

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed description of the methods is provided in Annex A. Throughout this Report, the Evaluation Team has tried to quantify, where meaningful, the prevalence of responses so as to give an impression of whether or not they constitute trends. However, in the Team's far ranging conversations with grantees some topics have arisen in a variety of ways that make quantification difficult and potentially misleading. For that reason, certain references are more undefined, such as "some."

The Interim Report seeks to inform the BUILD team and grantees according to their interest—not only the 56 grantee organizations that actively participated in the first wave of the developmental evaluation, but also others beyond those. Secondary audiences for the Interim Report include other Ford Foundation staff and the Board, and potentially other philanthropies. It is recognized, however, that the Report’s level of detail may not be of direct interest to these audiences. The Evaluation Team therefore recommends that it be repackaged by BUILD and relevant Ford offices for broader dissemination as deemed appropriate.

The Interim Report provides timely knowledge for the BUILD team to inform and stimulate conversations with these secondary audiences. While the Report’s design reflects the need to facilitate those processes, the primary responsibility for promoting this learning will lie with the BUILD team and the Ford Foundation’s Offices of Strategy and Learning and of Communications. The Evaluation Team is prepared to participate in relevant learning fora as required.

The Report has been developed through a process of analyzing, triangulating and broadly discussing the findings from the different data sources within the Evaluation Team, together with the BUILD team and with the grantees who were visited during data collection. The case studies (see Annex C) were authored by different team members and have played a central part in the analysis. This data is reflected extensively and directly in the Report. Most of the dialogue with the BUILD team was undertaken in relation to feedback on the case studies and also in the process of developing a briefing note for the Ford Foundation Board, where the Evaluation Team worked together to synthesize findings and analyses. The Interim Report was produced by the Evaluation Team (Maggie Bangser, Raphaëlle Bisiaux, Anthony Boateng, Ian Christoplos, Ron Dwyer-Voss, Flor Enghel, Susana Morales and Emelie Pelby, ), with Ian Christoplos as the lead author and Flor Enghel providing analytical and editorial guidance.

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION: INTERIM KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section highlights the key findings and recommendations arising from the triangulation of the evaluation's combined data set introduced in page 1 (i.e., the case studies, the standard questions, and the survey). These findings are analyzed through the lens of the four Learning Questions that have guided the inquiry in Section 3. The ensuing lessons learned, and recommendations are presented in Section 4.

### 2.1 KEY FINDINGS

*Has BUILD been organized and implemented optimally to achieve the desired impacts?*

- The BUILD approach is characterized by **built-in synergies** among flexibility, long-term timeframes, and ring-fenced commitments to institutional strengthening, which enable grantees to work more effectively towards mission achievement. That **grantees are firmly 'in the driver's seat'** in determining what BUILD means to them is directly linked to the flexibility that allows them to strategize and act accordingly.
- BUILD has often contributed to a **stronger, more open, and more constructive engagement between grantees and the Ford Foundation**. This is variable, though. There are other factors in the grantee-Ford relationship that have greater influence on the quality of these partnerships, including the history of these relationships, the term limit requirements on Ford staff, and varied levels of transparency in their dialogue.
- Grantees' impressions about **BUILD's Cohorts, Convenings and Technical Assistance (CCTA)** are, for the most part, based on limited direct experience of it. Data shows that this type of support is most **appreciated where events are linked to continued engagement and provide ample opportunities for peer exchange**.
- Impressions about the application of **BUILD's Organizational Mapping Tool (OMT)** are mixed. When guided by skilled facilitators, it tends to lead to positive experiences, but a significant number of grantees felt that it implied an **implicit bias towards organizational models that do not reflect their intentions and visions**.

*How has BUILD strengthened grantees?*

- BUILD has supported grantees to **expand, strengthen and better manage staff and volunteers while putting into place more formal institutional structures**. Data shows that grantees' systems for developing and managing their human resources were often dysfunctional before they scaled up. BUILD enabled them to address long-standing deficits while putting systems into place to better manage growth.
- BUILD has **created conditions for more strategic thinking and provided needed funds to put strategies into action**. Paths to strategic coherence vary, though. Some organizations are undertaking strategic planning processes, while others are applying looser, less formal, and more iterative approaches. BUILD has been a 'good fit' for both.
- Rejuvenated **strategic thinking has been most important during leadership transitions**. BUILD has given new directors the funding and the confidence to initiate institutional restructuring and bring together staff and boards to reflect over new visions.



- A key focus of new leaders is to **strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion** in their organizational cultures, human resource set-ups, and internal systems. New executive directors in the US **emphasize racial equity** as a crucial dimension of institutional strengthening, and in many cases mirror their internal work on diversity, equity and inclusion when establishing external strategic partnerships.
- **Leaders of color, particularly women, describe the disproportionate expectations placed on them** by staff and external actors to succeed quickly and without failures. BUILD's flexible, long-term funding has generally afforded the breathing room they needed to step into their roles and launch their institutional development strategies. Part of the formalization process reported by grantees has consisted of **investing in internal management and administrative structures that were long overdue**. Dedicated resources for institutional strengthening were new for many grantees.
- Modest gains, partially related to BUILD, have been made in **enhancing financial resilience, particularly the internal capacities to anticipate and cope with shocks** in the context of changing and unpredictable financial environments. However, critical challenges may come to the fore when BUILD's support for many grantees ends amid multiple and complex contextual crises. Driven primarily by fears relating to deteriorating funding landscapes in general and uncertainties about BUILD in particular, the specter of financial instability is a growing concern among grantees. A specific trend to watch in the Evaluation's next phase will be whether **diversifying and improving financial flexibility and stability, currently seen as an aspiration**, will continue or be stymied in the current scenario.
- Safety and security have been growing concerns. BUILD has **enabled grantees to manage an increasingly risky environment**, including investments in physical and digital security to respond to new threats such as psychosocial stress and legal suits. For many grantees, efforts to strengthen institutional structures have included greater attention to security protocols and procedures.
- Overall, BUILD support to institutional strengthening has enabled **transitions from being 'scrapy' to being more effective and strategic**. A certain ambivalence characterizes many grantees who recognize a need to formalize in some ways but remain wary of quenching the 'spark' that drives them. By providing the flexibility, time, and resources to experiment with new strategic directions, BUILD has given them headspace to find ways to manage this ambivalence.

*Did BUILD impact grantees' roles in leading or participating in networks in a way that strengthened those networks?*

- Grantees have leveraged BUILD support to move from aspirations to actions in their **engagement with networks, coalitions, and movements**, especially where they are supporting smaller partners and amplifying partner voices. Grantees working at the grassroots level have strengthened systems to train, equip, and enable branches, community-level partners and frontline staff, and volunteers.
- Grantees that are leading or supporting networks have often grown the networks' size and, in some cases, broadened the scope of their focus. Growth has mostly been a by-product rather than a driver of change. Grantees have focused on honing their strategic clarity and **better applying data and knowledge to bring partners together and amplify the voices of constituents** towards more legitimate and effective joint action.

*Does strengthening key institutions and networks advance (or consolidate past advances in) social justice?*

- By enhancing their institutional structures, capacities and processes, BUILD grantees have created conditions for achieving greater impact in the future. They consistently report that they are contributing to greater social justice despite overwhelming obstacles, cite processes that will contribute to mission impact and provide anecdotal examples where this has occurred. However, **actual changes in the lives of their constituents are difficult to confirm**. The pivots in responding to the multiple crises underway during 2020 suggest that in 2021 BUILD resources may occasionally be directed towards pursuing social justice resilience rather than expanded impact.
- **Grantees described how they have improved their work, thanks in part to BUILD**. However, **some also acknowledged that prospects for success are diminishing and ambitions need to be reconsidered**. Interviews revealed a range of reactions to this, from fierce motivation to forge ahead to critical reflection on priorities and decisions about what is possible in a difficult environment. Some grantees expressed optimism about leading progress on fundamental social justice issues and/or being on the cusp of reversing negative trends. Others emphasized working to mitigate some of the worst aspects of a declining situation. This balance between hope and frustration is likely to remain prominent and adopt new characteristics in the final year of the evaluation.

## 2.2 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILD

### Recommendations for BUILD 1.0

- To maximize the usefulness of CCTA, future actions should focus specifically on areas where grantees are striving to learn from peer reflection rather than on more issues. This will require linking one-off events to longer processes of organizational reflection.
- To better leverage the value of diagnostic assessments, BUILD should allow greater flexibility in how grantees administer and use the OMT (and develop a version for network grantees that reflects the specific conditions these face).
- Drawing on the generally positive grantee-program officer relationships established through BUILD as the basis for further development, the Ford Foundation should hold transparent, timely and explicit conversations with grantees about future BUILD/Ford funding plans or lack thereof. BUILD generates conditions for a stronger relationship between program officers and grantees and lessons about how it contributes to these relationships should be shared across the Ford Foundation.
- Social justice organizations worldwide are facing complex challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic, economic distress, and social unrest, and will continue to face them for the foreseeable future. In this context, grant negotiations should ensure that grantees lead decisions on how best to adapt program and institutional strengthening goals and plans.

### Additional recommendations for BUILD 2.0 (and beyond)

- The Evaluation Team strongly recommends that the Foundation continue with a BUILD 2.0 initiative based on the core principles of flexible, long-term funding and ring-fenced support for institutional strengthening. Given the evidence of BUILD's effectiveness documented in this Interim Report and its prospects for engendering mission impact in the long run, the Ford Foundation should continue to explore how to integrate the BUILD approach into its overall grantmaking.

- Grant size, periods and sequencing of disbursements should be more flexible, and decisions should be made through dialogue between program officers and grantees.
- BUILD should continue to provide grantees the necessary leeway to develop their own paths to financial resilience, sustainability and/or growth in the difficult period ahead.
- BUILD can deepen and expand its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion by continuing to support grantee organizations that are investing deeply in this respect, and by making explicit commitments to additional organizations and networks that are led by, represent, and reach other structurally marginalized people and communities in both the Global South and the US.

## 3. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE LEARNING QUESTIONS?

BUILD is an experiment in grant-making characterized by a fundamental change in power relations between the Ford Foundation and its grantees. The approach reflects a theory of change based on three underlying principles: 1) grantees should **decide where and how to invest as they know best**; 2) they need the time to do so in a concerted and strategic manner taking into account that **there are no quick fixes**; and 3) they must be able to invest in **rendering their institutions sustainable and strong to operate in effective and accountable ways**. BUILD components have been designed to reflect these three principles by providing unrestricted support, over a five-year timeframe, with the requirement that a significant proportion of the support be invested in institutional strengthening.<sup>2</sup> These principles are at the core of the highly iterative process of designing the BUILD program within the Ford Foundation and include components expected to lead to a fundamental redirection of how the Foundation operates.

Section 3.1 of the Interim Report looks into the application of these three principles and the components used to operationalize BUILD's theory of change. First, we consider the three principles jointly as a whole 'package.' Then we focus on the three principles and the corresponding components that have been applied. Finally, we examine the ways, beyond the grants per se, used to engage with the grantees over the course of the BUILD program thus far.

### 3.1 HAVE THE BUILD COMPONENTS REFLECTED THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES?

Although the developmental evaluation sought to understand how each of the principles introduced above were applied, informants indicated repeatedly and clearly that in their view BUILD is a package wherein the sum is greater than its individual components. An overarching finding is that synergies among efforts to apply the three principles is what counts, and that therefore trying to disentangle their relative importance can be misleading.

The online survey of BUILD grantees conducted by the Evaluation Team shows that all components had a positive influence, and that over 87 percent of grantees reported a large positive influence from the three major components of multiyear, flexible and dedicated funding (Figure 1).

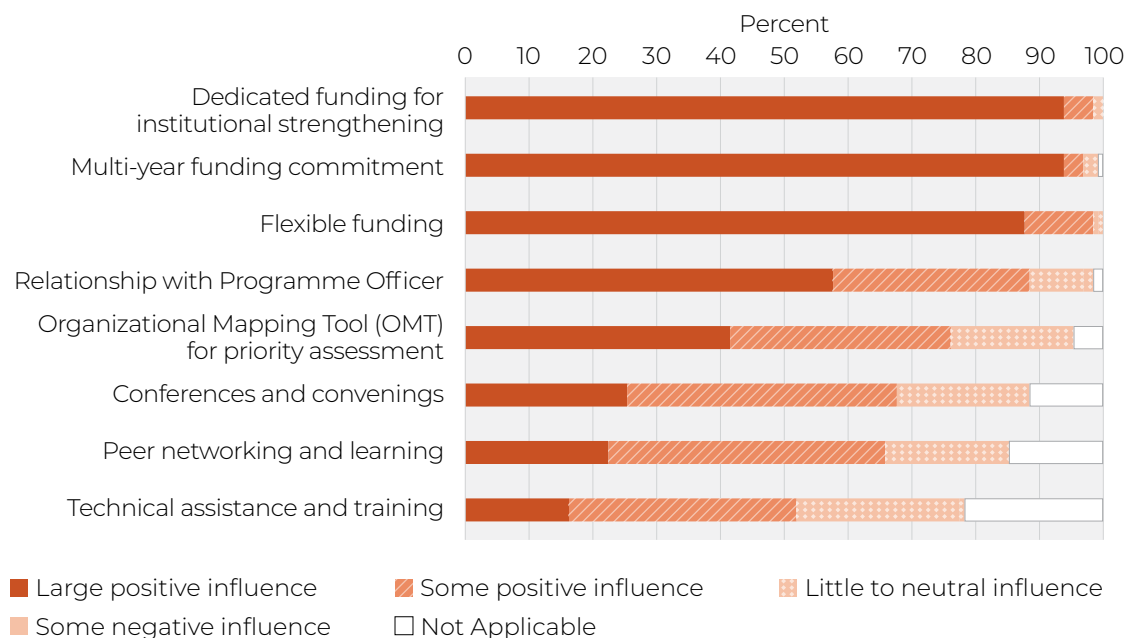
The combination of the grant's flexibility and long-term nature, together with the commitment to institutional strengthening, were often described as a **'game changer.'** Comments frequently emphasized how these three aspects of BUILD have provided **'headspace,'** (i.e., the resources, flexibility and patience **to figure out how to respond in a strategic manner to diverse and dynamically changing hazards and opportunities, while preparing the organizations to act accordingly**). Altogether, BUILD has allowed grantees to gain the confidence required to act in more focused ways to achieve their missions. They are now better able to work consistently on the steps, processes and relationships needed to achieve mission



**BUILD IS A PACKAGE IN WHICH THE SUM IS GREATER THAN ITS INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS."**

<sup>2</sup> The Evaluation Team's review of grantee proposals and practices shows that there is wide understanding of the requirement to invest a significant part of grants in institutional strengthening. However, the proportions invested vary, as do the understandings of what investments can be characterized as 'institutional strengthening.'

**Figure 1. Grantees' responses to the question *How much have the various components of BUILD influenced your organization?***



Number of observations: 136 grantees (total)

impact, and can do so without having to manage what in the past they knew to be sub-optimal organizational and administrative structures or to pursue portfolios of short-term projects that fail to contribute to strategic visions.

Grantees repeatedly described how the combination of BUILD components created conditions for them to take advantage of opportunities and to otherwise engage in adaptive, agile, and focused ways.

Working within unpredictable fields and loose networks also puts a premium on having a stable base for agile and iterative response. One grantee explained how reliable, flexible, and long-term support enabled them to retain strategic clarity in an institutionally and contextually chaotic situation: *“We’re fixing the crazy, while also being able to focus on the real problems. Having stable funding lends itself to having a more stable environment to do this.”* Time, unrestricted funding, and stronger institutional structures, combined, have made it possible for grantees to innovate and take risks by exploring new methods and avenues of work, and to start initiatives that take years to yield results.

“RELIABLE, FLEXIBLE, AND LONG-TERM SUPPORT HAS ENABLED LEADERS TO PIVOT THEIR STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO VOLATILE AND VARIABLE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS.”

### 3.1.1 TO WHAT EXTENT AND HOW ARE GRANTEES GIVEN THE FREEDOM TO DO WHAT THEY THINK IS BEST? WITH WHAT RESULTS/OUTCOMES?

**Flexibility was cited as having a large positive influence by 88 percent of the grantees surveyed.**

Among the case study grantees, 29 of the 56 said flexibility was the most important factor of BUILD strengthening their organization. It enables them to be innovative, to experiment and to change course with less risk when contexts change. As put by one of them, *“BUILD respects the strategy of the grantee, encouraging the grantee to develop a strategy based on its own needs and not expectations of others.”* Thanks to this flexibility, grantees can respond to long-neglected institutional dysfunctions, including solving pervasive issues in what they knew needed to be addressed but which had been neglected due to lack of funds and/or rigid donor requirements.

An example of **overcoming the rigidity of conventional funding** is the possibility to put resources into reserves or offices. One grantee referred to being able to use BUILD resources for urgent repairs to their offices after an earthquake. In comparison, their other main donor stated that *“earthquakes are not related to human rights,”* and thus they could not reallocate their grant. Another grantee noted that BUILD funding was different because of *“The ability to allocate some of the funds to our institutional reserve (many of our other funders expressly prohibit this).”*

While six of the 56 case study grantees described the **flexibility of their BUILD grant as unique compared to other funding**, others, particularly among the more established organizations, had a relatively healthy balance between restricted and unrestricted funding in place already. The importance of enabling flexible programming may be lower among established grantees due to the fact that the proportion of BUILD funding in relation to their overall budgets was generally low.

One grantee, for which BUILD contributed seven percent of their funding, used these resources to cover the costs of essential communications and meetings across their far-flung network, which their other funders refused to finance. Another grantee explained BUILD’s value in relation to their peace of mind and ability to get away from conventional funding treadmills: *“Can’t explain specifically how BUILD contributed. Mostly that we don’t have to think about money all the time. We can say what we want to say in meetings and not think about how the donors will react.”*

Some of the **grassroots mobilizing grantees, particularly in the US, encounter substantial obstacles to breaking out of narrow, restricted project modalities.** This is especially unfortunate given the importance of continuity in building and maintaining contact and trust amid diverse partners and constituencies at grassroots levels. Some grantees mentioned that other donors are starting to acknowledge their failures in this regard but have made limited progress in terms of changing their practices. One grassroots mobilizer in the Global South noted that their unrestricted BUILD funding enabled them to avoid dysfunctional donor restrictions; it gave them the independence to carefully select communities that are responsive to issues they work with and to be quick to respond to trending issues affecting their constituents.

The ability to be highly adaptive is an asset for all executive directors and can be particularly advantageous for new ones given the multiple, concurrent transitions that they may be managing. One grantee stated that BUILD gave them the self-confidence to know they were going to be okay



THE UNRESTRICTED NATURE OF BUILD FUNDS OFTEN HAD SIGNIFICANT IMPACT BY FILLING GAPS.”

and could continue their work despite overwhelming organizational challenges. BUILD's flexibility has been important in **enabling grantees to be open about their internal vulnerabilities and the need to think outside the box about how to reduce them**. One grantee appreciated *"the open, candid, and collaborative working relationship with Ford and the resulting flexibility in how we pursue the objectives of the grant."*

### 3.1.2 TO WHAT EXTENT AND HOW ARE GRANTEES GIVEN THE TIME TO DEVELOP THEIR PROGRAMS APPROPRIATELY? WITH WHAT RESULTS/OUTCOMES?

The long-term and stable nature of the BUILD grant was described as having a largely positive influence on their organizations by 94 percent of the grantees surveyed. As put by one grantee, *"certainly the five-year nature of the grant and the ability to be able to project ahead for some years was a big help."* Stability was seen to benefit both programming and internal processes. Long-term support allowed the grantees to plan for the future and then carry out those plans.

Nine case study grantees stressed that **institutional strengthening requires a long timeframe**, particularly when investing in human resource development, management and training systems, introducing administrative restructuring, and changing organizational culture. The timeframe was stressed as particularly valuable by new executive directors who needed time to undertake comprehensive reforms. One grantee linked this to a long-term change trajectory: *"This helped us start to get out of an eight-year start-up mode and then helped us through the leadership crisis and transition."*

**Long-term support is described as enabling grantees to reflect on and reinforce their relevance** as steps towards strengthening strategic clarity and coherence. One grantee stated that *"BUILD was just enough of a nudge to get us off the path dependency –to say we're taking away your excuses to say we don't have enough money or dedicated money."* For many grantees interviewed, the five-year time horizon was unique compared to the timelines of their other funding in that it enabled them to design and implement strategic plans in a consistent and sequenced manner.

Regarding programming, nine grantees explained that **mounting effective social justice initiatives was often contingent on taking the long view**. They talked about having developed comprehensive strategies such as taking on legal battles or inform legislative processes, mindful of the fact that these processes would take years to come to fruition. Short-term funding modalities leave organizations without resources to continue initiatives when they are only half completed, at the risk of failure and disillusionment if efforts are suddenly dropped. Some grantees had in the past faced the dilemma of deciding whether to initiate new programs with funding they knew would not last for the expected duration of the initiatives.

Six case study grantees interviewed emphasized that they valued the opportunity to try more innovative approaches while **having the time to fail and learn from mistakes**. Four grantees interviewed considered this long-term iterative perspective essential for forming genuine learning partnerships, as opposed to the ad hoc coalitions usually created to implement short-term projects. One grantee stated, *"We are supporting our partners rather than helicoptering in and expecting them to do things. Partners are saying we are supporting them holistically."*



**BUILD PROVIDED CONFIDENCE TO PROCEED WITH PLANS THAT WERE PART OF A LONG-TERM PROCESS NOT SUITED TO CONVENTIONAL FUNDING MODALITIES."**

Relationships with donors also improved for four interviewees that **did not have to devote so much time to managing a large portfolio of small grants**, which in turn changed the nature of their conversations with donors: *“My own work is made more peaceful and confident with long-term support. Can think and not chase money.”*

However, seven grantees visited noted that, **even if five years is an improvement, it is not enough from the broader perspective of the processes required to build sustainability**. This was especially important for the grantees that feared that their systems may return to ‘business as usual’ after BUILD support if funding modalities also return to ‘business as usual.’ As noted by one grantee, *“shifting organizational structures and change takes time. The first year was largely focused on developing our theory of change and strategic plan. The second year focused on sensitizing the network on the plan and internally developing a capacity building plan in order to effectively implement our strategic plan. Realistically, it is hard to say that everything we aimed to do during the BUILD grant cycle will be completed.”*

**Emerging organizations, in particular, found the lack of flexibility in terms of allowing an open discussion about the amount and length of the grant to be problematic.** One grantee expressed, *“more time should be spent at the beginning of the grants making sure they are properly sized (i.e., the total amount) to deliver true organizational strengthening. Ford should resist the temptation to hand out a lot of BUILD grants that are too small to achieve the desired effect. I know grantees always want more money, but in-depth conversations and budget projections could help arrive at the desired result for both parties.”* While the BUILD format of one year of planning plus four years of implementation helped grantees reflect on their ambition and intention, it gave them no opportunity to discuss the support modalities after the end of the planning year—a point when they had a more informed view of the size and length of the grant that would have served their interests best.

### 3.1.3 WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT ENABLING GRANTEEES TO STRENGTHEN THEIR ORGANIZATIONS AS THEY SEE FIT?

Thirteen of the grantees in the sample of 56 organizations visited for the case studies stressed the added value of BUILD’s **explicit commitment to institutional strengthening**, which was considered unique in contrast with most donors’ expectation that all resources be put into programs. Furthermore, 94 percent of the survey’s respondents indicated that dedicated funding to institutional strengthening had a large positive influence on their organization (see Figure 1). According to one grantee, the difference with BUILD’s funding was that it is *“specifically earmarked [dedicated] for organizational strengthening because those investments can be hard to make when program goals feel like a higher priority.”* Another grantee stated, *“We probably would not have spent much on institutional strengthening if we weren’t forced to.”* A further grantee framed this somewhat differently, referring to the importance of not having to make *“strategic trade-offs”* between institutional strengthening and mission-focused work.

Some interviewees pointed out that they did not invest in their organization because BUILD required it; instead, BUILD enabled them to undertake efforts already intended but for which they had lacked resources (and, in some cases, donor flexibility).



**BUILD ENABLED GRANTEEES TO UNDERTAKE INTENDED EFFORTS FOR WHICH THEY HAD LACKED RESOURCES.”**



Grantees were able to tailor expenditure to reflect the institutions that they themselves wanted to build. One grantee explained: *“BUILD’s focus on strengthening institutional capacity for the long-term, in a way that is most appropriate for our organization at this particular point in time (i.e., recognition that there is no “one size fits all” approach to institutional strengthening), has been invaluable.”*

The **mix of general operating support and institutional strengthening funding was considered helpful to think about institutional change and act accordingly.** Being able to combine strategic thinking and direct actions enabled them to better see what organizational changes were leading to in terms of improved practices. One grantee described the combination of institutional and general operating support as a virtuous circle allowing them to demonstrate to staff that BUILD support would not just lead them *“to become more bureaucratic,”* but rather allow them to do more and be more effective. For example, a few grantees in high-risk environments described how general operating support enables them to invest in staying at safer accommodations, while institutional strengthening funding went to protocols to ensure that staff realize that choosing safe accommodation is a requirement. One grantee stressed that BUILD institutional support allowed them to **establish the organizational and physical infrastructure that they needed, and that it is now time to use it.** To that purpose, they are looking for more non-BUILD general operating support and more projects in which to engage the staff and volunteers who enhanced their capacities through BUILD.

### 3.1.4 APART FROM MONEY, HOW DOES THE FORD FOUNDATION PROVIDE ADDED VALUE?

Most grantees interviewed described what they saw as enhancements in their relationships with the Ford Foundation program officers,<sup>3</sup> partly related to BUILD. This varies since changes in Foundation staffing (often related to the term limits on Ford staff), strategies and diverse types of pre-existing links between the Foundation and grantees have often played a bigger role than BUILD in forming these relationships. Most of the established organizations have had long-standing relationships with the Ford Foundation (ranging from ten years to several decades). Somewhat counter-intuitively, the five-year BUILD grant may actually have spurred them to **break out of a tendency to see this relationship as consisting of simply rolling over existing projects,** in that it introduced **new demands for conversations focusing on strategic planning and clarity.**

Nineteen of the grantees visited described a **collegial, supportive, and non-hierarchical relationship with program officers.** One grantee stated, *“in addition to the long-term, flexible financial support that BUILD affords, the relationship with Ford has enabled us to create space to be able to assess our organizational capacity in a candid way. The ongoing, substantive, strategic conversations with BUILD staff and other Ford colleagues have been immensely valuable.”* Eight grantees interviewed referred to open and transparent lines of communication. Another eight described their relationship as satisfactory, but not that different from other donors. Five grantees visited expressed concerns about a **loss of trust due to staff changes among program officers, mixed messages, weak communication, and general lack of transparency at the Ford Foundation.** In some cases, this related to the uneven information flow and to surprises concerning the future in light of changes in strategy. One grantee without a close relationship with the Ford Foundation mentioned that they

<sup>3</sup> This refers to both BUILD program officers and responsible program officers. The diverse relative sets of relationships with these two sets of officers (and by extension, between their relationship with BUILD as opposed to their relationship with the Ford Foundation more generally) makes it impossible to discern clear differences in this regard, though most feedback referred to the responsible program officers rather than BUILD program officers.

had been through four program officers and only been visited once since the start of their grant. BUILD had little impact on a relationship that was primarily influenced by other aspects of their engagements with the Ford Foundation.

**Impressions about BUILD's CCTA vary and, in many cases, were based on very limited exposure** to it or awareness of its existence. A grantee explained their impressions: *"It has not been clear how to access the other components of the program beyond the financial support. Convening seemed more focused on helping to design and improve BUILD than strengthening peer networks."* Nine grantees interviewed saw BUILD efforts in this respect as useful, **particularly as an opportunity for connecting with peers and sharing skills**. Six expressed dissatisfaction about the management of these events. One grantee stated, *"They invited us to a webinar one day in advance, which didn't seem very professional."* A notable concern was the **need for more follow-up, clearer objectives, and explicit plans to turn the inspiration generated during events into useful outcomes**. One grantee noted, *"The BUILD gatherings have been good for relationship building but the content has been mixed in its value for us."* For three grantees, this was the consequence of gathering a group that was too diverse to warrant continued momentum, or of insufficient tailoring of offers to specific needs. One grantee suggested, *"While BUILD plays an instrumental part in field building by organizing and supporting convenings, this support would be more helpful if less restricted to only BUILD grantees. For it to be a genuine ecosystem approach, these gatherings should also ideally include non-BUILD grantees along with the financial support to enable their participation. These broader conversations are critical to the movement and Ford can play a key role in enabling them more."* Some grantees felt it was not a productive use of their time and one was very concerned that repeated invitations to speak at events had become a major drain on their leadership resources.

The positive results of convenings in Mexico and Central America have showed that **CCTA** can be used **as an opportunity to bring together grantees and recognized experts to productively reflect on changing political realities and risks**. These convenings gave grantees a chance to compare their experiences, marked by related but also contrasting contextual factors in terms of the different governments' political stances and types of ties between state actors and organized crime. The selection of relevant topics was the product of close dialogue with the BUILD grantees and other Ford Foundation grantees to identify their interests and where peer exchange would prove most valuable.

The survey found that nearly three in four grantees had some positive views of their experience with the OMT, while interviews showed a more nuanced picture. The OMT, intended as an inclusive and participatory exercise to promote transparency and consensus regarding intended institutional change, is the only fixed requirement for receiving a BUILD grant. Findings present a mixed picture regarding whether it has contributed to these ambitious aims. A significant proportion of the grantees visited (21 of 56) had a generally **positive view, often related to the quality of the consultants contracted to facilitate** the exercise. One grantee noted, *"The organizational mapping tool was really helpful and influential to us in helping us figure out what we needed to work on as well as what eventually went into our strategic planning process. We've continued to make reference to it and even introduced it to our other partners to help them figure out what they need to focus on to strengthen their institutions."* Nine grantees interviewed had mixed views of their experience. One grantee stated that they *"felt more attention was paid to doing the OMT than implementing the priorities. We have been implementing a lot of the aspects of the priorities but would have benefited from more support post-OMT."* Thirteen grantees interviewed indicated that the OMT had little influence on their work in the longer term, and/or that they had limited recollection of it. In line with

findings regarding CCTA, **appreciation of the OMT appears to be contingent on opportunities to turn this one-off diagnostic into a step in a wider process of organizational reform.**

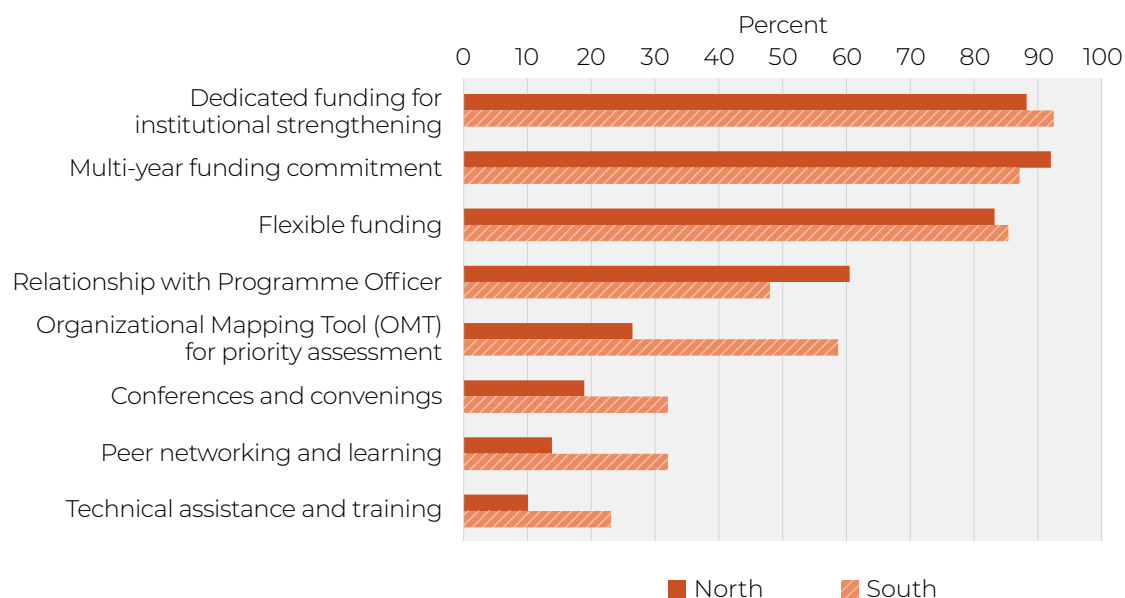
There are major **differences in perceptions between Global North and Global South** in relation to the OMT and CCTA support (see Figure 2). A larger percentage of Global South grantees reported that they had a positive influence on their organization, compared to Global North grantees.

Additionally, organizations with small grants (USD 2 million or less) reported more often that the OMT and CCTA were influential, compared to organizations with larger grants. Smaller grants tended to go to smaller organizations,<sup>4</sup> which may have less access to other forms of training and technical assistance and were therefore more likely to find CCTA support useful.

The OMT had different types of relevance for different categories of grantees. Most notably, **networks found it more useful for thinking about their organizations than about their networks.** Several grantees interviewed pointed out that the OMT was designed for a singular organization and thus only partially applicable to their self-perception as a network or movement supporter. One grantee noted that the OMT and its underlying understanding of institutional strengthening was poorly adapted to a network, especially since the hub did not seek its own strengthening and wanted to avoid becoming a formal NGO. This grantee experienced heavy

**“GRANTEES APPRECIATE THE OMT WHEN LINKED TO OPPORTUNITIES TO TURN IT INTO A STEP IN A WIDER PROCESS OF ORGANIZATIONAL REFORM.”**

**Figure 2. Grantees' responses to the question *How much have the various components of BUILD influenced your organization?* (disaggregated by grantee location, North versus South)**



*Number of observations: 135 grantees (total); 79 grantees (North) and 56 grantees (South)*

<sup>4</sup> Grantees with a 2 million USD grant or less had a median operating budget corresponding to 46% of the median operating budget of all BUILD grantees in the 2016-2018 cohorts.

transaction costs in dealing with expectations that they would somehow fit into the implicit OMT model of organizations. Similarly, two emerging grantees saw the exercise as assuming **a linear and traditional approach to organizational development that simply did not fit** with their relatively flat structure and nature.

Grantees in the leadership transitions case study had largely positive views of the OMT. Among other reasons, this was because it helped them “*uncork*” organizational issues that had been brewing, identify shared priorities for the grantees to address, and provide an opportunity to discuss organizational culture and structure.

Two grantees in the Global South felt it was inappropriate for their realities. One remarked that the OMT “*was ineffective – both the types of questions and the way it was to be filled out by all the staff, it did not allow us to accurately identify organizational management issues.*” Another grantee was more critical, “*The Organizational Mapping Tool was something we had to do for Ford. Frankly, it [...] was not of any use to us and didn’t work for a movement-based organization [which is a] different organizational model. It is a very Western tool. Global South organizations do not fit in. It requires more thinking [from the BUILD team: what is it that they want to achieve with the Organizational Mapping Tool?]*”



THE OMT HELPED LEADERSHIP TRANSITION GRANTEES “UNCORK” ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES THAT HAD BEEN BREWING.”

### 3.1.5 CONCLUSION: ARE THE PRINCIPLES BEING FOLLOWED, AND IF SO, TO WHAT EFFECT?

The findings presented in Section 3.1 demonstrate that BUILD has followed its principles, and that these principles work. Grantees **do know what is best** and are able to take advantage of the flexibility provided to do what they want and need to do. They have had the time to do this in a well thought-through manner. The five-year commitment has enabled grantees, many for the first time, to do what they have always recognized that they need to do to work towards impact. This was made possible as they could overcome the normal pressures that they have faced to devote a large proportion of their capacities to simply keep initiatives rolling. They have also had an opportunity to **make sure that their organizations are fit-for-purpose**. It has often been the first time that they have been able to make these investments.

A clear conclusion arising from the current phase of the Developmental Evaluation is that it would be inappropriate to try to rank these principles in order of importance. They are effective because they constitute a **comprehensive package that supports organizations to get on with their work. They enable grantees to apply their visions, strategic thinking, and ideas.**

## 3.2 IN WHICH WAYS ARE THE GRANTEES’ ORGANIZATIONS INSTITUTIONALLY STRONGER NOW?

Institutional strengthening has been pursued by BUILD grantees in a wide variety of ways in order to address a wide range of organizational concerns. This sub-section of the Interim Report looks at the varied aspects of what institutional strengthening means for the grantees. In accordance with the Evaluation’s developmental approach, findings describe a range of indicators for what constitutes or contributes to a strong institution. These indicators are becoming clearer, but in many instances more data and analysis will be needed to judge where there are clear trends and generalizable conclusions.

This sub-section moreover considers how effective grantees think their BUILD-financed efforts have been, including how those efforts have fit into their respective ongoing organizational change trajectories and how relevant they have been considering challenging external environments. The sub-section explores the major aspects of institutional strengthening observed by the Evaluation Team, roughly in relation to the relative frequency of responses.

The most common finding relates to how BUILD has contributed to growth and to the human resource development and management<sup>5</sup> capacities to handle this growth. The second most common sets of aspects relate to how BUILD has supported strategic thinking (and sometimes strategic planning). Explanations are presented about how BUILD has financed internal restructuring. Initial findings are described regarding what the emerging niche is of BUILD in contributing to financial resilience. Findings are also presented about how (especially) new leaders have drawn on BUILD for support, including how this has been linked to governance. Findings are presented about what BUILD has meant for enabling grantees to invest in a healthy internal organizational environment; what BUILD's contribution has been to what was generally already a high degree of intentionality in diversity, equity and inclusion efforts; and what aspects of safety and security have been addressed effectively as grantees struggle to manage increasingly challenging environments.

Survey findings indicate that grantees for which BUILD represents more than 30 percent of their annual budgets focused on strategic clarity, financial management, communication capabilities and operating reserves. Grantees for which BUILD represents less than 15 percent of their annual budgets focused on information technology, internal communications, and data analytics capabilities. According to the data, grantees for which BUILD constitutes a large share of their annual budget are more concerned about getting fundamentals such as strategic direction and financial sustainability in place. By contrast, grantees for which BUILD constitutes a smaller share of their annual budget are concerned about more specific issues, such as information technology or data analytics.

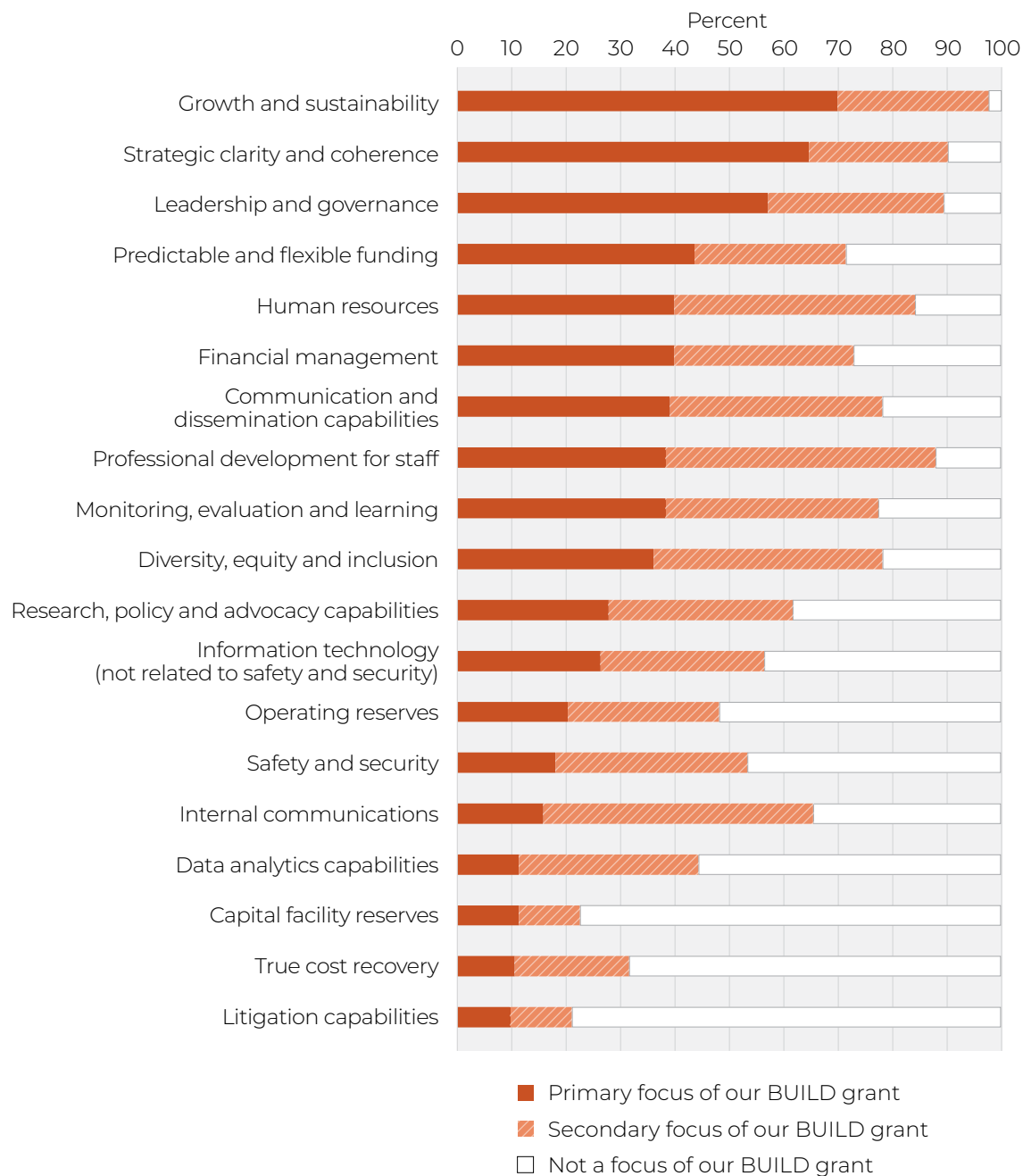
### 3.2.1 SUPPORTING GROWTH THROUGH INVESTMENT IN HUMAN RESOURCES

Within the case study sample, grantees emphasized that BUILD support has enabled them to **grow their organizations**. Twenty-one of the 56 grantees visited reported having used their BUILD institutional strengthening support for investments such as **expanding staff, paying better salaries, and enhancing job security, thereby increasing their human resources capacity**. The use of BUILD to expand and to retain better staff and volunteers for increased programmatic work was most apparent among grantees involved in grassroots mobilization. By contrast, organizations working upstream with advocacy and policy research tended to focus on filling strategic human resource gaps in financial management, administration, knowledge management and communications. Among grantees historically led by people of color in particular, which in most cases were chronically understaffed, the possibility to hire and retain staff allowed senior leadership and executive directors to work on their organizations' vision and mission rather than be consumed by day-to-day operations. One executive director said that she could finally focus on executive director-level duties because there were people on her team that could run programs and operations.

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5 For the purposes of this report, human resources and management refers broadly to the management and development of staff (and in some instances volunteers), including organizational staffing size and structure, roles and responsibilities, professional development, performance management, recruitment, retention, equity, compensation and benefits, employment policies and procedures.

**Figure 3. Grantees' responses to the question *Which areas are you focusing on with your BUILD grant?***



Eleven grantees visited explained that growth was taking place as part of the process of **investing in human resources**, and eight of them emphasized training as an integral aspect of this process. Investments in systems for strengthening their human resources and in better salaries, job security and incentives were made to attract and retain staff suitable both in terms of skills and diversity. Great emphasis has been placed on strengthening, and in several cases creating, human resource

management systems. One organization noted that they had to start from scratch, since *“In Mexico the function of a human resources manager does not exist.”* Grantees referred to making basic investments such as providing formal, legal contracts (sometimes for the first time) and shifting some consultants and short-term staff to a regularized employment. Improvements also included the provision of health and retirement benefits, greater job security, and stability, among other investments in staff care.

Grantees stressed the importance of the **stability and trust that have emerged as a result of their investments in human resources.**

One grantee referred to having entered responsibility for organizational health in the director’s job description as an example of what they recognized as a now obvious step not considered before. One grantee stressed that longer contracts enabled their organization to become more efficient as they no longer needed to retrain staff and rebuild their organizational structures when their funding was replenished in the run-up to each election.



PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING IS CENTRAL TO GRANTEES’ INCREASINGLY INTENTIONAL APPROACH TO HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT.”

Several grantees described having a **pipeline of new talent** as an important strategy to foster organizational sustainability and operationalize their commitment to hiring and retaining people of color. Three new executive directors talked specifically about developing a *“deep bench of people”* who they can work with over time as part of the longer-term vision for the organization: *“The BUILD grant was really instrumental so that we had a structured approach to the succession. It was very reassuring. It was also about identifying what kind of organization we wanted to have. It forced us to think about us as an organization.”*

All but one of the grantees in the Grassroots Case Study have expanded geographically and/or in terms of their range of constituencies. Some grantees have invested additional resources in existing branches and partnerships that were in place prior to BUILD but had very limited activities. They have both increased the scope of their work and specified how they want to enable frontline partners. This **growth in programming requires a larger amount of staff and volunteers, which in turn requires training** within their organizations and among partners. BUILD has helped grantees scale-up in this respect by providing funds to enhance the skills and work quality of volunteers and junior staff. In the US, this kind of institutional strengthening support is in marked contrast to the approach of electorally focused funders that only provide for knocking on doors and collecting voter registrations. One grantee expressed exasperation about such funders, solely interested in numbers of registered voters and oblivious to whether or not voter registration could be used to inform and educate constituencies or to develop the capacities their organization needed to make this happen.

Some organizations in the Grassroots and the Challenging Environments Case Studies have had to deal with the **problem of how to manage growth in the volunteer base to ensure an appropriate balance with staff.** Given the delicate position of many grantees that are dealing with hostile authorities who watch them closely in order to attack them in the event of small mistakes in relation to their legal status and mandate, having too many volunteers without the staff required to train and manage them is risky. BUILD-related investments in staffing and training may ameliorate this challenge.

Emerging organizations differed from the other grantee cohorts visited for the case studies in that they were less focused on growth. As one of the grantees explained: *“We are learning to be okay with not being in every available space and instead work towards mastery of our already existing*

*strengths. Through our strategic plan, we have come up with a clear roadmap on how to stay focused on and measure what we are good at.”* An established grantee that used the grant for a significant increase in staffing stressed that this was not only to undertake more programmatic work, but also to be more effective at what they were already doing via “*strategic growth.*”

### 3.2.2 STRATEGIC CLARITY

Because organizations were already involved in working towards enhancing strategic clarity and coherence before receiving their grants, BUILD’s influence in this respect is sometimes difficult to discern. Most grantees visited reported having experienced **a strong ‘push’ from BUILD to revisit their strategies or otherwise bring forward and better emphasize strategic thinking and planning processes.** Refining their focus meant sharpening their strategies and clarifying their intentions about how to allocate their limited resources. BUILD support freed up their time, therefore allowing them to think carefully about their strategy. Twenty of the 56 grantees visited for the case studies described taking **steps towards concretizing their theories of change, sharpening their results-based management, and generally connecting the dots among fragmented portfolios of activities.** This was possible thanks to having had the funding and headspace required to hone, revitalize, and/or re-think their roles in advancing social justice through planning, reorganizing, and shifting program resources.

Although BUILD grantees that are well established may be assumed to have a self-evident strategic direction, nevertheless, unstable external environments, and changing social justice ecosystems and funding landscapes may lead them to implement radical changes. The grantees in the Established Case Study have sometimes realized that their former purpose or niche is no longer relevant or viable, and that it is time to reflect on whether and how they can remain relevant so as to reconceptualize their legacy. For these grantees, the BUILD grant’s flexibility and stability contributed to the evolution and restructuring of obsolete organizational aspects. Innovations have led to new programs, ways of working and partnerships. In some cases, changes centered around new structures and systems for internal communication and knowledge management intended to generate better integrated and more strategic teamwork. Grantees recognize that, given the increasing constraints on civic space at a global level, **relevance needs to be seen as a moving target:** A legacy can turn into a burden if explicit steps are not taken to analyze what the current environment requires and to adapt decisively.



**A LEGACY CAN TURN INTO A BURDEN IF EXPLICIT STEPS ARE NOT TAKEN TO ANALYZE WHAT THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT REQUIRES AND TO ADAPT DECISIVELY.”**

Despite near universal attention to leveraging the BUILD grant to refine their strategic thinking, some grantees in the sample of 56 did not see a need for elaborate ‘strategic plans’ per se. The BUILD grant was in some cases perceived as refreshing in that it **did not demand the implementation of a strategic planning template,** which is often seen as a potential obstacle to more iterative approaches to reflecting over ‘what they want to be.’ Funder-designated strategic planning procedures generally do not allow for the time and flexibility needed for dialogue among staff, with boards and members, and with partners. Investments in internal communications are also part of how grantees are fostering strategic thinking. BUILD support is recognized as an opportunity to do things differently by financing and allowing time for these conversations across the different levels of their organizations and networks.



Critical reflection on the limits to using strategic planning as a basis for clarity was particularly widespread among emerging organizations, for which this approach reflected standard solutions adopted by more established grantees. Emerging organizations want to be more dynamic and more driven by their own learning and inspiration and generally fear that too much or too formal **strategic planning could lead to path dependencies**. In their view, efforts to follow plans may supersede readiness to ensure that strategies, relationships, and programming reflect the constantly changing social justice ecosystem.

Additional unrestricted funding can, however, raise expectations if it obstructs strategic prioritization. One new leader described how her efforts to promote transformational strategic change were stymied when (partly due to BUILD, but also to rapid growth) the staff wanted “*more of everything,*” while leadership was “*trying to call them to a higher purpose*” and to avoid expenditures that could put sustainability at risk. When change requires difficult decisions, such as shutting down long-standing programs to ensure more relevance in a changing context, unrestricted BUILD funds can help leadership to manage this turbulence. However, this may require a ‘firm hand on the rudder’ if access to unrestricted funds inadvertently encourages staff to make unrealistic demands and diverts attention from intentional thinking around sustainability.

### 3.2.3 INTERNAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

A variety of internal system and capacity development areas are receiving significant direct investment. Importantly, the **development of planning, financial management, project cycle management, reporting and budgeting structures** was mentioned by 24 among the 56 grantees visited for the case studies. Other common priorities mentioned in grantee interviews included internal communications, data management and digitalization, finance and administration, external communications, research and knowledge management, and setting formal corporate policies and procedures.

The **drivers behind the decisions to make these investments vary**. For most established grantees, BUILD support coincided with, and contributed to, the evolution and restructuring of ad hoc or obsolete organizational aspects. As one director stated, “*We had to focus on capacity building, managing outdated systems [...]. This was a radical transformation of our work, to build legs of the stools for building power and public will for these issues.*” Perhaps surprisingly, established organizations (which may be assumed to already have strong systems in place) often used BUILD support to make formal structural changes aimed at renewing organizational and administrative procedures. Two organizations in the Established Case Study used the grant for long overdue transitions from paper-based to digital administrative systems. It emerges as a paradox that established organizations have seen BUILD as an important opportunity to standardize long-established, but still rather informal and ad hoc, practices of the past. This suggests that over the years they may have been too concerned with basic survival, or alternatively been too locked into ‘business as usual’ to address fundamental management needs.



EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS  
WERE PARTICULARLY  
AMBIVALENT TOWARDS  
FORMALIZATION.”

Particularly among emerging organizations, there was significant ambivalence towards formalization, and a concern that efforts in that direction may smother the spark of creativity and openness that grantees treasure as a hallmark of their cultures.

One grantee noted the importance of avoiding the introduction of standard operating procedures: “We are wary about rules that may constrain us from doing good work. We want to cultivate our visceral compass to lead us towards impact. There has been some healthy tension with BUILD due to the pressure to make things visible. We were worried about the tyranny of best practices. Homogenization tendencies with best practices is something we are trying to avoid.” Some grantees visited were concerned about becoming formal, bureaucratic institutions following the path dependent route of simply managing donor funded projects and failing to focus on their partners and constituents (a trajectory often labeled as ‘becoming an NGO’).

### 3.2.4 TOWARDS FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

BUILD seeks to contribute towards financial resilience, i.e., anticipating and coping with financial shocks, in a range of ways. The clearest examples are when multiyear grants help buffer against instability in the wider financial environment, in some cases by encouraging and enabling the creation of stable operating reserves. BUILD has also helped grantees have more forthright conversations with funders about their true costs and their implications for appropriate funding, and ultimately about what ‘strategic finance’<sup>6</sup> might mean for them in a context where resilience in the face of changes in the wider financing landscape is a growing concern.

At the time when the case study interviews were conducted, the financial status of most grantees was relatively stable<sup>7</sup>, but there were increasing anxieties about trends in funding priorities related to political polarization and donor backtracking on commitments to unrestricted support. For many grantees visited, **financial stability after growth was an escalating concern.**

**They feared that significant disruption may arise in those cases where funding is bound to shrink considerably post-BUILD.** As one grantee explained, “without deliberate support to diversify income sources, it would be easy to become dependent on the size of this grant, which would devastate any organization by its term end.”

Eleven of the 56 grantees visited referred to exploring financial diversification, often as an aspiration. Seven grantees described small-scale successes related to public fundraising, individual giving, income from dues, service provision and/or product sales. One grantee asked straightforwardly, “We’re now an organization structurally dependent on \$1m of quasi-unrestricted annual funding. Replacing that funding on equivalent terms when BUILD ends will be a considerable challenge. The level of funding has encouraged us to scale up – how do we manage scaling down when the funding ends?”

The Evaluation Team explored the extent to which grantees are dependent on BUILD using information about the full cohort (e.g., annual budget size, size of BUILD grant). The data shows that the proportion of the BUILD grant in relation to grantees’ annual budget varies considerably. When splitting the full cohort of BUILD grantees into three broad categories of BUILD dependency (low, medium and high), it appears that almost **one-third of BUILD grantees are highly dependent on their grant, with the BUILD grant representing more than 30 percent of their annual budget.**

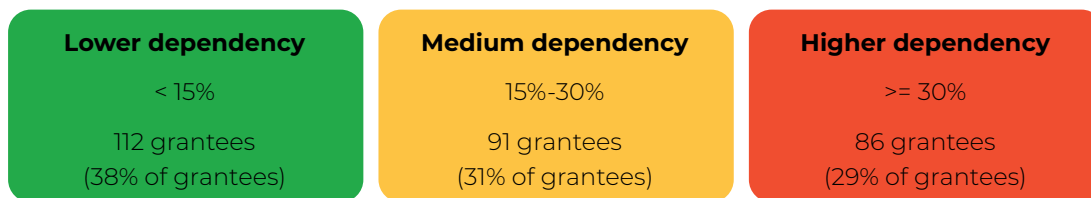


**BUILD HAS HELPED GRANTEES HAVE FORTHRIGHT CONVERSATIONS WITH FUNDERS ABOUT WHAT ‘STRATEGIC FINANCE’ MEANS FOR THEM.”**

6 Strategic finance, also known as strategic financial management, provides long-term planning for ongoing growth and development.

7 Data was collected between August 2019 and January 2020, i.e., before the COVID-19 related crises. Financial stability may have changed significantly since then.

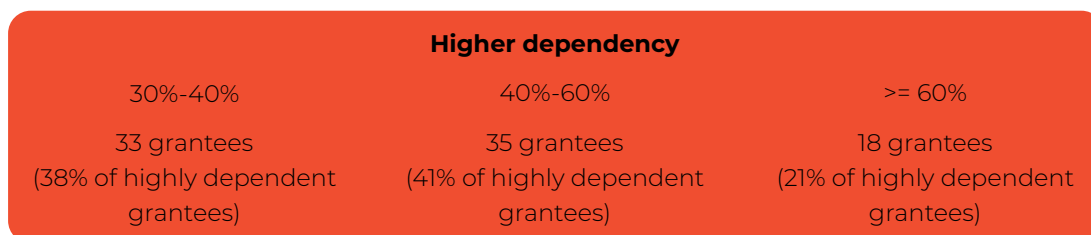
**Figure 4. BUILD contribution to grantees' annual budget (BUILD grant annualized)**



Total: 289 grantees (full BUILD cohort, as of October 2019)

Within the 'higher dependency' category, 18 grantees have BUILD contributing to more than 60 percent of their annual budget, as shown in the figure below. These 18 grantees are primarily grantees from the Global South, grantees with a smaller BUILD grant (less than USD 2 million) and grantees with an annual budget under USD 500,000.

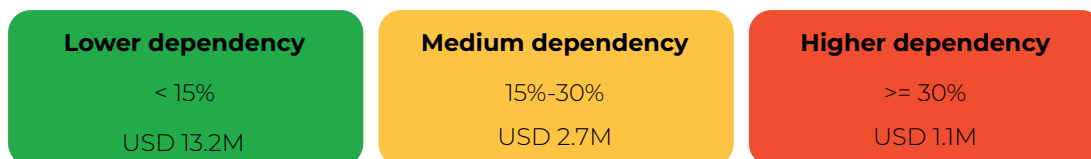
**Figure 5. BUILD contribution to grantees' annual budget in the high dependency category**



Total: 86 grantees; BUILD grant annualized

This indicates that **higher dependency on the BUILD grant is more likely to affect grantees with a smaller annual budget, and predominantly based in the Global South.** As shown on Figure 6 below, the average grantee size varies considerably according to the level of BUILD dependency.

**Figure 6. Average grantee size, by category of BUILD dependency**



Total: 289 grantees (full BUILD cohort, as of October 2019)

Data from the survey also shows that **grantees with a higher dependency reported a larger positive influence from technical assistance and trainings, peer networking, and convenings**, compared to grantees with a lower BUILD dependency.

In addition, all grantees, regardless of their dependency categorization, **reported the same levels of appreciation for the core pillars of BUILD** (i.e., flexible funding, the multiyear funding commitment and dedicated support for institutional strengthening). This suggests that BUILD is an important source of funding for all grantees, including those with large annual budgets that might show a low dependency on BUILD funding overall but actually rely heavily on the BUILD grant as their only source of flexible funding dedicated to institutional strengthening.

While their dependency on BUILD is of concern for many grantees visited, the survey data shows that specific aspects of institutional strengthening for financial resilience, such as true cost recovery, have received relatively little attention from most grantees. As regards the ability to overcome the broader 'starvation cycle' of taking on initiatives without full coverage of overheads and other associated costs, grantees appear to see the Ford Foundation as a model of good donorship, but are unsure of how to leverage this to convince other donors to do the same.

Respondents mostly stress that **the BUILD grant was very important for ensuring predictable and flexible funding**. True cost recovery is much lower on the priority list for grantees with regards to what they reportedly chose to focus on with their BUILD grant. Interestingly, however, investing in financial management and operating reserves is an area that grantees with higher dependency on BUILD ( $\geq 30$  percent) have placed a higher focus on compared to grantees with a lower dependency ratio. This suggests that **financial resilience for high dependency grantees is an area of concern, seen to be best addressed through improving financial management systems and investing in operating reserves**.

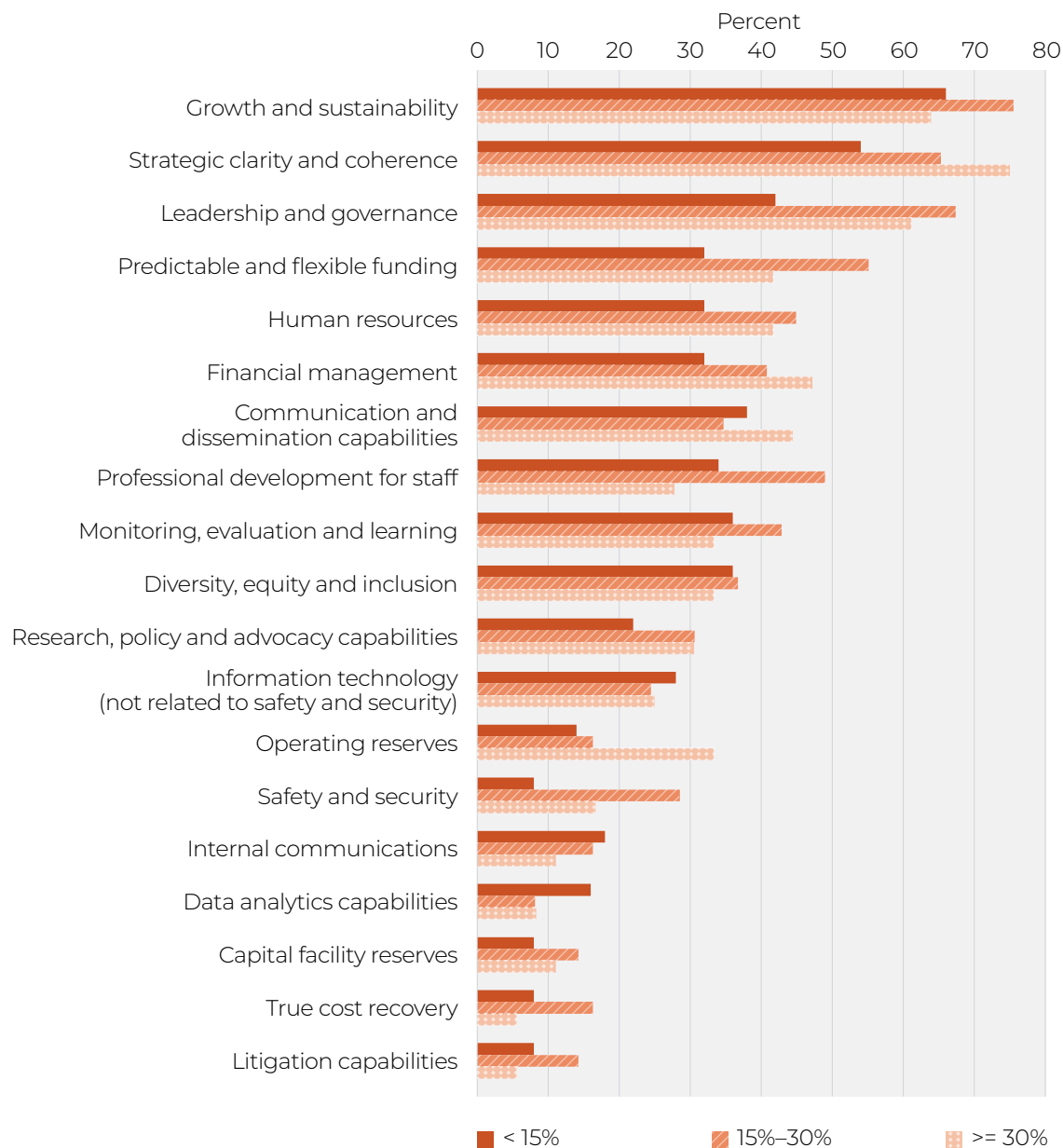
This is corroborated by findings from the case studies, with 15 of the 56 grantees visited referring to significant and/or growing reserves. This may be partly due to BUILD but was often related to their overall financial resilience efforts, most of which predated BUILD. Five grantees were hoping to generate at least a small reserve or savings in general, whereas, another four acknowledged having not given it much thought.

The impact of growth on sustainability remains unclear and may only become apparent after BUILD support ends. In the case of those grantees that decided to expand their staff in connection with institutional growth, and/or to increase salaries and benefits, these significant investments are generally still underway. **Ideally, stronger organizations should be able to attract more funding**, but it is too early to judge whether those investments will prove financially sustainable.

Nevertheless, there is evidence of grantees being able to leverage additional funding only a few years into their BUILD grant. BUILD's role in facilitating the leverage of additional funds was evidenced in the survey: **64 percent of the grantees reported that they have leveraged new funding or partnerships as a result of being a BUILD grantee**, and 46 percent reported that they leveraged the BUILD grant to negotiate improvements in funding size, length, type or conditions for existing funding or partnerships (see Figure 8).

**Grantees with BUILD support in its third year were more likely to report leveraging new funding or partnerships due to BUILD** than those with more recent funds (see Figure 9). This suggests that using BUILD to attract new funding takes time.

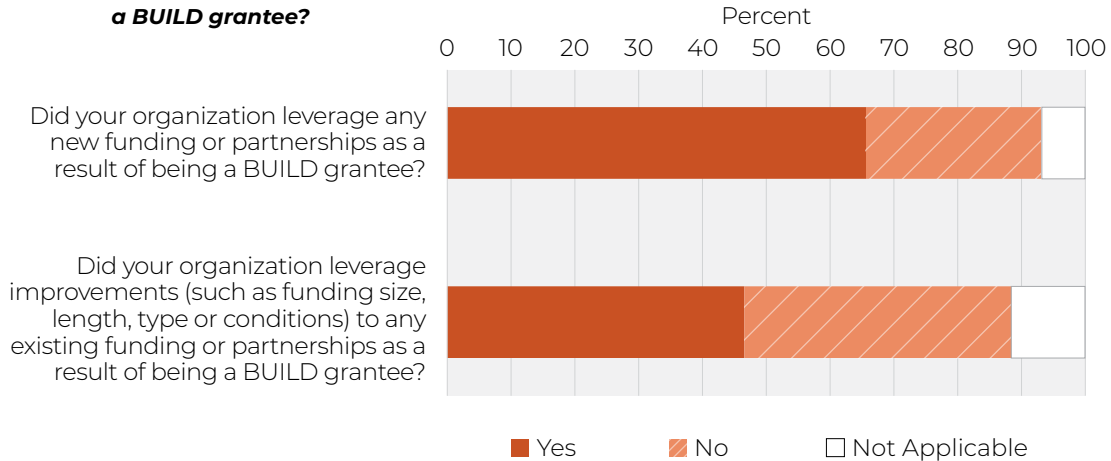
**Figure 7. Grantees' responses to the question *Which areas are you focusing on with your BUILD grant?* (disaggregated by annualized BUILD grant size in relation to annual budget size)**



Number of observations: 135 grantees (total); 50 grantees (<15%), 49 grantees (15%-30%) and 36 grantees (>= 30%)

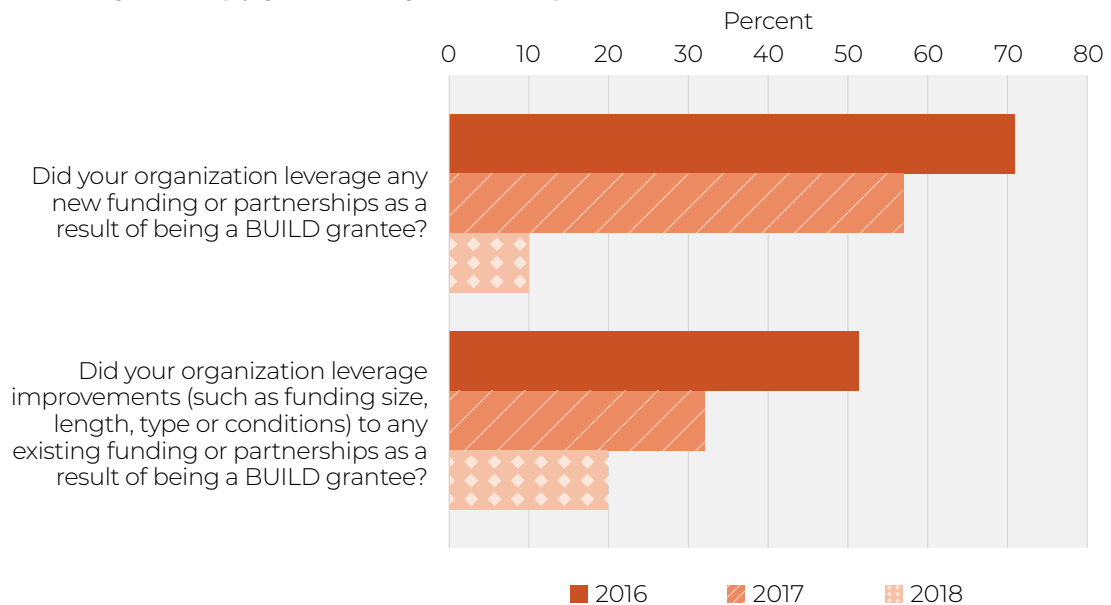
With regards to the evidence collected during grantee visits, eight grantees visited by the Evaluation Team made an explicit reference to their BUILD grant and/or to the Ford Foundation funding more generally providing a 'stamp of approval' that could be used to **leverage support from other donors**. In the words of one grantee, "BUILD has definitely shifted our message to funders. We never even asked for multi-year before [...] I have been emboldened." Two grantees mentioned the credibility

**Figure 8. Grantees' responses to the survey questions *Did your organization leverage a) any new funding or partnerships as a result of being a BUILD grantee? and b) improvements to any existing funding or partnerships as a result of being a BUILD grantee?***



Number of observations: 136 grantees (total)

**Figure 9. Grantees who responded 'yes' to the questions *Did your organization leverage a) any new funding or partnerships as a result of being a BUILD grantee? and b) improvements to any existing funding or partnerships as a result of being a BUILD grantee?* (by grant starting date/cohort)**



Number of observations: 135 grantees (total); 97 grantees (2016), 28 grantees (2017) and 10 grantees (2018)

that comes from being a BUILD grantee as important, and to BUILD as a “third party validator” that may lead to new partnerships. It is too early, however, to assess the strength and implications of this finding regarding the leverage effect.

**Organizations led by people of color found it particularly important to be able to use BUILD’s support to leverage funding from donors resistant to giving a large and long-term grant.**

Furthermore, visibility from BUILD could be leveraged to attract other donors. One grantee explained, *“We have successfully asked other donors to go to multiyear grants. Traditionally, people of color-led organizations are small and told they cannot get large grants because they haven’t managed large grants and that cycle repeats itself. This changed for us. We have more confidence and our funders recognize it. We have grown our capacities to meet the occasion.”*

While a majority of grantees have been successful in leveraging new funding or partnerships, it is important to mention a slightly different reaction from some funders approached for additional funding. One grantee reported hearing **funders stating that BUILD grantees do not require additional support**, and that they therefore focus their funding efforts on non-BUILD grantee organizations. *“There is this underlying misconception that BUILD grantees are now well-off and do not need support,”* the grantee explained. While this may be an isolated case, it flags the potential risk that funders think that BUILD and/or Ford Foundation grantees do not require further funding.

**External shocks and unforeseen events are important reminders** of the fact that focusing solely on traditional strategic finance measures to analyze and predict success/failure provide an incomplete picture of how organizations tackle unexpected challenges. BUILD initiated an effort during the first half of 2020 to provide technical assistance through webinars and follow-up coaching to grantees in the Global South with the goal of supporting their reflections on how to approach uncertainty. Initial observations of these webinars during the Spring of 2020 have reinforced recognition by the Evaluation Team of the value of such CCTA opportunities for peer exchange.

However, these webinars also demonstrated the risk of suggesting that standard solutions for financial resilience may be widely applicable, e.g., when presentations focus on how to roll out relatively standard components of the ‘BUILD toolbox’ that may not be useful in the current context, such as expanding reserves. Hopefully, this will be addressed in subsequent one-on-one follow-up coaching as grantees are assisted to consider what financial resilience means in relation to their own individual risks and opportunities.

### 3.2.5 LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS AND GOVERNANCE

Nearly one-quarter of all BUILD grantees have been going through a **leadership transition**, and it is here that BUILD’s impact on leadership is most apparent. Leadership transitions can be a time of significant transformation in the life of an institution. Several **BUILD grantees, particularly those in the Leadership Transition Case Study, maximized the opportunities for change during these transition processes** by renewing and reimagining vision and strategy; realigning and/or establishing internal culture, systems and practices to meet their goals more effectively and equitably; and creating and/or deepening their external partnerships to build stronger networks and ‘lift up’ the voices of constituents. These internally and externally facing changes occurred among grantees experiencing different types of transitions, including those emerging from leadership crises.

New directors found BUILD particularly important for rethinking their organizations' strategic aims, focusing on the long-term strategy of building their institutions to achieve mission impact, and in some cases for breaking out of past trajectories. One executive director stated, *"The BUILD grant definitely helped me create the [new strategic vision] because we needed space to not just be in the weeds of constant crisis, but to step back and say 'where do we need to go and what will it take to get there?'"* All the leadership transitions analyzed in the corresponding case study took place within approximately two years of a strategic re-visioning and/or planning process. BUILD funding supported internal planning sessions, the engagement of external partners to co-design strategy, and in some cases, the engagement of consultants for technical assistance. One new leader stated, *"The new strategic plan looked through the lens of the leadership transition. It focused on the organization finding its voice, being powerful in the new President's voice to get out there in a huge way."*

Half of the grantees in the Leadership Transition Case Study had an overlap period for the outgoing and the incoming directors to work together. In several of these cases, the BUILD grant specifically supported the overlap. This *"long runway"* has helped ease the disruptions that the leadership transition could create and further solidified the new executive directors in their role. Several grantees talked about testing a *"leaderful"*<sup>8</sup> (as compared to "leadership") model that in their view better represents the values of collective leadership efforts. However, although many grantees interviewed described the ways in which BUILD has supported their organizations' new leaders, it has been difficult to identify its exclusive influence on these processes as they were entwined with many internal organizational leadership processes that had little to do with BUILD per se.

The new executive directors and their staff visited for the Leadership Transitions Case Study valued the moral support of Ford Foundation program officers during crises and the financial security provided by BUILD funding. This was particularly the case where other donors were taking a *"wait and see approach"* to an organization's viability. A few grantees visited used BUILD funds to rebuild their organizations after a crisis, with one stating: *"The 'clean-up' from the crisis meant looking each other in the eye and telling each other what we did wrong and how to move forward. [We have] had to rebuild trust over time, show good will, and a commitment to rebuild an organization that serves everyone rather than some. That's the journey we've had to travel."* Five executive directors of color talked about the **importance of calling on board support** and the need to have board members skilled in governance to facilitate a successful leadership transition. Two grantees talked about the ways in which **boards and organizations need to step up intentionally and differently if they hire leaders of color**: *"The Board may think [that] just bringing in a leader of color [means] you've taken care of equity. But it takes more for the board to do."*

BUILD grants have enhanced the ability of new executive directors to take on the opportunities that a transition can bring and avoid the pitfalls that can cause nonprofits to falter after an executive transition. It is too early to determine if and how BUILD might be particularly well-suited for organizations anticipating an executive transition, but the new executive directors in the Leadership Transition Case Study described how the grant generally enabled them to pivot strategically as the



**BUILD'S FLEXIBILITY AND LENGTH, PLUS THE FORD FOUNDATION'S VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IT SIGNALS, EQUIPPED NEW LEADERS WITH THE FINANCIAL SECURITY, TIME AND SPACE REQUIRED TO ACT BOLDLY."**

8 "Leaderful" refers to the engagement of a broader segment of the staff and governance in leadership efforts, rather than executive leadership being held largely (or exclusively) by an individual executive director.



external environment changed and to begin establishing the organizational infrastructure needed to achieve long-term mission impact.

Twenty-one of the 56 grantees visited for the case studies described their work to renew governance structures, but the extent which this was related to BUILD support was unclear, and evidence related to changes in governance is largely inconclusive. Data from the case studies indicated that many grantees were struggling with governance issues for some time. **Governance approaches are very diverse.** Governance within the Grassroots Mobilizing cohort may consist of member assemblies or boards and committees made up of leaders of local chapters, of local partner organizations, or of leaders of both. Some of the governance processes are rather formal and strict (at least on paper), whereas others are more fluid, driven instead by sometimes shifting coalitions of actors that come together around initiatives they value. It appears that BUILD resources have helped finance some of these transaction costs.

### 3.2.6 HEALTHIER ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Grantees visited often described BUILD as contributing to a healthier organizational culture anchored in trust, transparency, shared values, and diversity in a variety of ways. After a period of largely BUILD-financed growth, 10 of the 56 grantees visited for the case studies described a range of ways in which their development was leading to recognition of a need to adopt more collective approaches and open discussions about trust, values and diversity. New leaders, in particular, used BUILD resources to address long-standing or emerging cultural problems related to rigid hierarchies or to the challenge of managing stress derived from their working environments. One leader stated, *“Everyone I know that has taken over as a new leader has had to invest deeply in a cultural re-set.”*

The grantees in various case studies, but particularly Challenging Environments and Grassroots Mobilizing, described a range of steps being taken to deal with risks of burnout related to a ‘guilt culture’ among staff unable to step back and gain perspective when facing overwhelming needs. This includes investments in self-care via team building, regular staff retreats, closing offices during long holidays to force staff to rest, and generally encouraging people to think about their personal well-being. BUILD has allowed grantees to confidently make these investments and work actively to avoid staff burnout. **Among grassroots mobilizing grantees, there are specific pressures which lead staff to overwork themselves linked to their direct contact with distressed constituents.** One grantee stated, *“Now we’re doing more humanitarian work given what people are facing, but in the long- term we need to think about staff being able a chance to rest and deal with trauma. Have policies, but don’t always apply them [...] It is about organizational culture. We work so much because the communities need us, but it is really toxic.”* Part of the solution has come from better anchoring grantees’ work in local communities through staffing: *“Making sure that it is folks from the community who are knocking on the doors and that they are getting paid a living wage.”*

Among grantees in the Case Study of Organizations Historically Led by People of Color, two factors related to organizational culture were consistently cited: **caring for their staff and defining their space for action.** The latter varied, from providing support and focus for collaboration and engagement in networks and a variety of fields to exercising internal and external leadership roles. Grantees led by people of color in the US organize



FOR SOME GRANTEEES,  
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and deliver training for leaders and others in the field, serve as technical assistance providers and fiscal sponsors, and hold safe physical spaces for the staff and their constituents to come together. For one grantee, creating a physical space where artists could practice was imperative, since the community was undergoing gentrification and experiencing economic inequalities that put such spaces at risk.

In one organization, a rather toxic culture had emerged due to ossified management systems, leading to a rapid and serious deterioration of staff trust and commitment. Discussions with this grantee showed a strong desire, not yet consolidated, to make the organization more attractive for younger and/or more dynamic staff to stay, while realizing that turnover among some of the senior staff who had been in place for many years was healthy, inevitable and needed. In another organization where the situation was less acute, turnover related to loss of staff who were happier with the older ways of working was also seen as natural and healthy. That grantee directed efforts to capturing and retaining the knowledge of these staff as part of measures to ensure continuity, rather than attempting to retain them.

### 3.2.7 DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Many of the grantees are leveraging BUILD resources to launch initiatives centering on organizational **diversity, equity, and inclusion**. New leaders are focusing efforts on **racial equity**, in particular, as a crucial dimension of institutional strengthening. One grantee explained how they *“made a really conscious decision to be a more diverse organization and serve more diverse communities [...]. I think what helped [the organization] become deeper with communities and organizations is it, kind of, reoriented its focus [...] internally, the goal was to create an organization that was staffed up with people that look like the communities [it is] serving.”* Several new leaders have sought to remind donors, including the Ford Foundation, that changing institutional culture is a long-term challenge: *“Once you start to open up large questions around how do organizations work, what is the culture, and who has the power in organizations [...] those won’t be easy questions to solve for, and you have to finish the job.”*

Grantees describe a range of work with diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the US it is mostly related to race, whereas in the Global South it is more focused on gender, and sometimes youth. Other aspects, however, are not being widely addressed. Ableism and ageism were rarely raised as concerns.

Six grantees interviewed for the case studies made passing references to their lack of indigenous people on staff, but for them employing indigenous staff members was not the main concern. They were instead committed to more concerted outreach to their indigenous constituencies and the indigenous-led organizations in their networks.

Some network supporting grantees (in both the Networks and Grassroots Mobilizing Case Studies) sought greater equity among network members, shifting sub-granting policies to give greater support to newer, smaller organizations and/or those led by people of color. Other grantees applied equity to adjustments in pay scales as well as shared power and responsibility among staff within the organization.



**DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION WORK IS MOSTLY RELATED TO RACE IN THE US, AND MORE FOCUSED ON GENDER AND YOUTH IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH.”**

### 3.2.8 SAFETY AND SECURITY

Grantees are facing intensified risks, primarily associated with a shrinking civic space as a consequence of political efforts to stigmatize civil society, eliminate opposition and stimulate hostility towards their organizations among the general population and civil servants. Twenty grantees stated that BUILD has assisted them with strengthening their digital security in particular. It also supported the design, improvement, and implementation of security protocols to respond to a range of hazards in often incremental ways (for 10 of the 56 organizations visited). Grantees whose institutional vulnerability is related to physical premises saw BUILD as unique in allowing the use of resources to renovate and build safer offices.

With the **global rise of political leaders who are hostile to civil society**, grantees have experienced a precipitous increase in risks, including death threats, assassination attempts, abductions, arrests, and physical attacks.

Such hostility has also encouraged other forms of aggression from reactionary actors. Specifically, grantees report an increase in what can be characterized as **regulatory, legal, and administrative hazards**. Four grantees in the Challenging Environments Case Study stressed the importance of strengthening internal legal and administrative structures to manage increasing politically motivated scrutiny. Three grantees mentioned having had to deal with defamation and libel suits from politicians and powerful businesspeople. This set of risks also involves grantees' more subtle concerns regarding the considerably more intense monitoring of administrative requirements in the Global South, and the narrowly defined adherence to the restrictions inherent in 501(c)(3) status in the US. Both are perceived by grantees as directly related to efforts to limit their work. **BUILD's support devoted to stronger administrative capacities has been important for the grantees to develop their potential to respond to these hazards.**

BUILD has enabled grantees to **bring in technical support as needed to enhance their resilience to the risks they face**. This includes strengthening digital security awareness and procedures for managing social media engagements. The release of data and reports is an example of an area where systems are being tightened to reduce risk. Caution sometimes relates to how to engage with social media, manage backlash, or file defamation suits. It may involve being more meticulous about data before releasing a report to lessen the risk of losing credibility in the event of an onslaught of media attacks. One grantee brought up how they were making sure that all staff were clear regarding who makes the decision about if and when to release a report, so that steps to deal with backlash were in place and coordinated. In various ways, grantees expressed how they are reflecting more on how their reporting and advocacy could be (mis)interpreted and manipulated, and the implications of this for generating risk for them and their constituents and partners.

In addition to relatively observable, physical, digital, and legal/administrative safety issues, feedback overwhelmingly emphasized how grantees are equally concerned about **psychosocial well-being**. This relates to how they are working to better manage organizational culture factors in various ways. Some grantees in the Challenging Environments Case Study noted that they had to work on developing more of a culture of protection within their organizations (i.e., on being more open about vulnerabilities and their needs to manage stress). This includes encouraging respect for safety protocols and generally discouraging high risk behavior.



THE GLOBAL RISE OF  
POLITICAL LEADERS  
HOSTILE TO CIVIL SOCIETY  
HAS LED TO INCREASED  
RISKS FOR GRANTEEES.”

### 3.2.9 CONCLUSIONS: WHAT HAS BUILD MEANT FOR THE EMERGENCE OF STRONGER INSTITUTIONS?

BUILD clearly works for most aspects of institutional strengthening. Clearly, bigger institutions can do more programming. BUILD has provided the resources for many grantees to grow, while also enabling them to manage this growth. This has been primarily through improved human resource development and management; reform of internal systems; by promoting a healthy organizational culture; and by financing access to skills and guidance for grantees to strengthen their diversity, equity, and inclusion. BUILD has also ensured that these internal processes are guided by processes and leaders who are enabled to think and act strategically and in ways that are safe in relation to increasingly threatening environments.

### 3.3 HOW DOES THE BUILD APPROACH CONTRIBUTE TO NETWORKS?

BUILD is specifically intended to contribute to networks (as well as individual organizations), but the theory of change is rather unclear, most notably with regard to how a grant to an individual organization contributes to change in networks and fields within which it operates. This section of the Interim Report considers what BUILD has contributed to in the work of a range of organizations that operate as 'hubs,' or primary supporters, of networks and/or coalitions that include a number of 'nodes' or engaged partner organizations. The section also focuses on organizations that work within a variety of constellations engaged in grassroots mobilizations, some of which are 'hubs' and others that have local branches that in turn act as hubs for community level informal partners. The findings presented emphasize how BUILD's contributions have supported more strategic clarity; how this clarity has involved a greater degree of intentionality and capacity development in supporting smaller grassroots partners; and how strengthened partnerships have in turn involved a role whereby grantees contribute to capacity development among these partners.

#### 3.3.1 STRATEGIC CLARITY IN NETWORK AND FIELD ENGAGEMENT

Over 75 percent of the grantees surveyed reported that BUILD enhanced their work to support their fields and made their networks stronger. Grantees involved with networks<sup>9</sup> tend to frame their network engagement as part of a long-term strategy. BUILD's contribution to their work reflects an ongoing process of becoming central to their fields. The fact that 14 of the grantees in the sample of 56 organizations visited for the case studies described themselves as leaders in their networks appears to reflect why they were chosen for BUILD support rather than a result of having received this support. Established grantees generally described themselves as well-positioned in their fields prior to BUILD. Grantees often referred to having **strengthened their engagement in networks, coalitions, and movements during and due to BUILD support, but these steps have largely been incremental** and there are no indications of this being a fundamental change.

However, there are **subtle ways in which BUILD supported** grantees' confidence and reflection about their place in their field. BUILD's contributions included enhancing the strategic clarity of their network engagement efforts through **detailed analysis of where impact was needed and where coalitions could be formed**. For example, people of color-led grantees in the US used BUILD resources to research historical patterns of marginalization as input to bring together coalitions to discuss common interests and goals.

<sup>9</sup> This is difficult to quantify due to varying definitions of networks, coalitions, fields and movements, but most of the BUILD grantees are engaged in one or more multi-member connected group to a significant extent.

Ten of the grantees visited for the case studies related their strategic positions in their fields to stronger **communications and related visibility**. Among emerging organizations, BUILD appears to have played a significant role in helping grantees find more forceful ways to articulate their role. As a result of in-depth reflection on their strategic direction, these organizations have gained clarity and confidence in their external communication strategies. As explained by one of the grantees, *“before BUILD, we were a niche organization, only people who knew us knew what we did.”*

Five grantees of the 56 visited highlighted how BUILD funding enabled them to **move from strategic aspirations to actions by providing additional resources to conduct focused work across their networks**. One grantee stated, *“We’d been trying to work effectively in broader networks but had little time to do that because we were chasing money, now can do that.”*

BUILD also helped the grantees to step back and reflect on how much and where they want to ‘network’ with other organizations or whether they should focus on other priorities. Noting that network participation per se is not a panacea, one grantee stated, *“We have to debate whether this is the best use of time for us. We are trying to leave the networks that hold us back and where we cannot get work done.”*

BUILD has helped network-supporting and network-engaging organizations to jointly and actively reflect on their relevance. Nine of the 56 grantees visited spoke of working towards tighter strategic coherence based on more granular analysis of what they need to do together to achieve greater mission impact, thus moving away from acting as a host for a *“collection of unrelated projects.”* Relatedly, many grantees have changed their way of ‘being a hub’ and shifted from coordinating and agenda-setting to facilitating and *“lifting up”* more localized and node-driven agendas. One grantee referred to this transition as *“devolution thru affiliates.”* Affiliates and nodes of the grantees are shouldering a stronger role in strategic planning or sub-granting decisions. For some grantees, this involves convening and connecting a node with sub-networks that act independently but with support from the hub-like organization. BUILD often provided the resources and impetus to bring together network members to do big picture strategic thinking and network imagining. The size and flexibility of the resources enabled network supporting grantees to think about how to share financial and technical resources in order to strengthen their partners. One grantee described this as a shift in their nodes’ role from *“transactional member”* to *“transformative partner.”*



**BUILD CONTRIBUTED TO ENHANCING THE STRATEGIC CLARITY OF GRANTEE’S NETWORK ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS VIA ANALYSIS OF WHERE IMPACT WAS NEEDED AND WHERE COALITIONS COULD BE FORMED.”**

### 3.3.2 STRENGTHENED LINKS TO THE GRASSROOTS

Grantees that focus on mobilizing people and informal groups at the grassroots have expanded their range of constituencies and/or expanded geographically by investing resources in new and existing branches and partnerships. With BUILD support, grantees have increased the scope of their work and engaged more intentionally with frontline partners. This includes sharpening their narratives about fighting discrimination through closer dialogue between local and central levels, and by expanding BUILD financed training.

Geographical factors have led grantees to use the grants in various ways. The scale and costs of managing headquarters/hub to grassroots/node relations vary according to the different geographies.

Working within a single state in the US is very different from operating a national organization in large countries such as Indonesia or across a global network. The **vastly different geographies also influence their ambition levels in relation to reaching local communities.** In Indonesia, the two grassroots mobilizing grantees work on a national basis in what is the fourth most populous country in the world across a vast and diverse archipelago. The branches are small units with responsibilities for trying to reach out to millions of people. As such, their engagements in grassroots mobilization are mostly about creating conditions and communication conduits, rather than actual community organizing per se. A basic infrastructure for this was in place pre-BUILD but was generally very weak. BUILD has helped to strengthen these small offices with huge constituencies through training, equipment, and by helping them with general operating support to achieve some basic 'wins' in terms of local control over natural resources and indigenous rights.

Some grassroots grantees in the Global South stress their **legitimacy to genuinely represent grassroots communities** and view their role as more fundamental compared to that of more elite-led civil society organizations (particularly international NGOs). In Indonesia, for example, grantees saw their grassroots role as providing a counter-narrative to that promoted by the very strongly resourced international conservation NGOs. Collusion between these international organizations and government to expel people from the forests and criminalize their livelihoods has been a major concern. The grantees are working to ensure that these conservation NGOs are not seen as legitimate actors in the networks involved with rights to land and natural resources. At a time when **civil society organizations are coming under greater scrutiny globally, the ability to demonstrate such legitimacy by amplifying the voice of community-level partners is of growing importance.**

An analogous example in the US is one grantee that stressed how they had been able to represent local grassroots actors and help them assume an important place in leading civil society. In the past, national legacy civil rights organizations with little or no experience, capacity or legitimacy at local level had tended to 'parachute in' with far greater financial resources than those available to local actors. This was especially common during voter registration and mobilization periods. This grantee worked within state-wide networks to redress this imbalance and seek to prove that there were more legitimate and effective alternative organizations, with institutional structures and a foundation of trust already in place among local communities.

BUILD enabled more grassroots-oriented networks to invest in strengthening and even operationalizing the overall institutional structures of grantees' network relationships according to largely pre-existing goals. Overall, these grantees are satisfied and even **proud of how they were already positioned in their networks before BUILD but want to act on this positioning in a more forceful, effective, and rigorous manner.** BUILD is helping them to do this. Training, in particular, is being used to ensure broader understanding of common goals and of how organizations in networks operate. The nature of these efforts to 'get on the same page' differs according to the formality and relative looseness of the networks, coalitions, or movements. For some, getting on the same page is addressed through assemblies, platforms, and governance structures. For others it is about using hotlines and other technologies to not only provide advice to members, but also to listen to the issues they are raising and make sure that these are reflected in the organizing and policy agendas.

Some grassroots organizing grantees are being more intentional and strategic about where they act to expand their networks. For example, some are striving to have greater representation in state capitals, some on reaching youth, and some on achieving a more representative racial/ethnic balance in their membership. This may involve developing more regionally specific awareness where communities may have vastly different cultures, priorities, political threats, and advocacy

opportunities. Regularly **connecting disparate groups and leaders is a way to enhance familiarity with local issues and generate trust in places where the organization does not have a strong historic footprint.**

Network expansion and/or consolidation costs money, and BUILD is paying some of those costs. For many, this involves bringing representatives of grassroots partners to capital cities and political forums where they can ‘speak truth to power,’ thereby ensuring that hub/headquarters does not ‘speak on behalf of’ the grassroots members.

Communications and data collection investments have been used to craft narratives that can be the basis for broad buy-in. In various ways, the grantees tend to describe efforts to forge common agendas as being about developing these shared narratives and strengthening their credibility and depth through a discussion about data. Intensifying and legitimizing the voice of local partners is central to what the organizations do, and BUILD is part of making this happen in a stronger way.



**INTENSIFYING AND  
LEGITIMIZING THE VOICE  
OF LOCAL PARTNERS  
IS CENTRAL TO WHAT  
GRANTEES DO.”**

### 3.3.3 CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT TO SMALLER PARTNERS

Ten of the 56 organizations included in the case studies referred to an **improved ability to support smaller organizations** that tended to be marginalized in terms of access to philanthropy and other support. For some grantees interviewed in the Networks and Grassroots Mobilizing Case Studies this was linked to **larger and better tailored regranting procedures** while others focused on **stronger capacity development initiatives**. Grassroots organizing grantees have invested in creating or strengthening training units dedicated to far-flung partners and branches. Those acting as network hubs emphasized that they **have strengthened their communications and thus become more influential in mobilizing their smaller partners** to challenge prevailing narratives that underpin discrimination. For example, one grantee changed from using a center hub model that supported its network with technical assistance around centrally determined issues and campaigns to a model that supports the network members to do what they think is important locally and connects them to each other for mutual support. One grantee described this as driving changes in their relationships saying, *“It is not just a transactional phone call anymore.”*

Ten grantees of the 56 included in the case studies described significant progress in terms of **more effectively reaching otherwise marginalized organizations**, including informal groups and movements. This progress tended to be linked to having a better awareness of their smaller partners’ realities, capacities, potentials, and limitations. One grantee explained the stretch that is needed to support smaller partners: *“Most of our federation leaders came up from organizing, so they don’t know about human resources law, maintaining a work culture or financial management.”* Other hub grantees in the Network and Grassroots Mobilizing Case Studies emphasized that many of the relatively informal organizations they support are unlikely to even try to become capable of meeting the formal demands of public institutions and large funders, and that access to a hub was therefore essential.

For several of the grantees, new capacity development roles have included a **‘BUILD-like’ shift from investing only in partners’ programming to also being concerned about their organizational capacity**. For four organizations, the last five to ten years of their work has centered around activities such as supporting independent filmmakers, setting up music and film schools, or providing support

to emerging women leaders. Since securing unrestricted funding from BUILD, they have shifted their working model towards supporting other organizations in their field to do precisely what they did before. By **shifting from being doers to capacity builders**, these organizations found opportunities in other countries to work with partners that can replicate or adapt their model with financial and technical support. Building capacity in other organizations instead of opening new branches or offices of their own to expand the reach of their activities is how they choose to serve constituents.

Capacity development roles underpin devolution and can include basic support for offices, computers, and IT for their nodes and/or branches at decentralized levels. Some grassroots mobilizing grantees created training systems to support their branches, which then support local networks in basic skills to run their relatively informal organizations and undertake their core tasks in community work. Some grantees specifically mentioned provision of training for partners in social media and digital security. Most of the grantees already had at least rudimentary systems in place to grant to local partners and generally invest in the human and physical resources of their local partners. BUILD has contributed to greater intentionality and effectiveness around this.

These findings indicate that BUILD's contribution to fields and networks has been about changing the quality (and occasionally the quantity) of relationships. The qualitative changes grantees are catalyzing in their own organizations for more equitable culture and management systems are often **a guidepost for having stronger, more equitable and authentic external relationships**.

### 3.3.4 CONCLUSIONS: WHAT DOES BUILD MEANS FOR NETWORKS?

#### **BUILD does work for networks, but in different ways than it does for individual organizations.**

This has largely to do with how being stronger internally has enabled grantees to be better partners with smaller nodes, isolated branches and informal groups of people who do not want to 'become an NGO.' Strategic and more informed conversations have been supported. These conversations cost money, particularly among networks that are spread across vast geographical areas, that are reliant on close and trusting dialogue at grassroots levels, and, above all else, where these conversations must lead to amplifying the voice of those constituents and communities that BUILD is meant to support. BUILD has contributed to the creation of important 'mini-BUILD' processes wherein the capacities of partners are enhanced, better enabling them to act as equal partners in their fields. This has been done while also recognizing that most have no intention to become more formal organizations directly accessing funds from big philanthropy and other large institutions. By funding organizations to better engage in their fields, BUILD creates a ripple effect beyond strengthening the organizations.

### 3.4 IN WHICH WAYS HAS BUILD CONTRIBUTED TO ADVANCES IN SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Despite facing significant obstacles and challenging environments, the grantees have found opportunities to achieve mission impact. Many grantees describe almost surprising successes and near successes in increased civic engagement, protecting natural resource tenure rights, and changing inequitable policies. For the most part, it is too soon since they received their grants to verify if mission impacts such as these have been expanded significantly and consolidated. BUILD has helped grantees position themselves to be able to disrupt growing discrimination. Most organizations working in the US and the Global South expressed confidence that their mission and purpose were more relevant than ever in the aftermath of the 2016 US elections and other problematic post-electoral processes in e.g., Brazil, Mexico and El Salvador.



At this point, initial clues have been identified about how institutional strengthening outcomes are creating conditions and providing agility for grantees to take advantage of opportunities and eventually achieve fundamental change. The Evaluation Team expects to find stronger evidence in the next wave of data collection, but verifiable impacts will only emerge later. Structural shifts are long-term processes, and although BUILD can contribute to conditions and grantee 'positioning' to disrupt discrimination, these changes are largely beyond its sphere of influence.

When describing their theories of change for how BUILD-supported institutional strengthening has been expected to contribute to mission impact, seven main aspects emerged, listed here by order of prevalence:

- Changes in organizational culture and ways of working (together with patience and financial stability) are leading to stronger partnerships as basis for mission impact.
- A strategic rethink is enabling response to challenges such as the rise of the right, impunity, decline of anticorruption institutions, failures/limits of past modus operandi, past lack of sufficient attention to racial equity and insufficient attention to culture.
- Geographical/network shifts are leading to more regional/decentralized work, including a rethink of the network roles and functions and reinforcement of network/community leadership to respond to changes in ecosystem.
- Being able to hire/expand/renew/capacitate staff is enabling more concerted action to address emerging challenges, scale-up effective programs and generally move from words to action.
- Stronger administration, clearer/formal procedures and human resource development/management structures are being put into place as a precondition for acting effectively towards impact.
- Greater retention and flexibility in staffing are providing a platform to act in a nimble and innovative manner.
- Stronger communications/advocacy are influencing the public narrative.



GRANTEES HAVE BEEN CONFRONTING CHANGES THAT CONSIST OF NEW MANIFESTATIONS OF LONG-STANDING STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION AND OTHER DETERIORATING CONDITIONS.”

This section of the Interim Report describes how these yet only partially realized processes are perceived to be contributing to initial mission impacts, i.e., actual empowerment and reduced discrimination, and how grantees envision (or re-envision) their ways forward. BUILD-financed drivers of these processes are explained, most notably enhanced strategic communications and use of knowledge, and a better positioning within fields. Conclusions are presented regarding what would appear to be the road ahead, taking into account the uncertainties facing the grantees in 2020 and beyond.

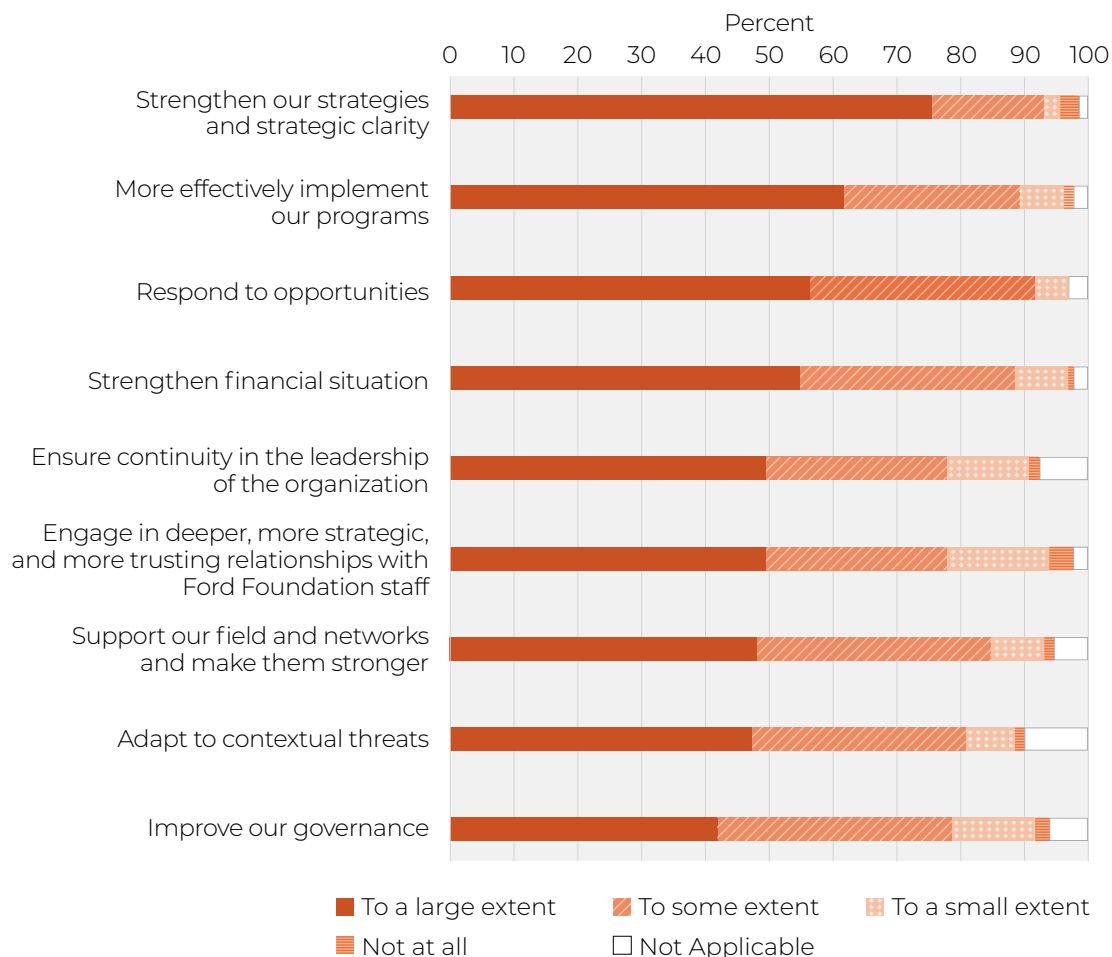
### 3.4.1 THE ROAD TOWARDS MISSION IMPACT

When asked about how they were working to disrupt inequality, 16 of the grantees interviewed mentioned processes and commitments that were in place before BUILD, suggesting that they were in fact selected for support due to their pre-existing ability to achieve impact, with the expectation that they would be able to do more. Considering the fact that these **grantees were generally highly effective before they received support**, the evaluation suggests that, **rather than having a 'transformational' effect, BUILD helped them do their work better.**

In interviews, grantees tended to describe processes rather than actual impacts. The survey highlighted how BUILD’s main contributions to the goal of advancing social justice were linked to: strengthened strategic clarity; more effective implementation of programs; greater ability to respond to opportunities; strengthened finances; and continuity in organizational leadership (see Figure 10).

A wide range of grantees interviewed (particularly among the Leadership Transitions and Established Organizations Case Studies) interpreted their context as a call to reinforce – while also revamping and updating – their historic vision and missions, in some cases primarily in response to changes in their context. Emerging organizations, in particular, have engaged in a process of ensuring that their mission is central to the type of organization they aim to be and stress that their **aspirations are different from more established actors in their field.**

**Figure 10. Grantees’ responses to the question *Which factors of your organizational strengthening have been instrumental in enhancing your organization’s impact on its mission?***



Number of observations: 136 grantees (total)

Organizations founded and led by people of color must navigate many complex challenges as they pursue their mission. BUILD supported grantees to grow and strengthen their power through increasing their presence and leadership. With infrastructures in place, most grantees shared how they are more present at decision-making ‘tables’ and conversations. This was partly due to the fact that BUILD granted them the financial resources required to hire more people and redistribute workloads so that leadership could be more active in ‘collaboratives.’

BUILD has been used by most of the grassroots grantees to address obstacles and gaps in their organizational structures and capacities, rather than for transformational change. These organizations were already generally strong in their evolving strategic thinking but had few opportunities and insufficient human resources to put this thinking into action. Gaps were mostly about financing the conversations within their networks, honing their narratives, formalization, and in some cases strengthening the operational capacities of their rather weak, skeleton structures at local level. One grantee stated, “Where we stand overall is that we have built the house, now it is time to use the house. The house is still empty. The needs are still there. We have divisions working with all of these issues. We need to use them to tackle the problems. We have systems in place, now we are ready to become more operational.” BUILD has helped grantees move towards this operationalization, which will ultimately be how impacts are achieved.

### 3.4.2 USING KNOWLEDGE AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TO DRIVE CHANGE

A striking finding of the first wave of the developmental evaluation has been that BUILD was used by grantees to **develop knowledge as a tool for becoming more impactful**. This use goes beyond what civil society organizations usually classify as ‘knowledge management’ to include the collection of better quality and more useful data by headquarters and its use for more accurate planning based on understanding of constituents’ realities.

For some grantees, there is also an emphasis on **enhancing the knowledge of their constituents**. Many grantees are engaging in community level awareness and engagement. This is not a new role but (due in part to BUILD-financed investments in staff, IT, etc.) an infrastructure of trained staff and more clearly defined operating procedures are in place to promote more profound change.

One grantee stated, “With comms we want to bring a new level to the arena of battle and contestation... now see that we need a Gramscian approach to changing minds.”<sup>10</sup> Among the grassroots mobilizing grantees this sometimes involves voter education and awareness raising, including education directed at constituents who themselves hold racist or homophobic views. In other cases, it is about supporting them to learn to know how to use data to influence policy themselves and to ‘speak truth to power.’ The role of BUILD investments in capacity development to support this consciousness raising has been subtle. Grantees generally had some systems in place for this already, but BUILD resources helped them scale up and improve the quality of training and dialogue between headquarters and partners working directly with constituents (and/or the direct training of constituents).



VIA BUILD-FINANCED INVESTMENTS, GRANTEE PROMOTING COMMUNITY LEVEL AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT HAVE TRAINED STAFF AND PUT IN PLACE CLEAR OPERATING PROCEDURES TO PROMOTE CHANGE.”

<sup>10</sup> Gramscian refers to ideas developed by Antonio Gramsci about the importance of developing intellectual leadership from among marginalized populations as the most appropriate and effective way to drive social change. See e.g. Mayo, P. (2008) “Antonio Gramsci and his Relevance to the Education of Adults”, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 40, Issue 3, pp. 418-435.

Among the two Indonesian grantees visited, the common denominator for achieving mission impact has been found in representing grassroots communities and helping these communities to reflect on the need to protect indigenous and community land rights. These grantees have been very involved in ensuring that local government is aware of and replicates national norms for community control over natural resources within their jurisdictions. These are not new agendas, but **BUILD investments in strengthening both the internal communication between headquarters and branches, and the branches' knowledge and general operational capacities** have **enhanced outcomes in influencing local government policies and practice**. One grantee described their approach to anchoring strategic clarity in grassroots perspectives as *"We only bring up the big issues if they can be tracked back to the local process."*

Choice of focus areas for mission impact is, thus, related to how to identify and utilize the added value of having an engaged grassroots constituency, both to leverage the credibility that this provides and to ensure that the constituents recognize that this is their voice.

A number of grantees across the case study categories are using research and publications to engage in policy advocacy. For example, one grantee described how they used BUILD resources to focus their energies and create a research report that illustrated how arts organizations led by people of color were underfunded and underrepresented. Their research was presented to policymakers and funding institutions to argue that these organizations are important to the culture of the city and the community, and they deserve to receive funding and support. Another grantee conducted a research project to analyze and raise awareness on how certain groups are fueling hate and discrimination against marginalized communities.



*WE ONLY BRING UP THE  
BIG ISSUES IF THEY CAN  
BE TRACKED BACK TO THE  
LOCAL PROCESS."*

Some Established grantees recognize that before BUILD their advocacy efforts were not sufficiently visible and effective, and are focusing BUILD investments on revisiting their communications strategy, together with their use of data and knowledge management to enhance dynamism in their work to drive change. A renewed take on advocacy to respond to changes in their field and political contexts has sometimes been described by grantees as being part of ensuring that they do not become complacent in their approach to publications, seminars, etc. For some of the 56 grantees visited, this was seen as being about ramping up advocacy efforts. For others it was about **revisiting the nature and focus of their advocacy**.

Grantees have taken time to reflect deeply on strategic priorities while also acting more decisively in their communications efforts through a seemingly contradictory 'patient but nimble' approach to messaging. Examples of this include quickly re-working websites to respond to emerging issues, and creating databases and designing new outputs that enable staff to engage in the policy sphere in 'real time' (as opposed to producing policy reports that may come out too late to influence the policy discourse at key junctures). For some, this has been a major change in their modus operandi.

For two research-oriented grantees, the changes tended to center around **breaking down old, ponderous silos and ossified internal communications channels within organizations** through new structures and systems for communication and knowledge management. Their intention was to generate closer and more mission-driven teamwork. In these examples, researchers had drifted towards each pursuing their own individual projects (a tendency that is common in older research institutions). The BUILD-financed structural reorganization forced them to work together in joint programs across the organization. The reorganization was quite painful and led to staff attrition

among researchers who were comfortable with the old order, but was starting to show results. One staff member in the other research grantee stated, *“We are like a whole new organization. Those who just wanted a place to operate their consultancy or be an academic left. Those that wanted to build a new thing stayed and I am really excited to see where we go now.”*

With two grantees, the leadership transition processes have been accompanied by much **stronger commitments to use data to monitor results**, as well as a more critical take on whether these results are strategically important. These aspects were perhaps taken for granted in the past. For some grantees, this has been part of introducing a culture of learning into the organization. One legal services grantee described the change in attitude after the leadership transition as *“We did not know for sure if we were using the resources strategically. Didn’t know if we were having a broader systemic impact from our work. With [...] we found facts and took them to court and won, but did not know if it led to broader impact. With BUILD this thinking is now going to be built in.”* This shift to stronger and more intentional monitoring includes the introduction of metrics and dashboards to measure success.

### 3.4.3 POSITIONING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IMPACT IN A VOLATILE ENVIRONMENT

Grantees described how BUILD has helped them deepen and/or change their strategies, expand their geographic reach, increase staffing, diversify into new areas of work, and/or reinforced partnerships, thus **becoming better positioned in the social justice ecosystem**. One grantee described this new position: *“We were small and scrappy, but strategic and impactful. Always trying to get to the table, let alone a seat at the table. Now, we are at the table and we are leading.”* Taking control of the narrative has been at the core of efforts undertaken with BUILD support. This is very important, particularly among organizations led by people of color or indigenous peoples, given the increasing barrage of toxic narratives and hate.

Grantees openly acknowledged that political changes in their working environment were influencing their ability to achieve mission impact, both by inspiring resistance and generating frustrations.

Organizations in the Global South frequently framed their **repositioning in relation to having the time to patiently respond to recent radical changes in the political context and the role of civil society**. Seven of the 56 grantees described an unease and uncertainty about their prospects for using past approaches to affect change in the current environment, characterized by growing attacks by government institutions, often in collusion with organized crime. In Mexico, grantees are being faced with uncertainties about if and how to shift away from a relatively clear role as critics of past governments that lacked legitimacy. This is because they are now dealing with a new government with broad support and legitimacy, but one that also has what they view as very problematic policies. This new context necessitated a new approach to how to communicate organizational added value to donors when their role as watchdog needs to be reframed.

**Grassroots mobilization in the US builds largely on an organizing tradition, whereas in the Global South approaches tend to reflect local community development modalities.** In both the US and the Global South, BUILD contributes to how grantees are trying to build on and sometimes transcend these organizational models to reposition their work in the social justice ecosystem.



TAKING CONTROL OF THE NARRATIVE HAS BEEN AT THE CORE OF EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN WITH BUILD SUPPORT.”

Particularly **in the Global South, many BUILD grantees position themselves in relation to grassroots resistance to exploitation by the private sector**, from oil companies to slumlords. In some cases, the collusion between governments and extractive and other industries that are trying to usurp the rights of marginalized populations has meant that grantees see their role as one of oppositional advocacy. In other instances, a more constructive approach is taken wherein they try to work together with (primarily local) governments to help them understand what rights are at stake and how to best respond. They thus act as watchdogs, while also trying to show the way forward through a critical partnership.

### 3.4.4 CONCLUSIONS: FUTURE TRAJECTORIES TOWARDS MISSION IMPACT

When asked about mission impact, the majority of grantees interviewed talked about processes or outcomes. Apart from anecdotal examples, they **rarely described actual impacts on the lives of their constituents**. This may be due to the fact that BUILD's focus on institutional strengthening leads grantees to talk about internal process and outcomes within their organizations and fields rather than about impacts in relation to political change and betterment in people's lives. It may also relate to the fact that it is somewhat difficult for grantees to disentangle internal and external factors that contribute to, or block, social change. Grantees make frequent references to building power, but they do not always clarify how that power is being leveraged to achieve impacts. Processes emphasized include a strategic rethink to respond to challenges such as: the rise of the right; impunity; dismantling of anticorruption institutions; failures/limits of past modus operandi; past inattention to racial equity; and insufficient attention to culture. These reflections have led to a reassessment of grantees roles and functions and a reinforcement of constituent leadership to respond to changes in their ecosystems.

It must be stressed that the lack of sufficient evidence of 'mission impact' at this point in the evaluation is not an indication that there has not been, or will not be, impact. At this stage in the evaluation, it is apparent that:

- Some **aspects of the processes observed up to this point constitute trends that are likely to generate observable and/or measurable impact in the next wave of data collection** (as grantees move ahead in implementing strategic plans and assessing the results derived from new organizational structures recently put into place).
- Many of the impacts that the grantees are striving for are **part of long-term strategies** that began before BUILD started, and that will become apparent after the five-year timeframe of BUILD is over.
- **Impacts will be framed by the context of the current pandemic** and related crises. In this volatile scenario, despite significant contribution from BUILD, direct attribution will be difficult to prove. Impacts may come to be defined by the extent to which grantees are enhancing the **resilience** of their organizations and constituents rather than by 'wins,' per se.

BUILD has contributed to concretizing grantees' strategic thinking. It has enabled them to turn plans into actions and focus on goals rather than pursue fundable activities only (in many cases for the first time, and as a work in progress, contingent on their broader and steady access to appropriate funding from others). Philanthropic and other funders' support in relation to the pandemic has shown some signs of recognition that flexibility is essential. However, it is too early to judge whether this trend will continue or whether recognition of the need to reform philanthropy will be carried through in practice.

It is also too soon to determine if, how, to what extent, and under what circumstances a five-year timeframe contributes to mission impact. The emerging outcomes presented in this report refer to individual wins, such as increased voter turnouts in 2018 of those facing historical marginalization, successes in decarceration and police accountability, increases in local minimum wage levels, formal recognition of indigenous people's land rights, and increases in public awareness about the impunity of governing elites. It will be important for the second wave of the evaluation to monitor patterns and setbacks related to these wins to see if and how investing for long-term success may be contributing to greater civic space and reduced inequality.

It should be acknowledged, though, that five volatile years is not a long time for turning institutional strengthening into mission impact. The sustainability of achievements regarding both institutional processes and expansions in mission impact will only become apparent after the Developmental Evaluation is completed.

## 4. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 LESSONS LEARNED

*Learning Question 1: Has BUILD been organized and implemented optimally to achieve the desired impacts?*

1.1 BUILD's grant-making approach, consisting of a combination of long-term, flexible general operating support and ring-fenced funds for institutional strengthening, was a 'game changer' for grantees.

This approach is based on BUILD's three core principles: that grantees know best how to invest funds to achieve organizational strength and mission impact; that, because there are no quick-fixes, they need adequate time, resources, and flexibility to do this work; and that investments in institutional strengthening render organizations more effective, accountable, and sustainable. Grantees report that the approach has enhanced their ability to pivot their strategies in response to sometimes volatile and unpredictable external environments. The time, headspace, and confidence contributed by BUILD's dependable and flexible resources and its explicit commitment to institutional strengthening has enabled grantees to further deepen and accelerate their efforts to set up resilient organizations that can propel their critical programmatic work. **This synergistic funding approach enables grantees to identify their priorities and focus on long-term strategies towards building strong institutions with great intentionality, rather than as an add-on to mission focused work.**

1.2 The convenings, cohorts, and technical assistance provided by BUILD can be highly beneficial to grantees if designed and implemented to take into account the diverse range of grantees and their stated priorities.

Grantees particularly valued the assistance where: participants could identify priority issues to be addressed and shape the agenda; participants played an active role in designing the process together with the facilitator; follow-up engagements were tailored to grantees' specific needs and contexts; and opportunities were offered for continued peer learning after a convening. In these cases, BUILD provided financial and logistical support, identified suitable facilitators, and shared its perspective on context and challenges as part of a grantee-led agenda. **The benefits from this type of assistance can be maximized when designed with extensive involvement of grantees and focused on their specific priorities.**

1.3 The majority of the grantees surveyed and interviewed gained some benefit from using the OMT to focus and prioritize before undertaking their institutional strengthening work.

The OMT requirement generally helped grantees effectively identify where they should focus their institutional strengthening. The exceptions were grantees that support networks or grassroots coalitions, and organizations whose cultural context and aims were out of sync with the underlying assumptions in the OMT. For some grantees, the OMT was not adequately facilitated or sufficiently integrated into their planning or decision-making processes. **This suggests that the OMT can be beneficial if there is strong ownership of the process, and that more effort and flexibility are needed to adapt the OMT to organizations' contexts and cultures.**



*Learning Question 2: How has BUILD strengthened grantees?*

### **2.1 Grantees have focused human and financial resources on sharpening their strategic coherence and strengthening core capabilities to operationalize their strategies.**

BUILD has supported grantees' work to sharpen their theories of change and strategic direction and to determine how to effectively put strategies into action. Grantees have invested in strengthening core capabilities such as filling human resource gaps and improving human resource management; equipping staff with the planning, management and reporting skills and tools they need to do their work; building equitable organizational cultures and partnerships; and addressing growing concerns about financial resilience, and safety and security. BUILD has furthermore supported executive directors to hire the talent needed to manage core operations, affording these executive directors more time and space to provide essential leadership to their organizations and within their fields. For new leaders BUILD has provided the time, money, and confidence to focus on strategic re-visioning and/or operationalizing those visions. **Given sufficient and flexible resources, grantees can combine strategic thinking and stronger management to enhance and rejuvenate the effectiveness of their organizations.**

### **2.2 A priority for many executive directors, including all the new leaders, has been shaping organizational culture and practice around diversity, equity, and inclusion.**

The focus in the US has been largely on race and racial justice, while in the Global South grantees tend to focus more on gender and sometimes youth. Ableism and ageism were rarely named as concerns in either context. In connection with their work on strategic coherence and management, grantees are investing in creating equity in their organizational cultures, governance and internal structures, and external partnerships. Leaders of color in the BUILD cohort, particularly women of color leaders, are setting the course for building more equitable institutions. Women of color leaders are also bringing to light the disproportionate expectations (and pressures) placed on them as they head institutions going through significant change. **By supporting leaders to build diverse, equitable, and inclusive organizations and networks, philanthropy can strengthen individual grantees as well as the field of social justice overall.**

*Learning Question 3: Did BUILD impact grantees' roles in leading or taking part in networks in ways that strengthened those networks?*

### **3.1 Partnering in networks is an important part of grantees' strategies for achieving and extending mission impact by building collective power.**

BUILD has supported grantees' efforts to clarify their roles in their respective networks, including reflection on what their strategic relationships mean in terms of how to collaborate with partners in joint actions, how to amplify the voices of smaller partners and constituents, and how to link marginalized organizations more directly into networks and collaborations. This appears to have energized and strengthened networks and fields, which grantees see as hopeful for leveraging broader impact. Grantees are also using financial and technical resources to strengthen the capabilities and effectiveness of their frontline staff and partners and to create new ways of re-granting funds. **These shifts in network dynamics suggest that the BUILD approach can contribute to more dynamic and equitable partnerships with shared power and collaborative agenda-setting and decision-making.**

*Learning Question 4: Does strengthening key institutions and networks advance (or consolidate past advances in) social justice?*

#### **4.1 Change is incremental, and mission impact requires more than five years to achieve.**

While a five-year grant may seem long from the perspective of philanthropy, its duration is brief in terms of allowing for social change. In the face of continued and mounting inequality, BUILD has enabled grantees worldwide to get on with their work, enhance their institutional structures and capacities, and achieve strategic wins in deeply challenging environments. While many of these wins are not yet (and may never become) “transformational” in the ways often expected by funders, **the BUILD grantmaking approach has been impactful precisely because it has supported incremental institutional change that contributes to achieving greater social justice.**

## **4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendations for grantees**

1. Given the complex challenges that grantees are currently facing and likely to face in the foreseeable future both in the Global South and the US, it will be crucial that they continue to take the lead in discussions with BUILD regarding how to use grant funds.
2. Grantees should be proactive in letting the Ford Foundation know how they wish non-financial support to be designed so as to create new opportunities for peer learning and mutual support around institutional strengthening goals, issue- and geographically-based challenges, and shared interests.

### **Recommendations for BUILD 1.0**

1. To maximize the usefulness of CCTA, future actions should focus specifically on areas where grantees are striving to learn from peer reflection, rather than on more general issues. This will require linking one-off events to longer processes of organizational reflection. It should also include adapting the CCTA to reflect and respond to different contexts (Global South and the US) and specific types of institutions (networks, grassroots mobilizing organizations, think tanks, etc.).
2. Drawing on the generally positive grantee-program officer relationships established through BUILD as the basis for further development, the Ford Foundation should hold transparent, timely, and explicit conversations with grantees about future BUILD/Ford funding plans or lack thereof. BUILD generates conditions for a stronger relationship between program officers and grantees. Lessons about how BUILD contributes to these relationships should be shared across the Foundation.
3. Social justice organizations worldwide are facing complex challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic, economic distress, and social unrest, and will continue to face them for the foreseeable future. In this context, grant negotiations should ensure that grantees lead decisions on how best to adapt program and institutional strengthening goals and plans. This should include developing paths to resilience, sustainability, and/or growth, and adjusting timelines for and requirements of deliverables.

### **Additional recommendations for BUILD 2.0 (and beyond)**

1. The Evaluation Team strongly recommends that the Foundation continue with a BUILD 2.0 initiative based on the core principles of flexible, long-term funding and ring-fenced support

for institutional strengthening. Given the evidence of BUILD's effectiveness documented in this Interim Report and its prospects for engendering mission impact in the long run, the Ford Foundation should continue to explore how to integrate the BUILD approach into its overall grantmaking.

2. Grant size, periods and sequencing of disbursements should be more flexible, and decisions made through dialogue between program officers and grantees. This should include a high degree of transparency between the Ford Foundation and the grantees about how mutual goals can best be pursued.
3. It is unrealistic to expect grantees to achieve broad social justice impact within the five-year timeframe of a grant. BUILD 2.0 should partner with grantees to define what impact is both meaningful and achievable in the grant period, and how this impact can be assessed.
4. BUILD should continue to provide grantees the necessary leeway to develop their own paths to financial resilience, sustainability and/or growth in the difficult period ahead, and communication between BUILD and grantees should reflect a strong emphasis on transparency, trust, and dialogue including, but not limited to, issues of financial strength and uncertainty.
5. BUILD can deepen and expand its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion by continuing to support grantees and their executive directors that are investing deeply in this respect, and by making explicit commitments to additional organizations and networks that are led by, represent, and reach other structurally marginalized people and communities in both the Global South and the US.
6. BUILD can leverage its investments farther by refining how it funds grantees that support networks of organizations. A more clearly elaborated approach would also give BUILD a mechanism for supporting grassroots mobilizers, intersectional collaboration, smaller informal organizations, and wider capacity building through network hubs. To better focus its support of network organizations, BUILD should develop a clearer theory of change and strategy for network support.
7. BUILD can reinforce its positive role in supporting social justice organizations worldwide by continuing to fund grantees that face complex challenges, particularly those run by new leaders, emerging from crises, working in challenging environments, and/or grappling with difficult changes in organizational culture.

# ANNEXES



## ANNEX A. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This Interim Report synthesizes findings and analyses from a **Developmental Evaluation** that resorted to the following data sources:

- Seven case studies, each based on visits to eight grantees (56 grantees in total). Six of them are included in Annex B, while the remaining one will be revised and reported at a later stage. Most of these visits were face-to-face, with some being undertaken partially or entirely virtually. Tailored interview guides were used to analyze issues of pertinence to the respective categories of grantees. The Evaluation Team also attended a range of convenings, trainings, and other events related to the case studies.
- A set of standard questions asked of the 56 grantees as the basis for comparative analysis.
- An online survey about grantees' uses of the BUILD grant, its effects on institutional strengthening and on mission impact, and grantees' experience with BUILD components. The survey was distributed via email to 200 BUILD grantees from the 2016, 2017 and 2018 cohorts. The response rate was 67 percent: a total of 136 BUILD grantees completed it. Among the 136 grantees, 32 grantees were among those visited by the Evaluation Team as part of the case studies.
- Findings from interviews and visits to 47 grantees, 13 Ford Foundation program officers and eight Ford Foundation directors during the Familiarization Phase of the Evaluation.
- In the Familiarization Phase of the Evaluation, coding, and analyses of 154 grantee proposals, as well as recommendations for grant approval and other data.
- Documentation (e.g., proposals, recommendations for grant approval, annual reports, historical data related to Ford Foundation support) extracted from the Fluxx database (Ford Foundation grant management system) related to each of the 56 grantees visited.
- List of BUILD grants awarded to date provided by the BUILD Team, including information about grantee location, annual budget size, grant size, date of grant approval, and categorization as per Ford Foundation's program/strategy.

**Developmental Evaluation** is an iterative and flexible approach intended to facilitate the generation of open-ended and real-time feedback to feed into institutional learning. This facilitation was sought by convening a conversation among the grantees, the Ford Foundation, and the BUILD team. **Developmental Evaluation** is particularly suited to innovation, radical program re-design, complex issues, and crises—all of which characterize the BUILD experience. In accordance with this approach, the structure of the evaluation and the basic understanding of how to approach BUILD were developed and agreed upon in a co-creation workshop held in 2018. The specific structure and detailed questions for each case study were elaborated as part of an Initial Trend Analysis that followed the Familiarization Phase and preceded this first wave of data collection.

The overall method used has been **Contribution Analysis**,<sup>1</sup> applied to reveal the extent to which BUILD support is contributing to its desired outcomes while acknowledging that contextual factors and pre-existing trajectories greatly influence the work of grantees. The use of **Contribution Analysis** has involved pursuing a number of lines of inquiry to generate the evidence needed to interrogate the BUILD value proposition and assess the extent to which it is contributing to change within grantee institutions, across their networks and fields, and for their constituents. **Contribution Analysis** has been used to reflect on the BUILD theory of change and how grantees, their constituents,

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1 Mayne, John (2008) *Contribution analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect*. ILAC Brief 16, 05/2008.

Ford staff and outside observers perceive BUILD to have contributed to broader outcomes and impacts. The interviews conducted with grantees throughout the evaluation have sought to record the achievements in relation to BUILD's very ambitious aims, and potential unintended positive or negative outcomes. Interviewees were encouraged to explain their views about what the wider contexts of political change and the shifting landscape of donor funding have meant for drawing conclusions about the influence of BUILD support. This proved highly appropriate given the often-subtle nature of BUILD's unrestricted contributions, which often emphasized incremental changes through addressing strategic gaps, rather than broad transformation. Of particular importance, the emphasis of BUILD on institutional strengthening has meant that these intermediate outcomes have been in focus, and that it was not possible to measure direct attribution of actual mission impacts to BUILD support. **Contribution Analysis** was also very useful for stimulating reflection on BUILD's added value among informants who stressed that they were unsure of what the 'results' were of BUILD, per se.

Most Significant Change<sup>2</sup> was the variation of **Contribution Analysis** applied in most case studies. It involved asking grantees about what significant changes have occurred in their organizations, networks, and their missions, and then tracing if and how BUILD may have contributed to these changes. This approach was very effective for bringing out how grantees have leveraged BUILD to work within a very volatile period.

The evaluation's limitations at this stage are primarily related to the extraordinary heterogeneity of the BUILD grantees themselves, their pathways to change and their uses of the grant. **Contribution Analysis** and **Most Significant Change** are methods primarily designed for analyzing individual initiatives and organizations, and their application for synthesizing such a broad range of experience has thus been a challenge.

The challenge was most notable in relation to the extent to which it is possible to generalize from extremely diverse case study examples. Each grantee, each country context, the varied approaches to BUILD applied within the Ford Foundation and across time, and especially the rather loose categories adopted for the case studies themselves are all factors that suggest caution in generalization. For this reason, the Evaluation Team has quantified findings to the extent possible, while also presenting individual examples considered important for stimulating reflection. These examples may represent working hypotheses for the evaluation to explore going forward. In many instances it has, therefore, been useful to 'generalize from samples of one,' while recognizing the risks of drawing too broad conclusions.

The Evaluation Team notes the following key conclusions and lessons from the methodology applied thus far as the evaluation moves forward.

- The **Developmental Evaluation** approach has proven highly appropriate for adapting methods to 'reality' and generating ownership of the evaluation process among grantees and Ford Foundation staff, especially with a program like BUILD where it would have been inappropriate to apply fixed indicators.
- **Contribution Analysis** has been very appropriate as a way to stimulate reflection on the various, often subtle ways that BUILD has influenced broader, contextually-driven change processes, and to avoid misleading expectations that it might be possible to trace 'BUILD dollars.'

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<sup>2</sup> See [https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/most\\_significant\\_change](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/most_significant_change)

- These methodological qualities will also be important to be able to follow the pivots in the 'direction travelled' by the grantees in the second wave of data collection given the profound crises and upheavals underway.
- The downside of this flexibility has been the difficulty to quantify and generalize, i.e., to identify what constitutes trends.
- The case study categorizations have in many cases proven somewhat problematic given the great diversity of grantee processes within the cases. This has also generated challenges in understanding different types of BUILD contributions and therefore in judging where and how to meaningfully generalize.

## ANNEX B. TOWARDS THE FINAL WAVE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

These lessons are interpreted by the Evaluation Team as generally validating the overall methodology thus far applied, while also implying the need to find somewhat more standardized and measurable indicators in order to more consistently quantify, enhance external generalizability, and better differentiate between intriguing examples and trends. Therefore, in the evaluation design going forward, greater proportional emphasis will be given to the evolving set of 'standard evaluation questions' across the sample, with somewhat less attention to case study specific questions. Furthermore, as the Evaluation Team has become more aware of key, relevant indicators, questions will be refined to trace a more standard set of trends (e.g., through multiple-choice questions).

However, it is also recognized that the new global realities that have emerged between the first and second wave of the data collection suggest the importance of allowing and encouraging both grantees and Ford Foundation staff to describe the different directions they are travelling, and what those implies for how BUILD has enabled or hindered much needed agility. Methods will, therefore, need to reflect a balance between testing the 'known' hypotheses that have emerged in the first wave, and an openness to 'unknown' and surprising emerging agendas.

The next and final wave of data collection will be carried out during the first quarter of 2021. At the time of finalizing this Interim Report, discussions regarding the methods to be applied and the selection of tools and case studies are still underway, but the focus is likely to reflect the following:

- Continuation of most of the case studies, with possible merging of related themes to better emphasize contrasts and comparisons.
- Additional case studies to address issues that have emerged due to recent events and lessons from the first wave of data collection.
- An additional full-cohort survey that will be largely (but not entirely) based on the questions asked in the first full-cohort survey so as to capture changes and also obtain data on new emerging issues.
- Considerable additional emphasis on an expanded set of 'standard' questions for in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with the focus derived from the 'indicators' that have emerged from the analysis presented in this Interim Report.



## ANNEX C. CASE STUDIES

The case studies presented in this Annex represent a major part of the empirical data and analyses produced during the first wave of the evaluation of BUILD. They were designed in line with the developmental evaluation approach with the aims of: 1) embracing the complexity and diversity of the grantee experience, and 2) facilitating learning and creating shared ownership for the evaluation process. The case study topics were selected to provide a basis for the continued assessment of the **distance travelled** by grantees with their BUILD support and to take a **deep dive** into specific aspects of those trajectories:

1. [Established Organizations](#)
2. [Emerging Organizations](#)
3. [Network Organizations](#)
4. [Organizations with Leadership Transitions](#)
5. [Grassroots Mobilizing Organizations](#)
6. [Challenging Environments](#)
7. [Organizations Historically Led by People of Color](#)

The case studies were designed to illustrate and contrast the various problems that grantees have been struggling with, and the different aims that they are striving towards. Each sample was chosen to provide an understanding of organizations working in different contexts, and across different Ford Foundation programs. The samples make it possible to analyze differences between grantees in the US and the Global South, among grantees within the US, and between grantees working across regions in the Global South.

The case studies are structured following the **four Learning Questions** designed for BUILD's developmental evaluation:

1. How has BUILD strengthened grantees?
2. Did BUILD impact grantees' roles in leading or taking part in networks in a way that strengthened those networks?
3. Has BUILD been organized and implemented optimally so as to achieve the desired impacts?
4. Does strengthening key institutions and networks advance (or consolidate past advances in) social justice?

**Contribution Analysis** has been applied to understand how the BUILD modalities have influenced institutional strengthening, and changes in the networks and mission impacts of these dynamic organizations. Strong emphasis has been placed on the contextual factors that influence BUILD contributions. Data was collected between August 2019 and February 2020, and thus corresponds to the period preceding the great turbulence of recent months, marked by the COVID-19 crisis and the overwhelming upsurge in the global fight against discrimination.



# ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATIONS

Lead author: Ian Christoplos

## A BRIEF SNAPSHOT

Long-standing BUILD grantees that are considered well **established** often struggle with challenges similar to those facing younger BUILD grantees. Even though they are ostensibly assumed to be stable, unstable external environments affect their work. Many of these grantees have realized that their former *raison d'être* is no longer relevant, and that it is time to undertake profound but potentially painful reflection about how they can remain relevant so as to revisit and recover their legacy. For these grantees, the BUILD grant contributed to the evolution and restructuring of obsolete organizational aspects. Innovations have led to new programs, ways of working and partnerships. In some cases, the changes centered on breaking down organizational silos through new structures and systems for internal communication and knowledge management to generate better integrated and more strategic teamwork. BUILD has provided an important opportunity to standardize long-established but still rather informal and ad hoc practices. Grantees recognize that given the increasing constraints on civic space at a global level, relevance needs to be seen as a moving target: A legacy can turn into a burden if explicit steps are not taken to patiently analyze what the current environment requires and to adapt decisively.

## KEY FINDINGS:

- Stability is a double-edged sword. It can create risks of perpetuating stale approaches, or it can allow grantees to leverage pre-existing trust and reputation to move forward. Strong leaders have used their BUILD grant to re-start a conversation within their organizations about strategic pathways to change.
- For many grantees BUILD has facilitated a transformation from being 'scrappy' to becoming more formal organizations able to more effectively leverage the strengths developed over the years.
- A BUILD grant can provide space to pause, reflect over strategies and find ways to innovate – and then to take sometimes difficult steps to revisit staffing structures in order to pursue reinvigorated plans of action.

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1

## OVERVIEW

This case study analyzes how BUILD has supported grantees that are considered established based on these characteristics:

- widespread recognition as a leader in their chosen field
- proven track record of impact
- diversified base of support
- high degree of strategic clarity and institutional strength
- effective governance and stable staffing
- hallmarks of financial sustainability (including strategic reserves, endowment funds, etc.)

Most grantees in the case study sample have had long-standing pre-BUILD relationships with the Ford Foundation. Some of them were explicitly selected for support because they were deemed to have the best chance of delivering according to BUILD's theory of change.

The purpose of the case study is to gain insights into how BUILD is used differently by established organizations, as compared with younger, emergent organizations. The analysis shows that assumptions about the common characteristics of established organizations could be questioned. Long-standing organizations may not bear all of the expected characteristics associated with being established, and struggle with challenges similar to those facing younger BUILD grantees. In light of this, the case study has looked at grantees' priorities and results in their use of the BUILD grant, and considered to which extent these can be traced to the age of their organizations and/or other factors related to organizational culture, strategic clarity, addressing institutional deficits, positioning in the field, and drivers related to efforts to reinvent their organizations to meet new contextual needs and challenges.

A concept considered potentially relevant for the case study in its early stage was **path dependency**, which refers to "how the set of decisions one faces for any given circumstance is limited by the decisions one has made in the past, even though past circumstances may no longer be relevant."<sup>1</sup> A body of research suggests that such path dependency locks in organizations that experience demands to respond to pre-existing expectations (of staff, boards and constituents), reinforce or at least not disrupt existing financing structures, and live up to general assumptions about their niche in their field. This is seen as potentially constraining innovation and ability to adapt to a changing context. Established organizations with a particularly well-trodden path may be specifically susceptible to path dependency. Where path dependencies exist, it is therefore important to consider the extent to which the BUILD grant has enabled them to break out of these paths, or whether the stability that accompanies the grant has encouraged complacency. There may also be relevant reasons to continue to work in a well-established path when the needs remain current and a grantee has a respected and clear role to play.

The established organizations analyzed here showed varied tendencies towards path dependencies. For some, their relative strength and stability provides the confidence to take risks and innovate, driven by a recognition that the current context demands new approaches. A working hypothesis of this case study has been that a BUILD grant can contribute to established grantees' ability to find a critical juncture for reflecting and acting to break out of path dependencies.

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1 Praeger, D. (2007) "Our love of sewers: a lesson in path dependence". *Daily Kos*, published online on June 15.

## 1.1 SAMPLE SELECTION

The sample of eight grantees visited for this case study was evenly divided between the US and the Global South. Grantees were invited to participate based on their relevance to the case study's issues and on criteria adopted to ensure that a wide variety of organizations were included, such as diversity in geographies, organizational roles and size. As a result, the sample was very heterogeneous.

Grantee/program area/ headquarters location	Year established	Annual budget size (USD at time BUILD grant was made; 2016-2018)	5-year BUILD amount (USD)	BUILD dependency (at time BUILD grant was made)	Primary geographic scope of activities
<b>National Employment Law Project</b> Future of Worker(s) New York, USA	1969	9,700,000	12,125,000	▲	National
<b>Vera Institute of Justice</b> Gender, racial and ethnic justice New York, USA	1961	86,200,000	8,000,000	▼	National
<b>Firelight Media</b> Creativity and free expression New York, USA	2000	2,100,000	4,750,000	▲	National
<b>Landesa</b> Natural resources and climate change Seattle, USA	1967	14,542,537	2,100,000	▼	International
<b>FUNDAR (Center for Research and Analysis)</b> Mexico and Central America Mexico City, Mexico	1999	2,500,000	2,250,000	■	National
<b>Legal Resources Centre</b> Southern Africa Johannesburg, South Africa	1979	3,799,494	3,300,000	■	National
<b>Leadership Conference Education Fund</b> Gender, racial and ethnic justice Washington, D.C., USA	1969	8,568,000	5,500,000	▼	National
<b>Federation of Women Lawyers-Kenya</b> East Africa Nairobi, Kenya	1985	2,336,873	2,500,000	■	National

▼ Lower dependency (< 15%), ■ Medium dependency (15%-30%), ▲ Higher dependency (>= 30%)

The sample includes a high proportion of grantees that have a significant focus on research or service provision, but is otherwise quite varied, with different sizes, levels of financial stability, and pre-existing strategic clarity. Notably, the grantees have diverse roles within their fields, ranging from high-profile advocates to low-key support institutions backing up (rather than leading) grassroots-focused organizations.

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The case study was undertaken using a modified **Most Significant Change** methodology that sought to understand what changes grantees perceived to have been most important in their mission impacts, institutional development and positioning in their fields in recent years. They were asked what aspects of BUILD may have contributed to these changes. The analysis looked at how these changes were framed by the context and the historical/recent positioning and trajectories of change in their organizations, including how leadership transitions may break path dependency and stimulate innovation. The goal was to **understand what being established has meant for grantees considering their legacies in their fields.**

The case study's greatest limitation is that it is often impossible to disentangle and verify what being established represents for these complex organizations, which usually face a dynamic and highly disruptive external environment. The case study has looked critically at the extent to which being 'established' is a useful categorization for evaluating how benefits from BUILD emerge. Efforts were made to report transparently where evidence of these causal linkages is weak. Hypotheses have been presented as a tool for reflection, even where they cannot be verifiably confirmed.

Due to the diversity in types of organizations, a related limitation is that aggregation has not been meaningful, for the most part. The case study draws on many single examples that illustrate and seek to illuminate important processes and outcomes, even if evidence is lacking regarding whether these represent broader trends.

## 2

## INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

For most grantees, the BUILD grant coincided with, and contributed to, the **evolution and restructuring of obsolete aspects of their organizations.** As one director stated, *"We had to focus on capacity building, managing outdated systems. The whole program structure moved [...] to a matrix structure. This was a radical transformation of our work, to build legs of the stools for building power and public will for these issues."* Others saw a need to revamp and enhance communication and advocacy capacities. One grantee needed to find ways to downsize significantly while retaining strategic relevance.

In the case study sample, several examples of BUILD support happened to coincide with a leadership transition. For these organizations in particular, BUILD has become a vehicle for new leaders to initiate more fundamental renewal and change, rather than just strengthening or upgrading what was there before. In describing a struggle within her organization, one grantee said, *"I need to have strategic growth, not just growth because stuff is happening."* Grantees' stories are very explicit in describing how BUILD enabled them to pursue something very different. One grantee stated: *"Now I have a platform for planning that has been revolutionary."* Another described how she saw a need for a fresh take on how to pursue policy influence. BUILD has provided opportunities for an outgoing<sup>2</sup> or incoming director to stabilize and/or reinvigorate institutional structures to reflect their changed and volatile context.

2 A more problematic example is one grantee that received the BUILD grant before the outgoing Executive Director left. In this case, the strong break in continuity and institutional memory after her departure led to most of these efforts to be seen in the organization as **"wasted"** due to the need to start over under the new leadership.

A few new leaders described, in various ways, how their efforts to promote transformational change were stymied by what one referred to as a “negativity bias,” where the staff wanted “more of everything” while leadership was “trying to call them to a higher purpose” and at the same time avoiding expenditures that could put sustainability at risk. When change has required difficult decisions about shutting down long-standing programs or taking steps to bring in different staff to pivot and ensure more relevance in their changing context, BUILD has given them the agility to confront intransigence that was reinforcing path dependency.

In various ways, these major changes introduced by new leaders in most cases drove innovations that led to new programs, new ways of working and new kinds of partnerships. In some cases, the changes tended to center around **breaking down old, ponderous silos** within organizations through new structures and systems for internal communication and knowledge management intended to generate closer teamwork. This need was related to some organizations having ossified internal communication channels.

In two other organizations, researchers had drifted towards each pursuing their own individual projects. This was recognized as a tendency that is common in older research institutions, wherein researchers tend to pursue different personal interests and chase different funding sources. The BUILD-financed structural reorganization forced them to work together in joint programs. This was quite painful and led to staff attrition among researchers comfortable with the old order, but also to greater clarity in ensuring that advocacy reflects a consensus regarding priorities while retaining an openness to a diversity of views about what their research suggests within those priority areas. A staff member from one of these two examples explained: “We are like a whole new organization. Those who just wanted a place to operate their consultancy or be an academic left. Those that wanted to build a new thing stayed and I am really excited to see where we go now.” Another grantee referred to their efforts to “coach people out.”

For two grantees, the leadership transition processes have been accompanied by much **stronger commitments to the monitoring and evaluation of results** and a more critical take on whether these results are strategically important (aspects perhaps taken for granted in the past). For some grantees, this has been part of introducing a culture of learning into the organization. One grantee described the change in attitude after the leadership transition as: “We did not know for sure if we were using the resources strategically. Didn’t know if we were having a broader systemic impact from our work. With [...] we found facts and took them to court and won, but did not know if it led to broader impact. With BUILD this thinking is now going to be built in.” This shift to stronger and more intentional monitoring includes the introduction of metrics and dashboards to measure success.

Perhaps surprisingly for established organizations that might already have strong systems in place, the processes supported by BUILD among most of the grantees were directed towards **creating new formal structural changes in organizational and administrative procedures**. At least two organizations used the grant for long overdue transitions from paper-based to digital administrative systems. It is somewhat paradoxical that even established organizations saw BUILD as an important opportunity to standardize long-established but still rather informal and ad hoc practices of the past regarding human resource management, knowledge management, reporting, division of labor and even administrative procedures. This could be suggesting that established organizations may have been too concerned with basic survival to address professionalization. It would also appear that in some instances path dependencies and a reluctance to cause trouble (within their organizations or in relationships with partners) have stood in the way of innovations to introduce more appropriate and formal institutional norms

and procedures. In other instances, BUILD contributed to an ongoing trajectory of maturation, as one grantee stated: “We are getting to that inflection point where the ways you work when you are small and scrappy – it won’t work anymore.”

For one grantee, a rather toxic organizational culture had emerged due to ossified human resource management, leading to a rapid and serious deterioration of staff trust and commitment. Discussions with this grantee showed a strong desire to **make the organization more attractive for younger and/or more dynamic staff to stay**, while realizing that turnover among some of the long-term senior staff was healthy, inevitable and needed, albeit painful. In another organization where the situation was less acute, turnover related to loss of staff who were happier with the older ways of working was also seen as natural and healthy, and efforts focused on capturing and retaining their knowledge as part of measures to ensure continuity rather than on attempting to retain them. This focus on institutional memory was new for the organization and not easy to implement. In the case of one grantee, older staff members who had led the organization stepped aside to bring in new leadership and moved to other roles instead.

For most of the grantees in the sample, **human resource stability is yet to come** and **further upheaval may arise in those cases where funding shrinks** considerably post-BUILD. Some grantees expanded their staff as part of growth, and others increased salaries. One worked to attract higher caliber staff. Several brought in a new generation of staff, which has created inter-generational challenges. These human resource changes are generally still underway, and the results are not yet consolidated nor is there clear evidence that investments will prove sustainable in terms of finances and of finding an appropriate ambition level. One interviewee attributed continued high turnover to a reiterated failure to align programmatic aspirations (workload) with staffing realities, even though “*BUILD was meant to fix this.*”



**BUILD MONEY FORCED US TO DO SOME CLEAR THINKING ABOUT SEQUENCING AND PRIORITIES.”**

These issues are not unique to established organizations but, because expectations of stability may be greater, this finding is striking.

With one notable exception, the grantees in the sample tended to **focus on specific aspects of institutional strengthening** rather than on adopting a comprehensive approach. This could be related to their status as established grantees with most of the elements of a strong organization already in place. Attribution cannot be confirmed, though. Some of the grantees **revisited governance structures**, most notably by introducing term-limits for their boards as part of their renewal processes and general professionalization. At the same time, boards have not always supported executive leadership in their BUILD-financed reform efforts. For one grantee, tensions arose when the director’s institutional strengthening plans were at odds with the board’s long-standing complacency with the status quo.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, BUILD has been cited as of particular importance by those **established organizations that are struggling to stabilize their financial situation**. Though not indicative of a general trend, one grantee in the sample was forced to undertake a major reallocation of BUILD funds to stave off a financial crisis. Another grantee was able to establish an emergency fund and expand their reserves from one month to one year. Overall, the grantees do not appear to have made significant changes to their long-standing funding base. Only one cited being able to diversify significantly. This may be related to their status as established organizations with funders that are well known and assumed to be stable, but this hypothesis could not be confirmed. In



general, apart from those organizations that were facing a severe financial crisis, BUILD's impact on financial resilience has consisted of a relatively modest contribution to the efforts that grantees were already engaged in, including enabling them to argue better for funds from other donors and for more support for institutional strengthening.

**Most grantees used their funding to grow**, including strengthening their reserves to safeguard this growth trajectory. Sometimes, growth has come through general operating support investments. In other cases, BUILD's contribution has been related to creating stronger institutional infrastructure to better manage the growth that has been happening (with the actual programmatic growth largely financed with funds from other sources). One grantee described how BUILD has fitted into the broader trajectory of growth: *"We are strong programmatically, but not so strong operationally. Being part of BUILD has given us far more appreciation for the importance of building infrastructure of organizational capacity to support the program work."*

Other grantees highlight how they are using investments in strategic clarity and overall programmatic realignment to **revisit priorities for growth** and, above all, to **take decisive steps to act on those priorities**. One grantee used the example of the decision not to continue with a large World Bank-financed program because it was not considered strategic. This had a significant impact, as some staff were dependent on those resources to keep their jobs, but the need to revisit and reinforce strategic clarity was seen as paramount. It may be doubtful whether the organization would have been prepared to decline this grant without the stability provided by BUILD.

Most of the grantees emphasize institutional investments in internal and external communications in different ways. Being able to have a more collaborative internal dialogue about advocacy and relevance was seen as important for working towards internal consensus about the organization's vision and thereby stimulate mutual efforts. Other grantees were also putting resources into getting this message about the vision out. One grantee noted the importance of revisiting existing communications approaches to respond to **increasing challenges in getting across complex messages in politically polarized environments**. Another grantee framed this in the context of widespread disillusionment, saying that they were leveraging BUILD to get out *"stories that change is possible."*

Two grantees in the sample cited strong evidence of major **changes in their internal institutional strengthening work around diversity, equity and inclusion**. Several of the other grantees had already been addressing diversity, equity and inclusion pre-BUILD. One grantee was dealing with a major high-profile sexual harassment suit within their organization. They clearly explained how they had been able to undertake a far more in-depth investigation into the case and develop stronger responses due to BUILD. They pointed out that the issue arose due to long-standing failures in human resources management functions and a closed and hostile organizational culture, while also highlighting that other donors are loath to invest in measures to solve these types of problems.

In most of the US cohort, diversity, equity and inclusion efforts focused heavily on racial equity. Grantees in the Global South focused more on addressing other aspects of societal discrimination than on race within their organizations. One US grantee used the BUILD grant specifically to transition out senior white leadership and hire people of color, including a new director and senior management. They also implemented strategies to make diversity, equity and inclusion a focused benefit for staff, such as using reserves (funded in part by BUILD) to establish a student loan repayment program that helps attract and retain staff of color.

In general, grantees seemed to have clear commitments to fighting discrimination in their programs prior to BUILD. Most described refinements related to BUILD as linked to strategic communications and advocacy, whereas one emphasized investments in much stronger systems and staff capacities for gender mainstreaming. The US grantees used BUILD funds to carry their internal diversity, equity and inclusion work into their external program and partnership work.

3

## NETWORKS AND FIELDS

Grantees generally describe themselves as well-positioned and well-established in their fields prior to BUILD. Although they often refer to having become **somewhat stronger during and due to BUILD support**, there are **no indications of fundamental change**. One grantee reflected on their long history with outside partners as improving incrementally, *“so if there are changes, they are assured we are the same people with the same expertise, but just reorganizing ourselves.”*

In the US, grantees leverage their anchor status to play a central and supportive role in relation to the other organizations in their networks and fields, and see this role as key to their mission. This includes, in some cases, bringing partners together for coalition building, advising on strategic and policy choices, and conducting research and policy development. As one grantee stated, *“Ford Foundation has always seen the leadership role [...] as the center of the [...] movement. Because it houses the coalition, we can have conversations that impact all of the [...] movement.”* By contrast, established grantees in the Global South stressed their focus on their own ongoing programs, with less evidence of a strong networking role. One grantee in particular described how they became introverted as part of being locked into long-standing service provision roles. Though caution is warranted when generalizing from this small sample, this would appear to highlight the importance of not transposing assumptions about how fields and networks operate across regions.

The grantees that are growing in size and influence sometimes refer to seeing their **increasing strategic clarity** as a way to share experience and resources to **strengthen the capacity of their peers**. In the US, this may include a focus on other organizations led by people of color. One grantee stated, *“We were saying to our funders, ‘you have things to learn from them [smaller peers]!’”* One grantee described a program officer’s surprise and appreciation when invited to a gathering of partners so that funders could meet these new people and organizations. According to the grantee, the program officer remarked: *“it’s so unusual to have a grantee introduce funders to other groups.”* Other grantees used their growth to help smaller partners with research or to replicate their services on a modest level.

### Is the ‘anchor’ concept relevant for grantees?

The justification for providing BUILD grants to most of the established organizations has been that they are (or should be) ‘anchors,’ i.e., respected, older and often sizeable organizations able to drive impact more broadly in their fields. One grantee stated that their program officer sees them *“as an anchor organization that delivers.”* Others were unaware of the ‘anchor’ terminology, which suggests that it relates more to how the Ford Foundation thinks about the organizations rather than to how they perceive themselves. The concept of ‘anchors’ predates BUILD in Ford Foundation theories of change, and appears to have been one of the ideas that underpinned initial BUILD thinking about why efforts to work with established grantees needed a more concerted, long-term approach. Ford had recognized that anchors could and should play a stronger role in their fields, but also saw that past funding modalities were not fit for this purpose.

There is a range of experiences related to the influence of BUILD funding grantees' role in their fields. Several grantees spoke about the expanded influence and leadership they have because of strategic and institutional changes supported by BUILD (and other funding). Other grantees acknowledged that, even if the BUILD grant has helped them to consolidate their thinking about their role in their field, it has not had a major influence on actual networking per se. This could be attributed to the more 'settled' role of established organizations in their respective networks, but could not be confirmed.

Some of the grantees used BUILD support to better hone their roles or develop new roles. Keeping track of their fields and of their place within these has encouraged some to **pay more attention to measuring broader influence**. One grantee emphasized having developed new practices and metrics related to gender integration that enabled them to be a better supporter and leader in their field. Others saw this monitoring of influence as part of playing a more central role in highlighting the exclusion of women of color in fields that were white-dominated in the US.

As noted above, at the outset of this case study an underlying hypothesis to be tested was that established organizations were more likely to have a central role in fields and networks that BUILD would help reinforce. This was partly behind the selection of some of these as 'anchor' organizations at the start of the program. The case study's findings question this hypothesis. Apart from results stemming from strengthened communications to enable voice from the grassroots partners, **limited evidence** was found **of fundamental change in the way these organizations anchor their fields and networks through BUILD support**. This is not necessarily a deficiency. There are indications that the size and age of these organizations have made them more acutely aware of the importance of focusing on approaches that do not overshadow the voices of their smaller partners and constituents.

## 4

### BUILD MODALITIES

**Long-term support** is described as being **at the core of capacities to reflect on and reinforce relevance** so as to strengthen strategic clarity and coherence. One grantee described how *"BUILD was just enough of a nudge to get us off the path dependency –to say we're taking away your excuses to say we don't have enough money or dedicated money."* Though obviously not unique to established organizations, the **five-year time horizon was a game changer** in terms of actually being able to design and implement strategic plans in a consistent and sequenced manner. It is notable that established organizations cited their frustration around not having had the resources to actually implement strategies in the past. The relative need for, and importance of, flexible funding was correlated with whether their other funding sources were largely restricted or not, and whether they needed the flexibility to stem a financial crisis.

Probably by virtue of their status as established, most of the grantees in this cohort had received some level of general operating support for some time, and the changes in financial significance and in flexible access to general operating support were not significantly transformed due to BUILD. For one grantee, BUILD was the smallest of their three large unrestricted grants. For others, its relative importance was greater. Some noted a slide among donors towards more restricted funding (and less funding). BUILD was therefore welcomed as a way to retain control and flexibility in programming. Its importance in enabling flexible programming may be lower among established grantees given that the proportion of this funding in relation to overall budgets was generally low – in three cases, less than fifteen percent.

In describing the use of the BUILD grant, informants clearly **emphasized institutional strengthening more than programming**. Statements indicated that ring-fencing support for institutional strengthening was useful for them to break away from established “*instincts*” to put everything into programs.<sup>3</sup> One grantee described this somewhat differently, as not having to make “*strategic trade-offs*” between institutional strengthening and programs when staff instinctively feel that available resources should be put towards mission-focused work. Another pointed out that they did not invest in their organization because of BUILD; instead, BUILD enabled them to undertake efforts already intended but for which they had lacked resources. One grantee described **the combination of institutional and general operating support as a virtuous circle** wherein they could demonstrate to staff that, although they were introducing a range of (for some) painful administrative reforms, they were “*not receiving BUILD so as to become more bureaucratic,*” but rather to be able to do more and be more effective. Another described **institutional strengthening and general operating support as being impossible to differentiate in practice**, since the goals were so closely related.

There were **mixed views on the value of the Organizational Mapping Tool**, mostly positive but some negative. There were also variations in the extent to which organizations subsequently applied its results. It is generally difficult to see a clear correlation between the perceived value of the exercise and the status as an established organization.

There was very little awareness of what, or even if, technical assistance was available. Most were unaware, and not necessarily interested in, convenings. Where they had an opinion of what was offered, it was generally that this support was unfocused and not linked to ongoing processes, and that there was little return on time investment. It may be the case that established organizations have been through so many donor convenings in the past that they are acutely and openly skeptical about their value. Nonetheless, grantees were supportive of more Ford Foundation-led cohort-building efforts as opposed to one-off convening events per se.

Most of the established organizations have had long-standing (in some cases, very long-standing) relationships with the Ford Foundation. Somewhat **counter-intuitively, the five-year BUILD grant may actually have spurred them to break out of a tendency to see this relationship as consisting of simply rolling over existing projects**, in that it introduced new demands for focusing on strategic planning and clarity. Several directors talked about the strong and positive relationships they have with their program officers, and said that their professional support and thought partnership were highly valued.

Two grantees lacked a close relationship with the Ford Foundation. One attributed this to the repeated changes in program officers and lack of Ford Foundation visits to their organization. This suggests that even established organizations are not immune to losing touch when there are too many changes at the Ford Foundation.

Overall, not much seems to be unique in established organizations’ perceptions of the value of BUILD modalities. Flexibility has enabled them to invest in human resource management and communications. Long-term support has enabled them to undertake what was in some cases overdue reflection on relevance and strategic clarity. The extent to which BUILD was distinctive and essential for the organizations was related to whether or not they were experiencing a financial crisis and whether or not they had access to other non-restricted funding.

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<sup>3</sup> This finding is not unique to established organizations, but may be more prevalent in organizations with particularly long-standing traditions in how they use resources.

5

## MISSION IMPACT

Even though established organizations are assumed to be stable based on their long-standing duration, the sample grantees highlighted how the **unstable external contexts** (politically, within their respective fields and in relation to the funding landscape) **are affecting their work**.

Established organizations working in the US expressed **confidence that their mission and purpose were more relevant than ever in the aftermath of the 2016 elections**, as the changes they were confronting consisted of new manifestations of long-standing structural racism and other deteriorating conditions. They interpreted their context as a call to reinforce, revamp and update their historic vision and missions. Some described their use of the BUILD grant primarily in relation to responding to changes in their context: *“Having the BUILD grant has made us bolder, given us the freedom as the environment and our industry are changing so fast. It [the BUILD grant] made us feel freer and be bolder in advocating on behalf of our constituents.”*

Organizations in the Global South framed this more in relation to **having the time to patiently respond to recent radical changes in the political context and the role of civil society**. In one country, this has been partly an issue of exploring engagements that focus on new legal norms out of sync with ‘traditional’ practices regarding, e.g., land inheritance by women. In Mexico, grantees are being faced with uncertainties about if and how to shift away from a relatively clear role as critics of past governments that lacked legitimacy. They are now dealing with a new government with broad support and legitimacy, but that has implemented controversial policies seen as fomenting hostility towards civil society. This new context required a new approach to communicating organizational added value to donors, since their role as watchdog needs to be reframed.

One interviewee linked the ability to patiently respond to contextual changes to having the stability to bring their organization and its network together around a common strategy to feel *“part of a political project [i.e., to achieve policy influence].”* The interviewee felt this was not the case in other civil society organizations where lack of a clear anchoring in their field generated uncertainty and anxiety, which their stable BUILD grant helped to assuage by strengthening the organizational focus on the political project. The need to reach consensus within the organization on this project to respond to a

### Changes in civic space generate needs and challenges for established organizations

It may be hypothesized that established organizations with an established role have particular needs and challenges when they adapt to changes in their civic space. Prevailing expectations around their leadership position in civil society need to be leveraged or confronted in order to create space for a renewed or different role. This may, for example, be a matter of rethinking the organization’s long-standing stance in relation to the state after a regime change, seeking out new entry points and allies to achieve policy impacts, or adapting programming ambitions to reduced donor readiness to cover recurrent costs of the services they provide (even when those services have always been provided and expectations from the clients in this respect are high).

A few established grantees stressed how they were realizing that their old *raison d’être* was no longer relevant, and that it was high time to undertake profound but painful reflection about if and how they could remain relevant. Even grantees more complacent about their existing roles stressed the importance of *“horizon scanning”* as a way to reassess relevance.

changed political context is not unique to established organizations, but ostensibly stable established organizations experience volatility differently and perhaps more acutely against the backdrop of a long-standing legacy.

Most of the specific **actions that grantees mentioned they are taking to enhance mission impact were not unique to established organizations.** Examples include upgrading skills of staff and partners in government or civil society in different and sometimes new geographies, or addressing capacity gaps, such as working with gendered land rights. Others describe the importance of relatively emergent properties, such as reinforced and revamped internal systems as a foundation for being able to think strategically, and to create opportunities for staff to devote time and funding to testing new program/policy ideas. Growth is another area where mission impact is increasing, though again, this is not unique to being established. Two grantees vastly increased the geographical scope of their work to expand mission impact. Some expanded their work to reach more and different partners with different spheres of policy influence or to bring new partners into the lane they have effectively worked in for decades. In all of these areas, BUILD has contributed, often significantly. Moreover, with organizations that have been reinventing themselves for decades, **BUILD has apparently enabled them to have a better (incremental) way to proceed, even if it is not fundamentally different (transformative).**

Legacy organizations may be different from other organizations in that there are assumptions that they carry a lot of weight and influence. Some grantees recognize that before BUILD they were not taking full advantage of their power, and are now focused on ramping up their efficacy. A recurrent theme in the sample has been **diverse BUILD investments in revisiting communications and knowledge management to enhance dynamism in their use of research and advocacy to drive change.** The organizations are moving to a position where they can exploit new opportunities, as one grantee explained: “[we] put out statements and had a big presence [at congressional level], but not concentrated as needed to be able to make impact. Like many organizations, we were not maximizing communications [...] we needed to have stronger and deeper messaging coupled with a structure that would focus in on the core issue areas.”

A renewed take on advocacy to respond to changes in their field and political contexts has been described by most as part of ensuring that they do not lose their relevance. Some of the grantees saw this as being about ramping up advocacy efforts. For others, it was about revisiting the nature and focus of their advocacy. For some grantees, BUILD has provided the time and resources to undertake a recalibration of how critical/constructive they should be when engaging with the state. A seemingly contradictory ‘patient but nimble’ approach to messaging has been notable as organizations have taken time to reflect deeply on strategic priorities while also deploying resources to act more decisively in their communications efforts. Those efforts include being able to quickly re-work websites to respond to emerging issues, create databases and design new outputs that enable staff to engage in the policy sphere in real-time (as opposed to producing policy reports that may come out too late to influence policies at key times in the process).

## 6

## CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

In the course of the case study, it quickly became apparent that some of those perceived as the most successful and oldest BUILD grantees used the support to make basic investments in systems and strategic clarity that should, ideally, have been made much earlier. Obviously, BUILD can be seen as a significant part of the solution, but the subsequent question is: what was the problem that hindered such investments in the past? Presumably not just a lack of funds, since most of the grantees had fairly

stable finances before BUILD. Was a five-year, flexible grant needed to trigger their breaking out of path dependency? Were the changes mostly related to sudden contextual pressures or a new director who saw the need for a revamp? This case study cannot provide definitive answers to these questions. Data suggests that for some grantees relevance needs to be seen as a moving target, and a legacy can turn into a burden if explicit steps are not taken to patiently analyze what the current environment requires and to adapt decisively, even if the process is painful for the organization. Path dependency is an endemic risk in virtually any long-standing organization. BUILD has enabled grantees to be better able to manage this risk.

The path to making the needed changes demands a proactive dialogue within and outside the organization. The ability to invest heavily in new knowledge management structures while being patient in having needed conversations before embarking on creating such structures was an important part of what BUILD means for established organizations.

When asked about whether BUILD's support filled any strategic areas, grantees reported that it:

- Allowed them to **focus more on strategies and their implementation**;
- Provided **unrestricted funding to finance growth**;
- Helped to **address diversity, equity and inclusion deficits in leadership transitions**;
- Enabled **changes in organizational culture and internal systems**;
- Allowed for **flexibility to respond to opportunities and crises**; and
- Strengthened reserves and **financial stability**.

While important and relevant, these valuable areas rarely seem to relate explicitly to established status. Examples suggest that **'being established' does not confer many unique qualities or stem from distinctive needs**. The data does not provide a strong basis for conclusions about whether, overall, it is advisable to use BUILD to support established organizations (as compared to giving priority to emerging or other categories of organizations).

An exception in this respect is that established organizations are more likely to have relatively entrenched organizational cultures. A somewhat unique aspect of the BUILD grant has been that **those committed to disrupting the problematic aspects of these cultures**, especially those with a new executive director, **have the resources and time to do so**. The evidence from the sample is mixed on this, with some grantees describing what appears to be tweaking, and others more fundamental change.

This case study can inform conversations underway at the Ford Foundation and other philanthropies about the relative values of investing in transformative versus incremental change. The grantees in the sample can be largely clustered along the incremental end of this continuum, as might be expected in established organizations. As one director said: *"BUILD alone cannot transform any organization, but the leverage can be transformative."*

This is not to imply that the outcomes of the grant have not been very significant. As these grantees generally had a relatively stable foundation to build on, they have had good opportunities to leverage the support for results. However, even if the pre-existing stability was significant, many saw it as implying an acceptance of stale or irrelevant approaches from the past. With BUILD they had a chance to hone and implement their visions without starting from scratch. All, but with somewhat varying levels of success, have **achieved this strategic clarity within a more collaborative but structured organizational culture** than possible before. This may not be considered transformative,

but grantees clearly saw it as a game changer. For those that were facing severe contextual challenges, the grant could be of profound significance, even if the ultimate changes in the organization were not of a magnitude that could be labeled transformative.

A major consideration in assessing whether a BUILD grant can be transformative is the state of the grantees' overall funding landscape. Most of the grantees in the sample have driven change through growth in the quantity and quality of staff, and it is uncertain whether these changes will prove sustainable if their budgets decrease post-BUILD. A return to reliance on smaller projects may tear apart their strategies. One grantee noted that they already had fifteen grants from different donors, all with ambitions that they were to undertake different transformations. Established organizations are probably more likely to be in this situation of having too many donors with transformative ambitions, and although a BUILD grant can enhance strategic clarity to better steer diverse expectations and aspirations, it would be naïve to assume that a single grant can overcome prevailing dysfunctions in the funding landscape.

Given the lack of clear trends in the case study related to being established, it may be **worth reassessing if a second wave of case study interviews is warranted**. In order to sustain the learning process with these grantees, a more efficient use of evaluative resources (and grantee time) might result from shifting some of them to augment other case studies.

Otherwise, it is suggested that discussions around the role of established organizations focus even more on understanding how factors related to the context, organizations' historic trajectories and the BUILD grant enable and constrain efforts to break out of path dependency and may facilitate innovation.

## 7

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TO GRANTEES

1. BUILD (or BUILD-like) grants could be taken advantage of to renew neglected administrative systems.
2. The five-year timeframe provides valuable opportunities to realign long-standing positions with new contextual realities.
3. Grantees could benefit from highlighting to donors how restricted funding leads to path dependencies (particularly among research organizations) in that it encourages individual units or staff members to work in silos rather than together on shared initiatives.

### TO THE FORD FOUNDATION

1. In the design of BUILD 2.0, be cautious about assumptions that established organizations can be addressed as a group with uniform characteristics and what it means to be an 'anchor' in a given field. Program officers' assumptions about support to fields may differ significantly from how grantees see their own roles in those fields.
2. If resources in BUILD 2.0 are limited, an appropriate target group for support should be those established organizations wanting to use institutional strengthening funding as part of leadership or other major human resource transitions.
3. Flexibility is warranted to be ready to shift/augment resources for those experiencing funding crises.



## TO OTHER PHILANTHROPIES

1. Consider using long-term and flexible support as a way to facilitate a fresh start for long-standing grantee partners that recognize the need to revisit their relevance and renew their strategic thinking.
2. Reflect over how restricted funding carries a risk of reinforcing path dependencies, and particularly tendencies to work in silos, in organizations that are expected to drive changes in their fields.



# EMERGING ORGANIZATIONS

Lead author: Raphaëlle Bisiaux

## A BRIEF SNAPSHOT

This case study focuses on a sample of eight **emerging organizations**. These BUILD grantees have a relatively new or informal structure; are often led and shaped by a founder director; have a less formalized, undocumented or lower degree of strategic clarity and institutional strength compared to larger, longer-standing actors in the field; and/or have grown in size or staffing rapidly and thus require a more formal governance structure and organizational systems. The case study looks at how and to what extent these organizations are leveraging the BUILD grant to organize, stabilize and/or formalize, and to potentially transform into more sustainable actors (i.e., with a long-term vision and diversified funding) in their field by refining their strategic intent and use of resources, defining clear roles and enhancing their exchanges with other actors.

## KEY FINDINGS:

- Due to the organizations' relatively young age, most grantees had so far neglected some organizational pillars necessary for operating properly.
- Interestingly, receiving a BUILD grant has not necessarily meant growing or scaling up programmatic work for emerging organizations. Rather, they have focused on the lower end of the BUILD pyramid, aiming to improve the quality of their work and the means to achieve their mission.
- A linear organizational development pathway towards becoming 'established' is not necessarily their objective. Grantees have raised concerns about the risks of formalization brought by the BUILD program, preferring the agility and flexibility of emerging organizational models.

- Overview
- Institutional strengthening
- Networks and fields
- BUILD Modalities
- Mission impact
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

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1

## OVERVIEW

This case study focuses on a sample of the significant number of BUILD grantee organizations that, having worked initially with more informal processes and systems, and/or simpler or non-specialized structures or staff, used their grants to formalize and stabilize their operations.

**Emerging** organizations refers to grantees:

- with a relatively new or informal **organizational structure**;
- with a less formalized, undocumented or lower degree of **strategic clarity** and **institutional strength** compared to larger, longer-standing actors in the field;
- that may still be **led and shaped by a founder director**; and
- that **have grown rapidly in terms of annual budget size or staffing** and may require a more formal governance structure and organizational systems.

Another dimension explored during this first wave of data collection is the potential trade-offs to be made by these emerging organizations between retaining pre-existing nimbleness and engaging in formalization. This case study focuses on two key questions:

1. how do organizations solidify their existence and what is the role of BUILD in this process of consolidation?
2. to which extent is the BUILD model tailored for smaller, newer and less formalized organizations compared to organizations that are more established?

### 1.1 SAMPLE SELECTION

The grantees included in this case study were selected to receive a BUILD grant because of their potential to become more established, stable actors and leading entities in their fields, and/or because they fill a gap or represent an alternative to the more established organizations in them. The case study's sample was selected taking into consideration the age of the organizations since they were established (between 5 and 15 years of existence as of 2019) as well as their thematic area and geography to ensure a varied representation of perspectives. The annual budget size at the time of grant approval ranges from USD 500,000 to USD 8 million across the sample.

Grantee	Year established	Annual budget size (USD at time BUILD grant was made; 2016-2018)	5-year BUILD amount (USD)	BUILD dependency (grant as % of annual budget / 5 years)	Primary geographic scope of activities
<b>Agencia Pública</b> Brazil Sao Paulo, Brazil	2011	572,136	1,750,000		National
<b>Upturn</b> Technology and Society Washington D.C., USA	2011 (became a 501c3 in 2017)	1,062,650	3,575,000		National

Grantee	Year established	Annual budget size (USD at time BUILD grant was made; 2016-2018)	5-year BUILD amount (USD)	BUILD dependency (grant as % of annual budget / 5 years)	Primary geographic scope of activities
<b>Center for Community Progress</b> Just Cities and Regions Flint, USA	2010	3,595,600	7,500,000		National
<b>In Docs</b> Indonesia Jakarta, Indonesia	2006 (InDocs is formally part of a pre-existing organization founded in 1999)	511,678	930,861		Regional/ International
<b>Doc Society</b> Creativity and Freedom of Expression London, UK	2005	3,147,098	5,875,000		International
<b>Action for Hope</b> Middle East and North Africa Beirut, Lebanon	2013	1,130,000	1,250,000		Regional/ International
<b>Akili Dada</b> East Africa Nairobi, Kenya	2006	1,400,000	1,500,000		Regional/ International
<b>Borealis Philanthropy</b> Civic Engagement and Government Minneapolis, USA	2014	8,556,000	3,790,000		National

Lower dependency (< 15%), Medium dependency (15%-30%), Higher dependency (>= 30%)

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The approach for this case study is primarily qualitative. Data was gathered via semi-structured interviews conducted through a combination of field visits and virtual engagement (Skype and emails). Interviewees included grantee staff (among leaders, management and operational staff) to understand which strategies they use to organize, stabilize and/or formalize and potentially grow, and in which ways BUILD contributes to these processes. Interviews were also conducted with selected respondents among partners and constituents to capture the effects of the BUILD grant from their perspective.

In terms of methodology, attention was given to gathering evidence about the organizational evolution of grantees and the possible existence of alternative pathways to organizational development<sup>1</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> Given the 'mirror' format of the case studies Established Organizations and Emerging Organizations, it was useful to draw comparisons and learn lessons as to the differences and similarities in their use of the BUILD grant and its effect over time.

sample allowed for consideration of contrasting approaches within a similar field or thematic area and provided opportunities to look at the BUILD grant size relative to grantees' annual budgets, which varied significantly. The resilience and agility of the sampled grantees were explored to examine the added value of the BUILD grant for emerging organizations.

A key limitation of this first wave of data collection relates to the variety of circumstances faced by these emerging organizations and their different levels of volatility. For instance, a grantee in Lebanon had to address the consequences of the civil unrest and demonstrations against the government during the last quarter of 2019, experiencing a severe liquidity crisis which could affect its mere existence. A grantee in the UK has had to manage difficulties related to the Brexit crisis, thereby opening a new entity in the Netherlands to ensure continued existence in a European Union country. Because the degree to which these crises threaten the work and existence of the grantees is extremely different, it is difficult to generalize findings across the sample.

Similarly, variations in the type of work and mission impact among grantees limit the extent to which their uses of the BUILD grant can be compared meaningfully. This case study therefore presents individual examples to illustrate the processes and outcomes related to the BUILD model for as it applies to emerging organizations, only highlighting broader trends when and where the evidence allows.

## 2

## INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

Before they received their BUILD grant, these emerging organizations usually underwent a period of growth and expansion with a keen focus on programmatic work rather than on the processes, systems and governance structures necessary to carry out their mission. BUILD was expected to provide grantees with the appropriate financial and technical support to set up strong and resilient structures to remedy existing deficits. This hypothesis is confirmed to a certain extent, but with nuances. Findings suggest that **a linear organizational development pathway is not necessarily predominant** among emerging organizations.

The sample shows a healthy skepticism among emerging organizations about the standard solutions adopted by more established organizations. For instance, institutional aspects such as working with a strict five-year planning cycle, having a detailed strategic plan, putting a number of policies in place, or establishing a traditional governance structure, are being questioned by grantees that were asked to carry out an Organizational Mapping Tool exercise based on a questionnaire that underscored aspects typical of long-term, large organizations. One grantee referred to the risks related to the “*tyranny of best practices*” and highlighted their preference for internal systems and processes that are fit for purpose and lean to reflect their ways of working: “*We are wary about rules that may constrain us from doing good work. We want to cultivate our visceral compass to lead us towards impact. There has been some healthy tension with BUILD due to the pressure to make things visible. We were worried about the tyranny of best practices. Homogenization tendencies with best practices is something we are trying to avoid.*”

In the context of BUILD support, all grantees in the sample engaged in strong discussions around the need to formalize; the rationale behind seeking to institutionalize; and the risks associated with these changes, especially vis-à-vis trying to preserve their organizational culture. As explained by one of the grantees, “*Are we doing these things to change social justice, or do we do this for ourselves, with a narrow-minded view of what an organization should be? Is it about doing the work, doing*

### Institutional change and the importance of organizational culture

For one grantee, the rather difficult experience of applying the Organizational Mapping Tool to their flat structure motivated its leaders to be more pro-active and clearer in their message to donors when describing the organization. After the Organizational Mapping Tool process, staff decided to document the key principles of their organizational culture, the flat nature of their structure and their attachment to keeping processes as lean as possible. While this structure had prevailed since the start, it did so through unspoken and unwritten rules, and BUILD's Organizational Mapping Tool led to realization of the need to be vocal about their ways of working for funders to understand what institutional development meant for them. To some extent, this outcome could be characterized as a "reaction to BUILD" (to quote the grantee). While this reaction was negative at first, over time it led to positive developments for the organization and a re-affirmation of their "DNA." This example suggests that, to some extent, the BUILD approach (e.g., the Organizational Mapping Tool, the proposal guidance or the BUILD pyramid) conveys an idea of institutional development that primarily fits larger and more established organizations.

*it better, or about my personal interest? If leadership cannot be questioned anymore because it's too codified, there is a risk of NGOization, and that's what I want to avoid here in my organization."*

A key finding in this case study is that **receiving a BUILD grant has not necessarily meant growing or scaling up programmatic work** for emerging organizations. Rather, the eight grantees visited have focused on the lower end of the BUILD pyramid<sup>2</sup>, aiming to improve the quality of their work and the means to achieve their mission rather than investing in programmatic growth. One grantee explained, "We are learning to be okay with not being in every available space and instead work towards mastery of our already existing strengths. Through our strategic plan, we have come up with a clear roadmap on how to stay focused on and measure what we are good at." Most grantees referred to the role of BUILD in strengthening their organization. One of them stated, "Our organization would not be where it is without BUILD – it allowed us to ramp up our infrastructure, that our program fees could not cover. We have been able to add staff, and engage in equity work and strategic planning, and staff developments in ways we could not have afforded otherwise. The BUILD grant is subsidizing our infrastructure as we grow."

Before BUILD, grantees in the sample did not invest much time or resources into building the organization, particularly in staff's professional development, building financial reserves or taking time to expand and diversify their boards. A clear finding from this first wave of data collection (and related to the previous point) is that grantees are focusing their efforts, time and resources towards institutional development more intentionally.

Most of the grantees declared that, due to their relatively young age, they had neglected a number of pillars needed for an organization to operate properly. This was the case for organizations that are still founder-led: "The question was, would these things still happen if I [the Executive Director]



[UP UNTIL NOW] WE'D ALWAYS PREFERRED TO DO THE WORK RATHER THAN ANSWERING THE HARD QUESTION ABOUT WHAT WE WANT THIS INSTITUTION TO BE."

2 The BUILD pyramid describes areas in which grantees can choose to invest the institutional strengthening portions of their BUILD grants. The pyramid has four tiers, from bottom to top: Strategic clarity and coherence; Effectiveness and Efficiency; Organizational resilience; and Growth and sustainability.

*wasn't there? Is it written down? We didn't have a board charter, we had a constitution that had not been reviewed since 2006, we had a loose human resources manual, I was making a lot of decisions and the board was not doing much. We had good ideas about what we were doing but none of them were written down."*

Intentionality around institutional development led to slightly different pathways for each grantee in the sample, but they **all focused on internal systems and formalizing governance arrangements**. Most of them have: 1) introduced more specialized roles in the management of the organization; 2) invested in board members' recruitment and revised the board structure; 3) either hired a financial officer or updated their financial processes; and 4) hired (or formalized a position for) an operations manager and/or human resources manager.

Going forward, a key aspect for this case study will be to explore the extent to which **putting the basics in place** is helping grantees carry out their mission and enhance their impact. Of interest, as well, is the degree of pragmatism demonstrated as they approach organizational development, and whether this approach serves their best interests. For instance, two grantees in the sample have transitioned, or are in the process of transitioning, to a different governance status with BUILD support. These transitions are likely to affect the organizations' own structures. Therefore, a more in-depth focus on the evolution of those new structures (for instance, from a consultancy model to a non-profit status) will take place during the next wave of data collection.

3

## NETWORKS AND FIELDS

Do emerging organizations see leading or taking part in networks within their sector as a priority, given their likely limited capacities and resources and their desire not to overstretch? The hypothesis at the time of planning this case study was that BUILD could enable grantees to become more active in their fields, and potentially act as a catalyst for them to establish more active and formal partnerships or collaborations.

Data shows that grantees in the sample are already fairly networked organizations in their respective fields, able to identify relevant partners and networks that help them advance their mission. No evidence of any fundamental change affecting the ways in which they interact with their peers was found. However, **there are subtle ways in which BUILD supports grantees' confidence about their place in their field**, as seen in the sample of emerging organizations we visited.

BUILD appears to play a significant role in helping organizations articulate their role in the field. For six of the eight organizations in the sample, there is clear evidence that BUILD supports their ability to maintain a clear niche. As a result of an in-depth reflection on their strategic direction, these organizations have gained clarity and confidence in the ways they communicate about their work externally, which in turn gives them more visibility. The combination of a) investing time and resources in clarifying their strategy, b) investing in branding and external communications, and c) using the BUILD grant as a brand to showcase the Ford Foundation's trust, has been instrumental in terms of placing emerging organizations on the map. As explained by one of the grantees, *"before BUILD, we were a niche organization, only people who knew us knew what we did"*.

Similarly, for one of the grantees, BUILD provided the flexibility to respond to the changing context (marked by populism and climate change) in a way that traditional actors in the field could not. They stated, *"This context creates new needs that we are only able to respond to by being agile in*



*an eco-system that tends to favor mammoth, institutionalized organizations.*” This is an interesting example of how multi-year, unrestricted support can help emerging grantees have a say in a field that might be saturated by larger, older, better-funded and more vocal organizations.

Interestingly, BUILD’s push to engaging in networks led to a healthy reflection regarding this for one of the grantees. As they explained, *“We have to debate whether this is the best use of time for us. We are more trying to leave the networks that hold us back and where we cannot get work done because of the structure and leadership of the network [than joining more networks].”*

Finally, although most grantees in this case study already played a fairly active role in their fields prior to receiving BUILD support, there are a few interesting examples of funding being used to respond to crises and mobilizing like-minded organizations to devise a common response to a situation, or to support a shift from domestic to international focus in terms of network participation and partnership creation.

During the next phase of data collection, the Evaluation Team suggests having a more in-depth focus on whether emerging organizations become more intentional about their role in their respective fields during the second half of their BUILD grant, once changes to internal processes are in place. It can be hypothesized that, following a strong emphasis on strategic direction and internal clarity, these organizations might turn their attention towards rethinking their engagement in their fields.

## 4

### BUILD MODALITIES

Most organizations in the sample received a BUILD grant that represents a significant share of their annual budget.

Conversations with grantees provided ample evidence that BUILD’s flexibility and multi-year commitment were conducive to long-term planning and further clarity in strategic intent. Nevertheless, two grantees remarked that it would have been **wiser to give small organizations a smaller BUILD grant, or the same amount but over a longer period of time**, to *“reduce the pressure to spend and do.”* This pressure to ‘spend and do’ seems to have affected at least one grantee in the sample.

While the flexibility of BUILD is remarkable in many ways, the **lack of flexibility in terms of allowing an open discussion about the amount and the length of the grant** is something that emerging organizations specifically found to be a disadvantage. While the BUILD format of 1-year planning + 4-year implementation helped grantees reflect on their ambition and intention, there was no opportunity for them to discuss the support modalities after the end of the planning year, although at this stage they had a more informed view of the grant size and length that would have served their interests best.

For some of these emerging organizations, receiving unrestricted funding is fairly new. The possibility to use BUILD funding for programming provided added flexibility to their work.

However, there are large variations in the ways grantees chose to split their BUILD funding between general operating support and institutional strengthening. One grantee used it to fuel delivery, expanding the number of programmatic strands in the organization and hiring more staff as a result. In one case, the sense of urgency and unstable context in the region forced one of the grantees to use a large part of their grant for programmatic work: *“We need to do something now. We’re not putting money into reserves because we don’t know what the future is made of.”*

Another grantee chose to focus on identifying the right scale for the organization, which meant reaching a healthy level of workload and activity for staff and an adequate size to be able to deliver their mission while remaining relatively small and manageable (scaling back from 25-30 to around 20 staff members).

For these organizations that chose to focus on institutional support and limit the amount of BUILD funding going into general operating support, the rationale was to avoid, as much as possible, the challenges linked to the after-BUILD scenario, such as having to downsize activities and/or being unable to retain staff. One organization spoke about the risks associated with spending too much of the BUILD funds in programmatic work and referred to their inclination to avoid a “*BUILD curse*.” As a result, the focus has been on institutional development, including building reserves. Two grantees explicitly mentioned that BUILD encouraged them to focus on institutional development. One of them noted: “*Otherwise our tendency would have been to move as much to program as possible.*” The other one indicated, “*We probably would not have spent much on institutional strengthening if we weren’t forced to. It’s not our strong suit, we are usually much better at doing the [programmatic] work itself.*”

As summarized by one grantee, “*The BUILD grant is a blessing and a curse. A blessing because we can get the database, hire a communications person, focus on impact and learning [even though] we technically can’t afford it.*”

There were **mixed views regarding the added value of the Organizational Mapping Tool** across the sample. For most grantees, it was useful to identify the areas they needed to focus on with their BUILD grant. For two of them, the exercise proved disruptive and counterproductive; it was seen as assuming a linear and traditional approach to organizational development that simply did not fit with their relatively flat structure and nature. In this sense, it symbolizes tensions related to BUILD: there is ambivalence towards the idea that the grant might lead to a formalization process that these organizations do not embrace.

When and where Organizational Mapping Tool recommendations did not fit with grantees’ own agendas, there was little to no pressure to focus on them from their program Officers or the BUILD team, which was largely appreciated.

Regarding the Cohort, Convenings and Technical Assistance strategy, grantees in this case study reported they had limited awareness about the availability of technical assistance or peer-learning events. There was also ambivalence regarding the relevance and quality of the convenings among some grantees, particularly in terms of their format and whether they fitted the specific needs of emerging organizations. A few leaders remarked that participating in large-scale convenings was not the best use of their time, especially as they are often involved in the day-to-day running of operations in their respective organizations, with little capacity to dedicate time and resources to attending external events.

Most grantees in the sample have a relationship with their program officer that pre-dates their BUILD grant, and in most cases it has been a fairly close one, with open and honest discussions about their needs and processes. Whether this relationship has changed in nature since BUILD is difficult to tell.

Most organizations recognize that program officers listen to their grantees, and especially to the fact that they aim to grow in impact without losing their flexible and responsive model or their passion.

### Lessons learned about BUILD modalities for emerging organizations

Two primary lessons emerge from this case study in terms of the relevance and effectiveness of the BUILD model: 1) the need to discuss whether it is wiser to give small organizations a smaller BUILD grant (or the same amount but over a longer period of time), to reduce the pressure to spend; and 2) concerns linked to the 'after-BUILD' scenario (e.g., having to downsize activities and/or being unable to retain staff) are all the more real for grantees that are less endowed in terms of resources and reserves to face the end of funding than established organizations.

## 5

### MISSION IMPACT

This case study's main hypothesis relates to whether emerging organizations have been able to achieve social justice outcomes in a way that accelerated their impact during the period of BUILD support. It is hypothesized that younger, newer and more flexible organizations are likely to benefit more strongly from multi-year BUILD support compared to larger and more established organizations, because it enables them to plan and act with a longer time horizon than previously possible during their relatively short existence. Additionally, these organizations are often still at the stage of defining or refining their strategic thinking and shaping the contours of their mission. The case study thus explores the extent to which emerging organizations may benefit from being nimble, flexible and innovative in terms of how to use their BUILD grant in ways that contribute to transforming their impact in their fields.

The broader contextual trends for the organizations in the sample show that most of them have experienced a period of growth since they were established, both in number of staff and in range of interventions, projects and initiatives implemented. For most grantees, BUILD support came at a time when the organization needed to take stock of the path travelled either since its establishment, or since the latest cycle of strategic planning. In most cases, this meant that grant recipients welcomed the opportunity provided by BUILD to shift from solely focusing on delivering their mission and securing funding, to attending to two broad sets of questions. These questions are based on what the Evaluation Team heard from grantees during the field visits:

- What is our *raison d'être* in the field? Has it changed since we first started our work as an organization? Are we relevant in the ways our constituents need us to be?
- How can we have more impact? In which areas are we needed the most? What does it mean to accelerate impact for our field? How can we have more impact without simply doing more of the same?

In most of these organizations there is a strong, visible and open discussion about how to develop unexplored pathways to impact and create new organizational structures to deliver impact. Visits to the grantees provided **evidence of a strong intent to avoid pitfalls such as the lack of critical assessment of an organization's *raison d'être* or the inability to reposition within a given field.**

The extent to which grantees have engaged in a process of questioning the type of organization they would like to be (or become) is remarkable, especially how they strongly voice their **aspiration to be different from other established actors in their field.** These young, new or relatively newer institutions share a strong sense that they need to affirm their identity as distinct from what they

perceive as highly formalized, siloed and rigid structures that stand in the way of responding to opportunities and critically assessing needs in the field. One grantee captured the risk of becoming a rigid, inflexible, established organization in a compelling way, declaring that their organization was a project launched to fulfill a specific role at a specific time, and that, should this role no longer be current (because it is fulfilled by another organization or because the need for their services is no longer there), they would happily close down their operations instead of struggling to piece together a new mandate to stay relevant: *“We [the founders] see a model in which we might have an obvious successor – or not. We might just shut down and disassemble the different parts of the organization. Or phoenix another organization. We don’t want to see ourselves as an organization, we instead see ourselves as a project. The project gets disassembled at the end, when it has run its course.”* Five of the eight grantees in the sample try to distinguish themselves from more established ones by stating that the existence of their organizations is strongly linked to their missions, and that mere existence does not provide a *raison d’être*.

This translates into being clearer and more articulate about their mandate and about why they are better placed to deliver their mission than they had been before. One grantee, for instance, commissioned an external service provider – a communications firm – to articulate their mission statement in plain English for a wide range of audiences, so that their role becomes easier to understand and more visible to external actors and to the wider public. This is an example of how an emerging organization strengthens their visibility and affirms their position in the field, financed by the BUILD grant.

To a certain extent, BUILD has catalyzed the kind of discussions portrayed above. Until they received BUILD support, most of the grantees in the sample had not obtained such large, multi-year and unrestricted funding. With BUILD came **the idea that the organizations were being invited to join a group of large, established and older actors** in the field. The idea therefore **reinforced discussions about identity and positioning**. Grantees started to ask: What do we want to be/become? And importantly, what do we **not** want to become?

Alternative ways of accelerating impact resulted from these discussions. An interesting example comes from a grantee that chose to operate without a formalized, written strategy document to allow for flexibility in choosing thematic areas and topics for their advocacy and research efforts. This decision came from the strategic thinking initiated during the Organizational Mapping Tool exercise as part of the BUILD grant process. What matters most for them is to respond to the advocacy needs of the moment and of their partners. To keep the organization accountable to their broader mission, the staff uses active project plans that ensure that their research is *“going somewhere”* and will be relevant and useful to someone at some stage, in order to prevent *“going down rabbit holes.”* For instance, the organization recently abandoned a project they were researching due to the lack of government, media and civil society attention to the topic at the time. As explained by their leader, *“part of the process is knowing when to quit.”*

Four out of eight organizations in the sample have used their BUILD grant to support similar processes of **shifting from doing the work to supporting others to do the work**. To some extent, this path reflects their intention to move away from a traditional model of growth and expansion that involves doing more of the same on a larger scale or in different geographies.

This mindset, which is fairly different from the ways of working of traditional organizations, requires a degree of flexibility and versatility in order to document organizational models and transfer skills and processes to other actors in the field (often other emerging organizations). It also entails a generosity that departs from competitive approaches keen on stressing distinction and uniqueness as qualities

### Shifting from doing the work to building the capacity of others

For four organizations, the last five to ten years have been about activities such as supporting independent filmmakers, setting up music and film schools, or providing support to emerging women leaders. Since they secured unrestricted funding from BUILD, they have shifted their working model towards supporting other organizations in their field to do precisely what they did before. By shifting from being *doers* to *capacity builders*, they found opportunities in neighboring countries to work with partners that can replicate their model provided that they receive technical support. Building capacity in other organizations instead of opening new branches or offices of their own to expand the reach of their activities is how they chose to serve constituents at this stage.

of a given organization. This degree of flexibility and versatility is something that BUILD support helped to facilitate by freeing up time and resources for these organizations to identify their technical capabilities, documenting them in a transferrable way (e.g., blueprint for organizing a pitch event for filmmakers) and enabling them to respond to like-minded organizations interested in learning from them. In one case, BUILD made it possible for the grantee to form, and invest in, strategic alliances with trusted partners in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda to deliver their leadership training. The BUILD grant paid for the financial and human resources to put this in practice.

While there is evidence that BUILD facilitated the process through which grantees articulated and affirmed their mission impact, it is difficult to assess whether these development pathways would have been followed in the absence of BUILD. It is clear that BUILD provided the resources to put ideas into practice. It is also clear that to some extent the ways in which grantees reflected on their *raison d'être* and on alternative ways of enhancing their impact was related to having received a large, multi-year, unrestricted grant. It is also possible that they would have eventually followed a similar path in the absence of the grant.

During the next wave of data collection, specific emphasis will be put on the evolution of these trends, looking into whether grantees managed to further develop innovative models of mission impact that are changing their fields, and the extent to which receiving a BUILD grant contributes to these changes. Newer organizations do not seem locked into the scarcity model of older, more established organizations, and think in terms of supporting others and sharing tools. This approach will be explored further during the next wave.

## 6

## CONCLUSIONS

The Evaluation Team found that BUILD plays a role in how organizations solidify their existence by helping them put basic institutional processes in place and clarify their strategic direction. Identity and positioning in the field are central to grantees' discussions about their uses of the BUILD grant. They have focused efforts, time and resources on institutional development, which has been instrumental in terms of placing them on the map in their respective fields.

However, there are some questions around the extent to which the BUILD model is tailored for newer, less conventional organizations. It appears that **alternative scenarios of organizational evolution are preferred by grantees that seek to retain flexibility and agility while engaging in formalization processes.** A linear organizational development pathway towards becoming established is not

necessarily what prevails among emerging organizations. There is a healthy skepticism about standard solutions typically adopted by more established organizations, and grantees have raised their concerns about the risk of formalization brought by the BUILD program.

Another key finding is that receiving BUILD support does not necessarily mean growing or scaling up programmatic work. Rather, most grantees have focused on the lower end of the BUILD pyramid, aiming to improve the quality of their work and the means to achieve their mission instead of investing in programmatic growth. This reflects their intention to move away from a traditional model of growth and expansion that involves doing more of the same at a larger scale or in different geographies. Some emerging organizations have used their BUILD grant to support a shift from **doing the work to supporting others to do the work**. This suggests that a different BUILD theory of change may be more suitable for these grantees.

Is BUILD envisioned to facilitate transformation in emerging organizations? To what extent does it lead to sustainable institutional development? While it is too early to provide definitive answers to these questions, the Evaluation Team found evidence that BUILD's flexibility and the multi-year commitment were conducive to long-term planning and to developing further clarity in strategic intent. The Evaluation Team also observed that the BUILD grant pushed a few grantees to focus on institutional development or to fuel delivery in ways that may not be sustainable in the long term.

The question also remains of whether BUILD represents a risk for these emerging organizations. Large **investments in institutional strengthening require time and resources to implement, and emerging organizations are often less able to carve time** for staff to reflect on strategic direction or focus on internal systems and processes. The case study revealed that a *"BUILD curse"* (i.e., the risk of BUILD being too large an investment under a short period of time, and an investment that cannot be sustained after the end of the grant) is more likely to affect emerging organizations than their older, more established counterparts. For at least half of the organizations in the sample, there is no clear exit strategy after five years of BUILD funding, which raises the question of how BUILD represents a commitment to sustainable institutional development.

## 7

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TO GRANTEES

1. Grantees are encouraged to continue reflecting on their needs to formalize and strengthen in a healthy and constructive way while taking the time to plan for the changes they need to bring about in their organizations.
2. Balancing institutional development and programmatic work is a concern that not only pertains to the life of the BUILD grant. Grantees may want to sustain their intention to develop strong and resilient organizations and seek the type of funding that can respond to this need.
3. Some organizations, especially those that secured a BUILD grant already some years ago, could possibly enter another period of planning after having implemented a large number of the changes. Learning from these changes and the subsequent needs of the organization, as well as how to finance these in the future, will be key to sustain the positive outcomes from the BUILD program.

## TO THE FORD FOUNDATION

1. The BUILD Team and program officers should reflect on the BUILD theory of change for emerging organizations and ask whether it might lead to putting pressure on some grantees to formalize and grow.
2. The size and length of the grant should be discussed with the prospective grantee, to openly and honestly explore the level of ambition, and the absorption capacity of the organization.
3. Grants with a smaller annualized amount and a longer grant term (between 5 and 8 years, possibly longer) might be preferable to ensure that young grantee organizations are able to reflect on their needs and plan for the medium- to long-term without feeling the pressure to spend BUILD funds over a relatively short period of time.
4. Individualized support should be part of the Cohort, Convenings and Technical Assistance strategy (e.g., technical assistance and facilitation of peer learning, possibly in the form of study visits between grantees sharing the same institutional development challenges).
5. A post-BUILD strategy should be discussed as early as possible with the grantee to ensure that investments in organizational development are approached with the right timeframe in mind.

## TO OTHER PHILANTHROPIES

1. Carefully select the organizations to be supported, with specific attention to their ability to reflect on their strategic intent and to assess the relevance of their internal structures and processes. The capacity of these organizations to conduct a critical and constructive self-assessment of their needs in the medium- to long-term is key to ensuring that they engage in a process of strengthening that will enhance their mission impact.
2. Prior relationship with these organizations is likely to create a conducive environment for honest discussions about the possible uses of a multi-year, flexible grant.
3. Individualized support would be useful for grantees seeking help that fits their own specific needs.





# NETWORKS

**Lead author:** Ron Dwyer-Voss

## A BRIEF SNAPSHOT

Network grantees have shown how BUILD investment in a central hub can result in changes to a network by strengthening the interconnected organizations that a hub supports. Most of the grantees in the case study moved from a directive role as hub to a facilitative role, seeking to expand connections laterally among network members. Several grantees also shifted prioritization and decision-making functions from the hub to a collaborative process involving members. These changes led to growth in the network and to stronger connections with network members. Grantees influence the field through their network members, which takes more time but also can yield more and faster results.

## KEY FINDINGS:

- BUILD’s support contributed to the strengthening of each hub organization and, in many cases, of their nodes. Support to nodes included organizational capacity development; an increased role in shaping the network’s mission and strategy; direct subgrants and cooperative fund development; and strengthening the frequency and methods of connection among nodes, and between nodes and the hub.
- Grantees experienced growth as a byproduct of BUILD support. Their focus was on strengthening internal operations (strategic clarity, leadership and governance, human resources, finance, funding development and communications) and the relationships with and among their nodes. For several grantees, growth was characterized by the inclusion of new organizations and less formalized movements through strategic, intersectional approaches to the network’s mission. Since receiving BUILD support, most grantees have moved to a more facilitative hub model from more centralized and directive models. In most cases, grantees are not influencing change directly or exclusively, but through and with their network members.
- It will take more time to determine how BUILD contributed to grantee network impacts and to clarify if and how this support transcends strengthening the hubs to enhance the capability and impact of partner organizations to advance social justice.

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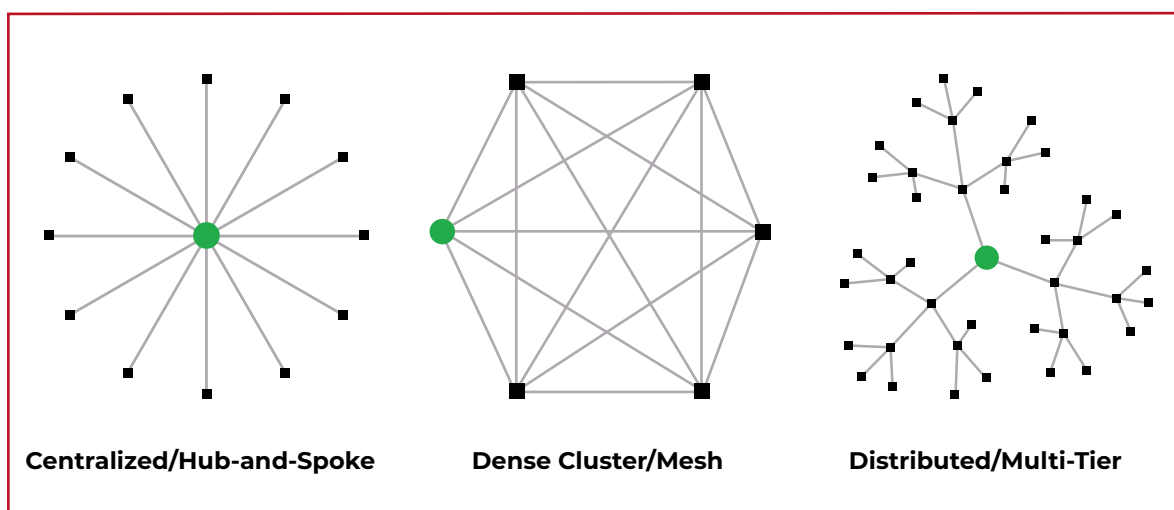
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## OVERVIEW

The case study focuses on grantees that serve as **hubs** supporting, mediating or facilitating groups of organizations (**nodes**) with shared values and a common commitment to bring about social change through collective action. Even if the focus is on hub organizations, there is a continuum of centralization and control in the networks that BUILD supports, ranging from all control maintained by a central hub to dispersed control and decision making. The Evaluation Team discovered different hub types along this continuum among the eight grantees in this case study's sample.

For most of these grantees, BUILD appears to have been used primarily to support not only a strengthening of hubs, but also the quality and nature of their connection with the network nodes and their connections with each other. For some networks, this has meant moving from a pure hub and spoke model to more of a centralized cluster or mesh model (see diagram below). In the latter, the grantee still plays some hub functions, but those include supporting independent connections between the nodes. The nodes, in turn, have more collective influence on the hub, what it does, and how it operates. Other networks have maintained a strong hub role but have fostered independent internodal connections where nodes communicate and act together independent of the hub.

These models are often noted by researchers as low-density and higher density to refer to the number of connections represented by lines in the diagram<sup>1</sup>. Several BUILD grantees in the case study are moving toward a higher density model. For instance, one grantee shifted from a centralized hub and spoke model with nodes of individual members to a cluster/mesh model. Another grantee even moved towards the distributed/multi-tier model as its leadership became multi-locational, its membership added institutions and networks, and it shifted its operations towards supporting local and regional movements. The number of connections and sub-connections in, and related to, their network is exponentially higher than those shown in the hub and spoke model in the illustration below.



Source: <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/series/next-gen-tools?challenge=0&topics=&media=0&audiences=0&page=1> (licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License). The green circle represents the grantee.

1 Ogden, Curtis (2018) [Structure Matters: How Network Form Affects Outcomes](#). See also Creech, Heather & Ramji, Aly (2004) Knowledge networks: Guidelines for assessment. Winnipeg: ISSD.

Half of the grantees in the case study sample either have changed or are currently changing their model of network. Two networks have clear hubs and are continuing that model, but have shifted the way they support the nodes. In both cases, the grantee is moving from a focus on issue-based support to one of organizational capacity, creating collective connection among nodes, and supporting subnetworks. Three grantees have changed from a typical hub and spoke model to more of a centralized cluster model. One grantee is changing from a network of individuals to one of organizations, which is also leading it to reconsider its nature and geographic footprint.

At the same time, grantees have sought to reorganize and strengthen their internal operations to support a more complex model. This has primarily involved human resources (hiring for the model, focusing on internal wellness and staff development, and adjusting leadership roles); financial management; fund development (including funding for the nodes); communications; and incorporating nodes into institutional governance. The reorganization represents power shifting from hub to nodes. Hubs have also tried to strengthen their institutional connection with nodes by hiring internal staff and leadership that are increasingly representative of the populations that these nodes serve.

Grantees feel these the shifts in type of model have strengthened their internal organization, their network and the individual nodes. While it is clear that such strengthening has transcended grantee and directly involved the networks, it is too early to determine how that has or has not influenced mission impact. The current global pandemic crisis will be an important stress test of these emerging webs of high-density networks.

## 1.1. SAMPLE SELECTION

The sample of grantees in this case study was selected in contrast to those included in the case study on **grassroots mobilizing**. Network grantees were considered for inclusion in the sample when they appeared to be hub-style organizations that exist to support a relatively fixed group of other organizations and individuals in a given field. The differences between network and grassroots mobilizing organizations are fuzzy and wide. Given this inter-relatedness, learnings derived from the two studies should be considered together. The scale of the respective case studies grantees' network webs is mostly larger than that of grassroots grantees, but not entirely.

The Evaluation Team met with eight grantees, four based in the Global South and four in the United States. There are two global networks, two African sub-regional networks (each based in one country in Africa but partially working beyond those borders) and four national networks based in the United States. All the grantees were part of the 2016 BUILD cohort, and therefore over half/way through their grant period when visited by the Evaluation Team in late 2019 and early 2020.

Grantee/program area/ headquarters location	Year established	Annual budget size (USD at time BUILD grant was made; 2016-2018)	5-year BUILD amount (USD)	BUILD dependency (at time BUILD grant was made)	Primary geographic scope of activities
<b>Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)</b> BUILD ProgramNo HQ. Co-EDs based in Washington D.C. and Cape Verde	1984	4,100,000	3,500,000		Global
<b>Katswe Sistahood</b> Southern Africa Harare, Zimbabwe	2008	789,014	1,450,000		Regional/ international
<b>Polis Global Platform for the Right to the City</b> Brazil São Paulo, Brazil	2015	873,000	1,500,000		Global
<b>Third World Network – Africa</b> West Africa Accra, Ghana	1995	1,617,925	1,200,000		Regional/ international
<b>Faith in Action</b> Civic Engagement, Government San Diego and Washington D.C., US	1974	14,400,000	5,050,000		National
<b>Family Values at Work</b> Inclusive Economies No headquarters, Executive Director based in Washington D.C., US	2010	4,898,938	12,810,000		National
<b>Partnership for Working Families</b> Equitable Development Oakland, US	2003	5,000,000	7,850,000		National
<b>UNIDOS US</b> Gender, racial and ethnic justice New York and Washington D.C., US	1969	37,200,000	9,000,000		National

Lower dependency (< 15%), Medium dependency (15%-30%), Higher dependency (>= 30%)

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This case study used the **Most Significant Change** methodology. Grantees found it challenging to assess which changes were most significant for their network nodes and in their fields. In some cases, the Evaluation Team was able to connect with network members and evaluate how they experienced changes in the hub, the network and, occasionally, the field. These impressions

were limited by our access to nodes recommended by the hub grantee. Inquiries may have been characterized by a certain bias towards grantees that have a good relationship with the hub. The Evaluation Team noticed a strong degree of openness and candidness in conversations with nodes, so this bias may not be pronounced, but it should be acknowledged as a limitation in our capacity to assess changes at the network and field levels.

The Evaluation Team analyzed how BUILD's various components contributed to changes in the organizations and field, and the degree to which the grantees identified BUILD components as important contributions to or influences on those changes. If a grantee described the Organizational Mapping Tool process and subsequent strategic planning funded by BUILD as instrumental in remaking their network sub-granting, they were asked about the particular contributions each made to the changes they experienced, but without attempting to trace dollars spent relative to impact.

The site visit process revealed that two grantees included in this case study did not fit the traditional hub model. One grantee was in the process of planning change from an organization that supports and helps engage networks and coalitions around specific issues to becoming the hub of a network. The other was a coalition-style coordinator, but not a central institution. The grantees still had valuable experiences with BUILD that were taken into consideration in the data analysis for the type of organizations they represented.

## 2

## INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

The most common uses of funding among network grantees focused on achieving strategic refinement and clarity; developing/strengthening leadership and governance, human resources, finance, communications; and funding development for themselves and the nodes they support. These top six focus areas were very similar to the most common focus areas across the BUILD cohort according to the survey<sup>2</sup>, i.e., growth and sustainability.

While several network grantees experienced growth within their organizations, it was not the stated focus of their work. One grantee said, *"Growth is where we want to get to, but now we are consolidating the structure to support this. Governance tools, strategic clarity, knowing what we should not do [...]. Anchoring ourselves first, getting to know ourselves. Getting clarity on what model would suit us."*

The networks in this case study did not focus their BUILD work on growing the size of their network. All the grantees seemed to be more focused on the density of network connection than on growth in scale or size. They focused on alignment of values and communications and connection with nodes rather than on growing the number of nodes. Some did experience growth, but it was secondary to the other foci on the strengthening the hub and the existing network.

Several network grantees used BUILD to support strategic planning. This was often done in the context of a primary focus on leadership and governance – specifically rearranging and/or refocusing how the network connects, how decisions are made, the roles and responsibilities of the hub grantee, and how leadership functions in the organization. BUILD funds were used to widen the circle and diversity of those involved in network decision making, therefore expanding ownership of the strategies that grantees were pursuing with their network.

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2 BUILD Survey, November 2019.

### Parallel paths of strengthening

The grantees in this case study engaged in two types of internal strengthening. The first is internal to the hub (the grantee). The second is internal to the network. For the hub, grantees were using BUILD to restructure or clarify leadership, improve finances and financial management systems and strengthen human resources – including staff wellness. For the network, BUILD was used to strengthen two-way communication between hub and nodes, provide funding to nodes, directly connect nodes (clustering) and create ownership of strategic clarity and direction throughout the network.

Many grantees have experienced some sort of **shift in their way of being a hub, mostly from coordinating and agenda-setting to facilitating and “lifting up” more localized and node-driven agendas**. One grantee referred to this transition as *“devolution thru affiliates.”* The implication is that power is shared, devolved from a central hub to and among the nodes. For some grantees, this meant giving nodes a strong role in strategic planning or sub-granting decisions. For others, it meant convening and connecting a node with subnetworks that act independently but with support from the hub. In these cases, the network moves toward a distributed/multi-tier model.

This devolution of control was often supported, if not catalyzed, by grantees' experience with BUILD. BUILD provided the resources and impetus to bring together nodes to do big picture strategic thinking and network imagining. The size and flexibility of the resources enabled hubs to think about how to share financial and technical resources in order to strengthen their nodes. For a couple of grantees, the Organizational Mapping Tool process created the conversations that led to the reorganizing of the networks.

For several grantees, the shift undertaken represented a change in the hub's role, from setting and disseminating the network's agenda to connecting and supporting nodes. One grantee described this as a **shift in their nodes' role from transactional member to transformative partner**. Members used to join in order to get access to position papers and discounts on conferences, but now engage in setting the agenda for the organization and/or for subnetworks that the organization supports.

All grantees in this case study used BUILD to strengthen their internal organizational operations. Most of them used it to support their immediate network of nodes, be it through regranteeing, providing technical assistance or facilitating independent subnetworks of nodes. In many cases, nodes were connected to the hub's work on strategic clarity. Strengthening was rarely thought of solely in terms of the BUILD grantee organization without consideration of the extended network.

## 3

### NETWORKS AND FIELDS

While non-network grantees used BUILD for their own organizational strengthening in order to achieve greater impact in their fields, **network grantees engage in their own strengthening and the strengthening of their connected nodes**. Then the hub and the nodes engage their broader fields towards achieving greater impact. A hub investment influences the field directly through the impact of the hub and its network nodes.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Grassroots case study grantees have a similar dynamic in that their field impact is often through those they mobilize.

A couple of the grantees in this case study were not formal hubs, and several are moving from hub to cluster/mesh models. This makes it difficult at this point to assess the contributions of BUILD's investment to the grantees' fields. The grantees point out that it is too early to determine their impact on the broader field, but they are optimistic that it will be larger than that of the hub alone. As one grantee stated, *"For both hub and network it is about moving into a more NGO-ized space, with both risks and opportunities, but too early to see how these will play out since ideas on how to formalize are just beginning to come together (maybe)."* Another grantee observed, *"We don't know what we don't know – so we are in the process of discovering how tech can support our strategies. What changes do we need to make internally and how do we engage affiliates more meaningfully?"* Finally, one grantee pointed out the tension arising from support that is promising for future impact but also time-limited: *"Looking forward to sustaining the impact we have begun. We use current fights to build long-term power for our communities so they can lead and win future issues at the intersection of race, class and gender. The funding is not here for the long-term implementation of race equity – white supremacy takes a long time to break down. To think we can flip organizations in a three- to five-year time frame and then pull back from that.... Long-term investment is needed to keep the networks strong."*

Some grantees have sought to strengthen their networks through direct funding and/or technical support. This is a concrete way in which BUILD investment in network grantees extends beyond them. While each BUILD grantee approaches field influence in a unique manner, network grantees seek to influence their fields in a way that is exponentially larger. **Most of the grantees in the sample consider their impact on the field through the lens of the work their nodes do**, and therefore have deployed their BUILD support with a focus on how it will directly or indirectly make their nodes and the connective tissue of their network web stronger. One grantee stated, *"We need to remake the internal infrastructure to support the breadth of the network [...] We always knew this but now it is up front – the collective power of all our affiliates to work on an issue. We are trying to figure out how to leverage that [...] to be more aware of what value we bring to the network beyond dollars, [we are] rearranging."* BUILD contributed to these types of changes by helping bring them up front with the institutional strengthening focus and the Organizational Mapping Tool process, and by providing the resources necessary to envision strengthened infrastructure and new relationships.



THERE IS NO POINT IN DREAMING OF NEW STRATEGIES AND WAYS OF CONNECTING IF YOUR FUNDERS WON'T ALLOW YOU TO PAY FOR THOSE CHANGES."

### BUILD's extended influence: from organizations to networks to movements

Several grantees who have shifted the type of network model they use expect to have a different impact on their fields than they have had in the past. Grantees have begun to experience a different relationship with their network nodes. Several grantees describe their changing impact in terms of a more intersectional approach to their work and that of their nodes. One grantee cites the shift towards bringing an African feminist lens to its policy analysis. Another refers to organizing at the *"intersections of race, gender and class."* BUILD's flexible funding has created the space for these networks to examine a more intersectional approach and connect to less formal organizations and groups beyond their core issues.

4

## BUILD MODALITIES

Network grantees were unanimous that the most significant positive impact of BUILD comes from the long-term commitment and flexibility of funding. Several also felt that the institutional strengthening focus was essential for them to proceed to use funds internally. One grantee said that the internal focus *“Helped us strengthen our infrastructure. It impacted how we do organizing. Then it enabled us to develop the talent compliment of our staff. In order to change, we have to tool people up to do the work that needs to be done. Stopping the turnover model of nonprofits and investing in our team.”*

The Organizational Mapping Tool was generally seen as useful in that it provided occasion for thinking about strengthening, but often misaligned with how networks organize. Several grantees pointed out that the tool is designed for a singular organization and so was only **partially applicable to their self-perception as a network or movement supporter**. One grantee reported that, *“The opportunity to do an initial organizational strengthening assessment with a consultant was an interesting chance to bring staff into a joint reflection on how we’re doing, and I found it quite helpful in terms of saying ‘we’re actually not so bad in these areas and let’s not take that for granted’, and we saw a lot of consensus in the areas we most needed to strengthen.”*

At the BUILD Power Convening of State and National Networks, experiences with Cohort, Convenings and Technical Assistance varied among this case study’s grantees, from *“not aware”* to *“nice to connect, but need deeper meetings”* to *“transformational content.”* One grantee’s Executive Director reflected the experience of the sample when she said, *“I didn’t identify it [the convening] as most helpful but I really appreciated and took a lot away from the ‘Power. Influence. Change’ meeting<sup>4</sup> – it was a constellation of women I wouldn’t otherwise have had a chance to connect with and some of those relationships have lasted.”*

Most grantees in this case study cite a good relationship with their Ford program officer. Some grantees have experienced several transitions, which has been unsettling. Grantees commonly describe the relationship as a ‘partnership’ and feel genuinely supported by their program officer. One grantee said *“we are close and open. We go back and forth, strategizing together.”*

### Sustainability of changes in question

All of the grantees in the case study sample come from the 2016 cohort of BUILD support and they are worried about sustaining the infrastructure they have built to support their networks. They are on latter half of their BUILD grant timeframe and not sure about how much new funding they will be able to leverage to support the new infrastructure and systems they have created. One stated, *“It is indeed long-term funding, but the question is whether this is long enough for the changes that we are preparing to initiate. The BUILD grant will be long gone by the time we realize the vision we set for ourselves during this first year [of BUILD funding].”* Another grantee observed that it took a year to identify and plan changes and will take a year to recalibrate if funding is not continued, so the grant amounts to three years of fully strengthened work. For the issues these grantees work on, three years is not sufficient to see lasting impact.

4 ‘Power. Influence. Change’ was a multi-day convening of women leaders of BUILD grantees held at the Ford Foundation headquarters in New York in March 6 and 7, 2019.



Although BUILD was designed for singular organizations, network grantees have found many of its components useful, especially the long-term funding and its flexibility. Several organizations pointed to the focus on institutional strengthening as especially helpful. According to one grantee, *“It gave us permission to invest in ourselves. Otherwise we would have poured all that unrestricted money into programming we couldn’t get other funding for.”* According to another grantee, *“The explicit purpose of the BUILD program gave us permission to focus on finding answers to questions that had been building in our organization over the prior few years – for example, about what types of representation we needed on our board; how we strategically make regrants to network organizations, etcetera.”*

Ultimately, grantees found it difficult to cite one aspect of BUILD as most important. Most of them talked about its components as part of a package. In response to the survey question about which aspect of BUILD had the most positive effect on her organization, one grantee said, *“The fact that there was an express emphasis on using these resources for organizational strengthening. The flexibility in the resources. The ability to allocate some of the funds to our institutional reserve – many of our other funders expressly prohibit this. The opportunity to do an initial organizational strengthening assessment with a consultant was an interesting chance to bring staff into a joint reflection on how we’re doing.”*

5

## MISSION IMPACT

According to one grantee, *“This is what it [BUILD] is for. It provides a more solid institutional basis to support the national network of activists, and also the increasingly formalized regional network of the organization.”* Most network grantees had similar views.

The short answer to whether BUILD impacted both grantees and their networks is “Yes.” Nonetheless, how BUILD support extended to networks varied based on the type of network and how each grantee used it. **The networks that shifted from secretariat-centered to a more facilitative hub seem to have impact that is quicker and easier to see.** The strategic plan of one US grantee reflected significant participation from its members, including decisions on equity-oriented regrants. Members who have historically been led by people of color and therefore have less access to resources are receiving larger sub-grants than grantees without the challenge of systemic racism in philanthropy. These decisions are made collaboratively by the members. A grantee in the Global South explained that they had momentarily moved away from a focus on growing the number of nodes attached to their hub to the extent to which they are engaged: *“Growth is where we want to get to, but now we are consolidating our structure to support this. Governance tools, strategic clarity, knowing what we should not do. Anchoring ourselves first, getting to know ourselves. Getting clarity on what model would suit us.”* Increased resources, strategic clarity and stronger connections should directly lead to mission impact, but those steps are still in process and it is too soon to be able to determine any change in mission impact as a result.

Technical assistance and regrants hubs have made changes whose impacts will also take more time to realize. One national network has shifted its technical assistance from subject matter expertise (policy and advocacy related) to organizational development support: *“We had developed a bunch of subject matter expertise departments but hadn’t quite figured out how that all gets out into the network – then we’d have these situations where we realized that ten different people were talking to the same organization and there would be other organizations that no one is talking to. So we developed a new structure [...] The idea is to have someone in each of our regions who’s*

*become an expert in the place, the people, the organization, the needs, and could really help us direct the right kind of resource in the right place and the right time.”*

Regional leads enable one grantee to provide hands-on organizational development support to their nodes: *“And that is long-term [...] it’s an organism, like a human being. Right? You don’t just quit growing. I mean you could, but that’s not what you want to do, you know, you want to continue to learn [...], so, we help them with creating an organizational culture, doing human resources right, fund development, finance, communications [...] because we made a clear and solid investment in leaders of color and women. [...] these core functions in order for an organization to really reach its mission have to have greater support. This [BUILD] money allowed us to do that.”*

These institutional efforts in capacity development are often partly funded by BUILD and extend beyond the grantee. **While the mission impact they aim for will be created by the grantee and the additional organizations in its network, that impact will only be detectable over time.** In some cases, like effective human resources policies or organizational culture investments, their effectiveness may be experienced as the absence of internal crisis or the reduction of staff turnover. A toxic culture or botched handling of co-worker conflict can lead to the organization spending days of productive time dealing with, and recovering from, an internal crisis that distracts key staff from their mission impact work. A positive and supportive internal culture and smooth conflict resolution reduce the potential for a distracting crisis and lower staff turnover.

The networks which created and supported independent subnetworks saw rapid impact when they convened subnetworks that may not have self-organized otherwise. One US grantee did this in several regions. In one state, they brought together a set of affiliates and trained them to act together as a statewide network. That subnetwork led a campaign successfully supporting the reinstatement of a program that provided 30,000 children free health insurance.

Another grantee, AWID<sup>5</sup>, brought together partners from an intersectional range of women’s rights and civil society groups to develop feminist priorities for the United Nations Binding Treaty on Transnational Companies and other businesses with respect to human rights. They invited five of the groups to an intensive feminist corporate accountability advocacy retreat to increase capacity and develop collective strategies. This subnetwork’s perspectives were included in the larger networks’ analysis and legal position. The grantee anticipates that while the treaty itself may take up to a decade to pass at the United Nations, the subnetwork they engage is already creating a collective feminist agenda against corporate abuses and impunity, and ensuring cross movement alliances to advance it in the United Nations and beyond.

Another way in which some networks are seeking to achieve mission impact is through what one grantee referred to as a “conduit” role that links the grantee’s larger scale work (nationally or globally) with nodes’ more localized work: *“We are also part of national organizations and coalitions. [We] have state [nodes] informed by the national work, and we try to inform the national work from the state work – a conduit. If national coalitions cannot get along, we cause wars at the state level. How do we work at the national level so as not to overburden the state organizations? Lots of national coordination to align messages nationally and with states.”* Another grantee discussing their connection between global UN work and its members’ more localized action said it is *“a win-win process as the members with local work start thinking about using the network for global engagement.”* These are examples of how network hubs are working to increase mutual relevance

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5 Grantee identified with permission, March 26, 2020

between hub and nodes while reducing burden. The two-way dependency is characteristic of almost all the grantees in this case study.

**Regardless of a network's typology, BUILD support for the hub has extended directly and indirectly to the nodes.** The support comes in many forms, including regranting of funds, an organizational development staff expert providing technical assistance, engagement in strategic planning for mutual benefit, and information sharing between levels of advocacy. BUILD has been used by hubs to plan, hire staff, set up the sharing infrastructure and establish sub-granting procedures.

Grantees expect that investments in their nodes and the connectivity between themselves and the nodes, and in some cases between the nodes, will yield mission impact beyond what the grantee could do alone. It is still early to assess the extent to which this is true, but some of the examples above indicate promise.

## 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

For network organizations, BUILD support contributed to strategic and organizational changes that transcended the grantee and applied to the network nodes and connections as well. Most grantees found that the changes BUILD supported enhanced and enlivened the nature of the relationships between organizations in their network. In some cases, these changes have led to an increase in network membership and/or expanded the type of groups and organizations involved, creating a more intersectional character. The **Most Significant Change** approach showed that nodes valued the role of the hub in attracting and redistributing financial, organizational, and technical resources. The Evaluation Team did not analyze whether these resources could have gone to the nodes separately and independently of the hub. Where this possibility was discussed, the nodes seemed to feel that the hub attracted additional resources and helped focus them in ways that could not happen separately from the network.

Grantees that engaged their nodes in the work supported by BUILD (whether organizational restructuring, strategic planning, or sub-granting resources) seem to have stronger nodal connections and shared responsibilities. Supporting networks may require mutual nodal engagement to maximize effectiveness. While this approach involves an extra layer of resources (time and money), it carries the potential to increase mission impact exponentially.

Several network grantees are using intersectional approaches and actively engaging and supporting movements, either through their nodes or their nodes' subnetworks. In this way, funding networks may be a promising way for BUILD to support movements even while maintaining an institutional focus. The ability to leverage this organizational and network strengthening into mission impact takes time.

## 7

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### TO GRANTEES

1. Network organizations offer a highly leveraged investment opportunity for philanthropy when they seek to strengthen their members individually and collectively. This opportunity can be lost or diluted due to the wide-ranging, rarely defined nature of networks. Because such nature is linked to a general lack of understanding of what makes a network a network, the role of the hub, and the power or lack of power of the relationships between nodes, network hub-like organizations would

- do well to develop a clear narrative about how their network functions, how they as a hub create added value and how their members create impact as a network.
2. Networks offer a potentially valuable bridge between philanthropy and less formal organizations/movement actors. Grantees could consider developing and articulating a clear strategy for fulfilling this bridge function and extending their influence beyond traditional established organizational memberships.
  3. Network hubs that have moved to a more facilitative role, cultivating more relational connections with and among nodes instead of traditional transactional relationships, have seen their networks invigorated and poised to create wider impact. Taking this into account, hubs could review their role with members, and the relationships between members, and explore the possibilities of less centralized, higher density network organization.

## TO THE FORD FOUNDATION

1. Consider more intentional investment in network hubs to expand influence in fields. Network hubs carry the potential for their investment in institutional strengthening to 'spill over', intentionally or otherwise, to their network members. Hubs also have (or can create) capacity building relationships with their members. This provides an opportunity for exponential increases in outcomes.
2. Consider expanding support to network hubs, particularly their regranteeing and capacity development work. Networks often connect directly with less formal groups and individual leaders. They are better positioned to bring capacity building and resources deeper into grassroots organizations and movements than most philanthropic institutions.
3. Consider using other tools to support network hubs assessing their organizational and network strengths and priorities for improvement. BUILD's focus on, and facilitation of, institutional strengthening, including through the Organizational Mapping Tool process, was very important to the growth and change of these grantees. Yet, the tool itself is misaligned with the nature and character of a network hub.
4. Consider terms of support longer than five years. Network strengthening takes time and involves layers of organizations and subnetworks. The hub, the connections and the nodes are all factors in the movement from 'a' to 'b' in terms of increased strength, capacity and even resilience. To ensure improvements at the hub and throughout the network are sustained long enough to achieve impact in the very complex issues addressed by networks, the Ford Foundation should look at longer terms of support.

## TO OTHER PHILANTHROPIES

1. Philanthropy seeking to influence social justice outcomes should consider investing in network hubs that catalyze and support focused subnetworks. Network hubs seem to be quite effective when they convene, facilitate and support subnetworks that have not self-organized and probably will not. The hub organization has a broader perspective and can identify potentially productive alliances. This is a unique strength of the hub. The hub is also often able to provide trusted support and capacity building for the subnetwork to be effective.
2. Philanthropy can add value to the power of networks by supporting more cross-issue, intersectional and inclusive work through peer-to-peer sharing and cross-field convening. Network hubs that organize more democratically than traditional hub and spoke models, but more relationally than coalition or think-tank models, seem to be able to move out of issue silos and become more inclusive and intersectional in their partnerships. This increases the potential for having broad impact beyond a single organization or network.



# ORGANIZATIONS WITH LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

Lead author: Maggie Bangser

## A BRIEF SNAPSHOT

Leadership transitions can be a time of significant transformation in the life of an institution. BUILD grantees maximized the opportunities for change during these transitions by renewing and reimagining vision and strategy; realigning and/or establishing internal culture, systems and practices to more effectively and equitably meet their goals; and creating and/or deepening their external partnerships to build stronger networks and lift up the voices of constituents. These internally and externally facing changes occurred among grantees experiencing different types of leadership transitions, including those emerging from leadership crises. BUILD funding, together with the vote of confidence that comes with Ford Foundation support, provided new leaders with the financial security, time and space to “step out” in their new roles. It also provided grantees with the resources needed to catalyze significant change in their institutions. The flexibility and length of the grant enabled organizations to pivot strategically in response to the external environment and to focus on the “long game” of building institutions to achieve mission impact.

## KEY FINDINGS:

- The highly concurrent timing of the leadership transition, strategic re-visioning, start of the BUILD grant and contextual (political and funding) challenges makes it difficult to discern the exclusive role of the BUILD grant in institutional strengthening.
- A key focus of new leaders is to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion in organizational culture, human resources and internal systems. At the same time, leaders of color, particularly women of color leaders, describe the particular expectations placed on them, and the toll that being an Executive Director<sup>1</sup> takes on them and their families.
- BUILD’s long-term, flexible and dependable funding supports the institutional strengthening priorities of new Executive Directors including, in particular, coaching and talent development, board governance and management structures, financial sustainability, equitable internal systems and processes, organizational culture, and diversity, equity and inclusion.

- [Overview](#)
- [Institutional strengthening](#)
- [Networks](#)
- [BUILD Modalities](#)
- [Mission impact](#)
- [Conclusions and lessons learned](#)
- [Recommendations](#)

CLICK ▼▼▼

<sup>1</sup> Grantees in the sample use the titles “executive director” and “chief operating officer” to refer to their organizations’ leaders. For ease of reading, the term Executive Director is used throughout the case study.

1

## OVERVIEW

Nearly one-quarter of BUILD grantees have recently experienced a leadership transition. This case study explores how those transitions affect BUILD grantees, and if and how the BUILD approach supports organizations and networks as they go through these pivotal periods of change.

Executive Directors, staff, boards of directors and partners discussed the ways in which leadership transitions influence every aspect of an institution's life, including vision and strategy, internal systems and practices, governance, values and culture, financial sustainability and resilience, and network alliances. Across the different types of leadership transitions represented in the case study, several themes emerge: the creativity, energy and power that new leaders bring to their roles; the dual challenge of accelerating social change while deepening institutional strength; and the fulfillment of the deep commitment to equity and inclusion inside the organization and externally.

Findings from the case study reflect how BUILD's approach, with its long-term, flexible funding, is an asset to new leaders building institutions and to institutions evolving with new leaders. BUILD has contributed to grantees' ability to meet their strategic goals in the near term and to set the stage for long-term mission impact.

### 1.1 SAMPLE SELECTION

The Evaluation Team met with eight grantees: three based in the Global South, four based in the US, and one based in the Global North that has programs focused largely on the Global South. The grantees represent a range of transition types: a) planned and intentional over a longer period of time, with deep work on creating an organizational identity and new ways of working; b) planned and intentional, largely maintaining past identity and organizational structures; and c) transitions resulting from crises. Half of the grantees (across the range of transition types) transitioned from founder to new leader.

Members of the Evaluation Team visited the eight grantees in person between September 2019 and January 2020. Interviews were held with the Executive Directors and staff of each grantee organization. In addition, the evaluation team spoke with members of the board from six grantees, partners from three, and three former/outgoing Executive Directors. These additional conversations took place both in-person, and by telephone/Skype. Three grantees in the case study had also participated in the Familiarization Phase of the evaluation: one based in the US, and two working in the Global South.

Grantee/program area/ headquarters location	Year established	Annual budget size (USD at time BUILD grant was made; 2016-2018)	5-year BUILD amount (USD)	BUILD dependency (at time BUILD grant was made)	Primary geographic scope of activities
<b>Fern</b> Natural Resources & Climate Change Gloucestershire, UK	1995	3,718,500	2,000,000		Local/ subnational, global/ international
<b>Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI)</b> Southern Africa Johannesburg, South Africa	2010	1,330,000	1,900,000		Local/ subnational, national
<b>Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI)</b> Southern Africa Johannesburg, South Africa	2010	1,141,000	2,700,000		Local/ subnational, national
<b>Foundation for Salvadoran Program on Environment and Development (PRISMA)</b> Mexico and Central America San Salvador, El Salvador	1992	1,611,000	1,750,000		Local/ subnational, national, regional/ international
<b>Center for Community Change</b> Civic Engagement and Government Washington D.C., USA	1968	20,484,000	6,000,000		Local/ subnational, national
<b>Jobs with Justice</b> Inclusive Economies Washington D.C., USA	1987	3,950,000	4,975,000		Local/ subnational, national
<b>National Women's Law Center</b> Gender, Racial and Ethnic Justice Washington D.C., USA	1972	12,985,000	6,500,000		Local/ subnational, national
<b>re:power</b> Civic Engagement and Government Minneapolis, MN, USA	2003	2,745,000	3,700,000		Local/ subnational

Lower dependency (< 15%), Medium dependency (15%-30%), Higher dependency (>= 30%)

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The case study focused on BUILD's contribution by examining how the grant might strengthen the opportunities and mitigate the challenges posed by leadership transitions. The evaluation



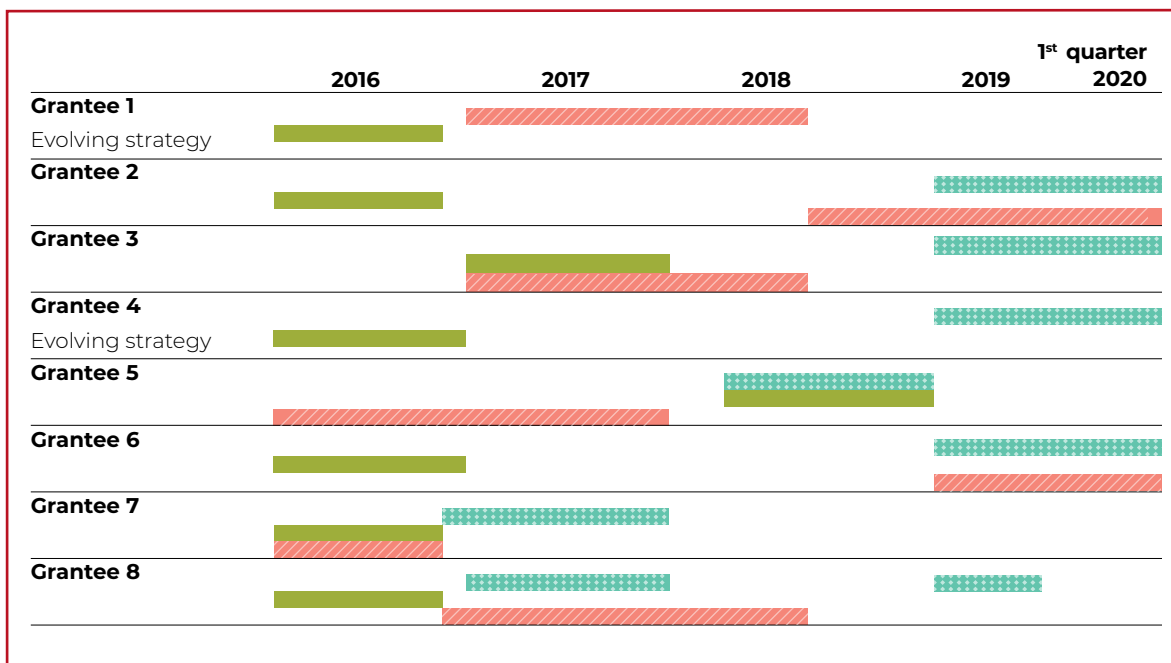
applied the **Most Significant Change** methodology to understand how the transition and use of BUILD funding can influence the experience of executive transition; vision and strategy of grantee organizations; priorities for institutional strengthening; internal arrangements instituted to facilitate strategic work; and issues of organizational culture – most notably in relation to race and racial justice.

A key insight derived from this case study is that leadership transitions do not happen in a vacuum as stand-alone events. The concurrent transitions in strategy, funding and external context pose a significant limitation to distinguishing the influence of BUILD alone. In addition, because the BUILD grants began within one to three years of the leadership transition, there was likely not enough time for them to have noticeably strengthened organizations' capacity to prepare for and go through such significant process.<sup>2</sup>

2

## INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

The **leadership transitions** discussed in this case study **have been part of a constellation of change that grantees are experiencing**, including one or more of these elements: adapting to abrupt external challenges such as the 2016 US presidential election and shrinking civic space in the Global South; a strategic planning or re-envisioning process; the start of the BUILD grant; and, in some cases, an internal crisis. While all the grantees described the ways in which BUILD has supported the new leaders and their organizations, findings suggest that the concurrent changes make it difficult to identify the exclusive influence of BUILD on the leadership transition or the grantee. Six of the eight grantees in the case study received their BUILD funding within the two years preceding the leadership transition, so the overlap of changes in the organizations is extensive.



The colors in the figure correspond to the periods of  
 ■ 1. leadership transition, ■ 2. BUILD grant and ■ 3. strategic review/revisioning

2 In the second wave of the evaluation it may be possible to learn more about the BUILD grant's influence from grantees that have had a longer lead-up time between receiving it and experiencing a leadership transition.

Grantees emphasized **the interrelationship between leadership transitions and strategy, and how it affects institutional development.** All the leadership transitions took place within approximately two years of a strategic re-visioning and/or planning process. BUILD funding supported internal planning sessions, engaging external partners to co-design strategy, and in some cases hiring consultants to provide technical assistance. One new leader stated, *“The new strategic plan looked through the lens of the leadership transition. It focused on the organization finding its voice, being powerful in the new President’s voice to get out there in a huge way.”* As these new or revised strategies took root and the new Executive Directors solidified their leadership, grantees used BUILD funding to institutionalize new (or stronger) internal practices that reflect both their strategic direction and how they choose to engage with external partners. A key feature of this work is a focus on equity and inclusion.

Grantees in the case study sample represent a range of transitions types. This presents an opportunity to understand the common as well as different ways in which BUILD may support institutional strengthening during transitions. The grantees share **several common uses of BUILD funding across types of transition, including strategy development and aligning institutional practices to those new (or adapted) strategies.** Findings suggest that the flexibility and security of the BUILD grant gave new Executive Directors the time and space needed to work on strategy development and to be responsive to constituents and partners. One grantee in the Global South described the flexibility of the BUILD grant as a way to *“let us get the work done when dealing with unexpected delays and political negotiations. If we didn’t have that, we would have had serious fault lines [with partners].”* A grantee in the Global North explained: *“BUILD meant stability...to not have to stress out and be [able to be] creative and focus on the impact. Essentially [BUILD] gave us the room to make the transition. [It’s] hard to know whether we could have done this without BUILD. It wouldn’t have been this thoughtful and with so much research.”*

Grantees also share similar priorities at the infrastructure level. The most common uses of BUILD funding for grantees going through a leadership transition include creating human resource policies and coaching opportunities (many of which address race and gender equity), financial resilience and sustainability, board governance, organizational culture change, and diversity, equity and inclusion. Each of the five grantees in the sample that responded to the evaluation survey said they are focusing their BUILD grant on leadership and governance, and four of them said that BUILD has contributed to the continuity in leadership. All grantees in the case study said the stability, flexibility and security of BUILD funding gave new leaders and their colleagues greater confidence to undertake this *“intensive”* work. As one new Executive Director remarked, *“(We are like) a startup that grows too fast – if you don’t have resources to invest in (organizational development), it leads to failure.”*

Findings also suggest that grantees across the different types of leadership transitions may **apply BUILD resources differently.** Among the three grantees that experienced **planned transitions with deep work on organizational identity,** the BUILD grant funded, at least in part, a *“long runway”* (one to two years) of co-directorship or focused handover between the outgoing and incoming Executive Directors.

BUILD funds that were applied to the transitions largely funded internal consultations, search firms and leadership coaching.

For three other grantees in the sample, the transition was anticipated and planned, and largely maintained the organizations’ existing strategy and identity. Staff valued having flexible funds to sustain past programmatic commitments to constituents and to institute internal processes that could outlast the BUILD grant.

### Periods of co-directorship and focused handovers are useful

Extended periods of co-directorship may be particularly helpful in transitions described by William Bridges<sup>3</sup> as opportunities to develop a new organizational “identity” with “realignments and repatterning” cultivated by and with the new leader. This can be a challenging evolution, as one new leader reflected: “[Our organization] was structured around [the former Executive Director] as the leader, and [...] culturally, he was the emotional center of the organization. He needed to extricate himself from that...what is our culture without him?” For several grantees, the evolution in organizational identity has helped staff move on from old ways of working towards new beginnings. As one grantee noted, “[The transition] was a thoughtful, clear process of grieving the departure of the old, beloved executive director, and having time for staff to think through and get excited about a new vision and strategy led by the incoming Executive Director.”

Two grantees that emerged from leadership crises focused human and financial resources, including the BUILD grant, on stabilizing the organization, reckoning with the impact of past dysfunctionality and destructiveness, and creating a new organizational culture. The new Executive Directors and their staff valued the moral support of the Ford Foundation program officer during the crisis and the financial security of BUILD funding. This was particularly the case where other donors were taking a ‘wait and see’ approach to the organization’s viability. One grantee used BUILD funds to hire consultants and coaches to help rebuild the organization: “The ‘clean-up’ from the crisis meant looking each other in the eye and telling each other what we did wrong and how to move forward. [We have] had to rebuild trust over time, show good will, and a commitment to rebuild an organization that serves everyone rather than some. That’s the journey we’ve had to travel.”

All Executive Directors in the case study prioritize **organizational culture change, particularly racial equity**, as a crucial part of institutional strengthening<sup>4</sup>. Of the eight new leaders in the sample, seven are leaders of color (four of them women). Three of the new leaders in the sample are the first leaders of color in their organizations. In reflecting on the broader trend in the social justice sector to people of color-led institutions, one Executive Director remarked, “This is a seismic shift. Let’s acknowledge that. What does it mean for us to collaborate that is maybe different? What is our understanding of our role in the change in leadership of this sector?”

### Internal practices for equity and inclusion

All the grantees in the case study are using BUILD funding to establish internal practices focused on equity and inclusion. Several new leaders have sought to remind donors, including the Ford Foundation, that changing institutional culture is a long-term challenge: “Once you start to open up large questions around how do organizations work, what is the culture, and who has the power in organizations [...] those won’t be easy questions to solve for, and you have to finish the job.” One Executive Director expressed: “[We] made a really conscious decision to be a more diverse organization and serve more diverse communities and put a greater emphasis on equity and race and gender and how they all play out, and power building and the progressive movement [...] Internally, the goal was to create an organization that was staffed up with people that look like the communities [it is] serving.”

3 Bridges, W. (2003) Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Cambridge: Da Capo Press.

4 The sample was heavily weighted towards grantees in the US and South Africa, and the Evaluation Team recognizes that issues of equity and discrimination may be framed differently in other contexts.

Women of color leaders in the sample discussed the additional layer of expectations placed on them: “I was very conscious of the fact that there are not that many Black women in this country that have these opportunities and I didn’t want to let anyone down. The staff and the women’s community are counting on me.” These leaders describe the pressure they face to succeed, to do it fast, and to run the organization like “a commune” where decision-making is collective: to “simultaneously be magical and amazing, but also not wield power.” Women of color leaders discussed the toll that the position takes on their health, family and marriage.

A group of six leaders of color in the US, including BUILD grantees, meet regularly to share experiences and support, including around the differential expectations, loneliness and stress they face. All of these leaders direct organizations that were formerly white-led. A group of BUILD leaders in the Global South have formed a similar group to meet regularly with Ford Foundation support.

Five Executive Directors of color talked about the **important role of board support** and of having board members who are skilled in governance to facilitate a successful leadership transition. Four grantees stated that BUILD funds have financed board governance training and transitions in support of the new Executive Directors and that the BUILD grant gave the board confidence in the new leader. They also mentioned that they could “experiment and grow the organization significantly” because of the financial stability of the BUILD grant. As one leader explained, “With the additional pressures of being a woman of color leader, especially succeeding a long-term founder, having a supportive, engaged, dynamic board has been really critical.”

At the same time, two grantees talked about the ways in which **boards and organizations need to step up differently and with intention if they hire leaders of color**: “The Board may think [that] just bringing in a leader of color [means] you’ve taken care of equity. But it takes more for the board to do.” As suggested in a recent blog post in *Non-Profit Quarterly* by Idalia Fernandez, Monisha Kapila and Angela Romans, “in preparing for a hiring process, boards should ask themselves and the organization’s staff, ‘what do we think leading this organization will be like for this new leader? How do we have explicit conversations about the range of identities and lived experiences on staff and the board and what support this leader will need given that context? What culture are we bringing them into?’”<sup>5</sup>

Although racial equity stands out as the fundamental focus of organizational change, **gender equity and building a younger generation of leaders** have also been goals of several grantees (particularly in the US and South Africa). Four new Executive Directors spoke about expectations they have encountered about what successful female leadership looks like and of the importance of a commitment to opening up space for LGBTQI leaders. Among the four new leaders who are younger than their predecessors, transitioning to the next generation was an explicit goal of the former management. One former Executive Director stated, “I wanted someone younger to bring a new perspective;” while an outgoing one cautioned that, “The youths now at [this organization] need to understand how [we] survive. They need to



I AM CLEAR THAT THE STANDARDS SET FOR [THE NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, A WOMAN OF COLOR] AND EXPECTATIONS OF STAFF ARE NOT THE SAME THAT WOULD HAVE APPLIED FOR OUR [FORMER LEADERS] BECAUSE THEY WERE WHITE. [...] THERE IS A DIFFERENT STANDARD - A MUCH HIGHER EXPECTATION THAT ON ALL OF THE INTERNAL THINGS IT WILL BE EXACTLY WHAT THE STAFF WANTS, IN THE WAY THEY WANT IT, IN A TIMEFRAME THAT THEY WANT AND NEED IT.”

5 Fernandez, I., Kapila, M. and Romans, A. (2020) “Failing is not an option: How non-profit boards can support leaders of color.” *Non-Profit Quarterly*, June 19.

*understand relations with donors and how to navigate this ... Many NGOs have died along the way. I am hopeful but unclear how the experience will lead us, as it is very different."*

This younger generation of leaders is seen by several grantees as part of ensuring the sustainability of their institutions. Four grantees discussed the role of **succession planning**<sup>6</sup> and that BUILD can be a resource in planning for leadership transitions.

Several grantees see the **pipeline of new talent** as important to foster organizational sustainability and operationalize their commitment to hire and retain people of color. Three new Executive Directors talked specifically about developing a *"deep bench of people"* to be part of the longer-term vision for the organization: *"The BUILD grant was really instrumental so that we had a structured approach to the succession. It was very reassuring. It was also about identifying what kind of organization we wanted to have. It forced us to think about us as an organization."*

Four grantees are interested to explore **innovative models of leading**, principally models of being *"leaderful"* rather than having leadership. The grantees in the case study sample are very interested to collaborate with other BUILD grantees to share alternative models of leading as a way to test and demonstrate more equitable forms of collaboration, decision-making and stewardship in organizations.



IF YOU HAVEN'T DONE THAT INVESTMENT IN OTHER LEADERSHIP IN AN ORGANIZATION, WHEN YOU GET TO THE LEADERSHIP TRANSITION, IT'S TOO LATE. [INVESTING IN STAFF] IS THE MOST CRITICAL FACTOR IN A TRANSITION. YOU HAVE TO BUILD THE TALENT TWO LAYERS BELOW, OVER TIME. YOU'RE IN A VERY DISADVANTAGED POSITION IF YOU DON'T."

3

## NETWORKS

All the new Executive Directors in the sample spoke about their commitment to working in partnership with allies to achieve collective impact. While leaders who are not new may also share this commitment, it is notable that all the grantees that went through leadership transitions prioritize strategic partnerships and network affiliations in achieving mission impact.

Findings point to two themes regarding how new Executive Directors and their organizations are approaching their engagement in networks: building equitable relationships; and ensuring those partnerships build the capacity of all allies to achieve mission impact. As one new leader stated, *"[We have] clarity that transitions are happening all the time [in our network], and we have to engage with them [in a way] that leaves partner organizations in a strong place and builds our relationship with them."*

The changes new Executive Directors are catalyzing in their own organizations for more equitable culture and management systems are, for several grantees, a guidepost for having stronger, more equitable and authentic external relationships. One grantee stated that the organizational culture change work *"helped us to bring a more sensitive and supportive approach to working with partners."* A staff person from another grantee shared a sentiment expressed in many interviews: *"We cannot talk about external equity without talking about internal equity. The principle holds. We lose credibility as an organization if we are not holding true to those values internally."* Another

<sup>6</sup> See also the work of Miecha Ranea Forbes on "intentional pathway planning", including "What it takes to manage leadership change in the non-profit sector" (2019), Koya Leadership Partners, December 6.

grantee indicated: *“The intentional and supportive transition from the former to new executive director seems to reflect the values of [our organization] and how it operates externally, [our] internal culture, values and principles, [the] ethical lines of commitment to the public work and the way in which we do it. Not only what we are doing, but how we are doing it. Not from a narcissistic point of view, of being the savior, of taking away their agency. We’re playing a supportive role and that’s where it ends.”*

All the grantees in the case study are involved in **building the capacity of partners**. One Executive Director stated that *“[we are] taking a BUILD approach to our own network.”* This capacity building support includes financial management training, new data and data technology approaches for broad campaign-based work, supervision training, leadership transitions and coaching, financial support and moral support. Decisions about strategy and partnerships led to a **shift in internal arrangements** and ways of working in all the organizations. One Executive Director recounted, *“We deepened our commitment to flexible, responsive, intersectional work in the organization [...] by building ways to leverage one [organizational] approach to strengthen the whole.”* With BUILD support, another grantee has created internal functional/skills-based teams to align with the support that network partners have requested: *“A strength of us as a national network [is] we invest in the capacity building side [or our affiliates]. We have a team that also does leadership development [...] Some of that is through partnerships and referrals for finance skills, for example, and we do a lot of things like monthly coaching for new executive directors [where] we talk about board development.”*

Two grantees are **applying an equity lens to building their allies’ capabilities** by working with *“people of color, women of color and trans[gender] people that we didn’t have the opportunity to do before. The BUILD grant [is] a huge investment that allowed us to take a step back to see what opportunities came with these [network leadership] transitions.”* Another grantee organization, run by a new Executive Director of color, has a leadership development program for its network funded in part by the BUILD grant. That leader described their work as follows: *“We’ve been thinking about the issue of leadership when a senior person leaves a partner organization. [Our initiative is] investing in women of color in those emerging mid-trajectory leadership positions, equipping them with the relationships, capacities, and skills to be able to take on leadership of the organization, from a place of power and strength and have the support around them to do that.”*

## 4

### BUILD MODALITIES

Findings indicate that the **combination of reliable, flexible and long-term support** have enabled new leaders to be nimble and to pivot their strategies in response to sometimes volatile and unpredictable external environments. While the ability to be highly adaptive is an asset for all Executive Directors, it can be particularly advantageous for new ones given the multiple, concurrent transitions that they may be managing.

BUILD funding has sustained those Executive Directors managing the **emotional turmoil of a leadership crisis, especially as other donors took a wait-and-see approach** after a crisis. Reflecting on the stability of BUILD funding in the wake of a leadership crisis, one grantee noted that during their organizational crisis donors put a *“freeze on funds.”* Another grantee remarked: *“Some [grants] were a couple of months delayed. We didn’t know if the money would come back. When Ford Foundation said, ‘we believe in you’ and the funds came through, it was a relief. They were one of the first to unfreeze the funding.”*

Half of the new Executive Directors in the sample said the flexible, long-term commitment enabled their board of directors to “*re-stabilize itself and the organization’s direction.*” In one crisis transition, BUILD enabled the board to hire an interim Executive Director before searching for a new one. Two grantees said the flexible and long-term funding allowed them to explore new business models and revenue streams in case of a likely drop in Ford Foundation support at the end of the BUILD grant.

At the same time, for several new Executive Directors in the Global South, the changing funding priorities of bilateral agencies and private philanthropies (including the Ford Foundation) are threatening their organizations’ financial sustainability and potential for achieving impact. One grantee stated: “*There is a sense of crisis creeping into the social justice sector around funding which is happening at the same time as leadership transitions in most of the organizations [...] the new directors are not networked into money like the old directors. The old boys’ networks – where the former executive director could get a coffee with the Head of (a bank), resulting in significant amounts of money. I don’t have links into money in the same kind of way and new money is not funding social justice causes.*”

New Executive Directors talked about the value of both general operating support and institutional strengthening funds for their organizations. This is not surprising given the overall limited availability of general operating support funding for nonprofits and the restrictions that many funders place on the use of funds. General operating support funding was used by four Executive Directors for strategic planning processes, bringing an “*intentionality*” to colleagues’ discussions about strategy and program development that they determined was “*not just for our sake but for groups around the country.*”

Grantees valued the **dedicated funding for institutional strengthening** and the Ford Foundation’s recognition that organizational development takes time. Findings show that grantees use BUILD funds for strengthening human resources (e.g., recruitment, coaching, professional development, training); developing financial resilience and sustainability (e.g., fundraising strategies and technology); strategic planning (including technical assistance for this); and organizational culture change work (specifically diversity, equity and inclusion). Grantees also used BUILD funds for board development and governance (with consultant support); data and technology (to enhance programs, outreach and fundraising); and communications and branding (often linked to new strategic directions and new leaders). One grantee expressed: “*Getting [the BUILD grant] was a stars’ aligned moment. We had spent a lot of time working on the priorities in the strategic planning process. Then [the conversation] became about moving the institutional strengthening priorities rather than having to make choices in priorities...I’d like to say ‘yes, we would have used the general operating support money for institutional strengthening’ [however] the core institutional strengthening support made for some leverage in the conversations about priorities internally.*”

The structuring of the BUILD funding may be relevant for some transitions. Most of the grants in this case study took the form of 1+4-year grants. For a grantee that received a 2+3-year grant, the structure was both helpful and anxiety-provoking: “*The size of the grant and assurance of the grant were important. [We received a] 2+3 because in part we hadn’t yet transitioned [to the new leader]. I think [the structure of the grant] allowed Ford Foundation to sort of understand that the first two years would be guided heavily by the last two leaders, and the next three by me. At the time, I was worried because ‘what happens if they don’t give me the next [three-year grant]?’ As an organization leader you would want the assurance of five [years]. At the same*

*time, it was useful for me to be able to go through the [proposal] process again without the previous presidents. There are up and down sides of it.”*

Two of the five leadership transition grantees that answered the evaluation survey reported that BUILD conferences and convenings benefited their organizations. Several women of color leaders mentioned that the New Executive Directors and the Women of Color Leadership Rising convenings for US-based grantees were highly valued: *“The most valuable aspects of the convenings were the connecting, validation of experience, not feeling alone, and learning how others are handling challenges.”*<sup>7</sup>

Grantees in the sample had **largely positive views of the Organizational Mapping Tool**. Among other reasons, this was because it helped them “uncork” organizational issues that had been brewing and identify shared priorities for the organization to address, and provided an opportunity to discuss organizational culture and structure. However, two grantees in the Global South did not have positive experiences. One remarked that the Organizational Mapping Tool *“was ineffective – both the types of questions and the way it was to be filled out by all the staff, it did not allow us to accurately identify organizational management issues.”* Another grantee stated, *“The Organizational Mapping Tool was something we had to do for Ford. Frankly, it [...] was not of any use to us and didn’t work for a movement-based organization [which is a] different organizational model. It is a very Western tool. Global South organizations do not fit in. It requires more thinking [from the] BUILD team: what is it that they want to achieve with it?”*

New Executive Directors in the sample have generally had a good rapport and positive professional relationships with their program officers (thematic and BUILD) and directors. One Executive Director talked appreciatively about the significant support received from a program officer after the grantee revealed a crisis they were experiencing: *“[The program officer] was the first person we took a risk on as a funder.”*

### The BUILD grant signaled a good investment

Four out of the five grantees in this case study that responded to the survey indicated that the BUILD grant helped them to leverage new funding. During interviews, four Executive Directors commented that BUILD support had a positive impact on their relationships with other foundations. Several new leaders reported that when the Ford Foundation supported their leadership transition it reassured other funders that the grantee is a good investment: *“Being able to talk about the five-year grant with other donors was a vote of confidence in us. I know from that period that a lot of funders were really nervous about the leadership transition.”*

<sup>7</sup> Evaluation - December 11, 2019 New Executive Director Convening Summary. Email from M. Tirona, BUILD program officer (February 14, 2020).



5

## MISSION IMPACT

Achieving social change and dismantling inequality are, as one BUILD grantee stated, “a long game.” Because of this, grantees in the case study sample have not yet achieved measurable mission impact since receiving BUILD support. But it is already evident that grantees experiencing leadership transitions are: a) achieving near-term impact by meeting their strategic goals to shape government policies, laws and structures to uphold people’s basic rights; b) strengthening mechanisms that give voice to marginalized communities, increase their representation and build their constituent power; and, c) providing thought leadership to social justice movements can shape the narrative around the rights of marginalized people and disenfranchised communities.

Strong, viable and lasting institutions are needed to achieve this influence. Visionary, skilled and effective leaders are needed to steer those institutions. Findings from the case study indicate that BUILD has helped new leaders and their institutions to survive and thrive through a leadership transition. While many nonprofits and non-governmental organizations collapse because of a change in leaders, the grantees in the sample have succeeded to:

- Shape and articulate their vision and strategy;
- Pivot strategy when necessary in response to external opportunities and threats;
- Adapt and create organizational systems, policies, structures and capabilities that facilitate the strategy;
- Build and shape organizational cultures consistent with their values;
- Develop synergistic and strategic partnerships to advance their goals; and
- Maintain and grow their financial security to sustain the organization.

BUILD contributed support, flexibility and ‘breathing room’ for these transitions to happen so effectively. Examples of grantees’ influence and near-term impact include:

### *Policy and legal change, and structures to uphold these changes*

Five grantees had a lead role in developing policies, laws and public sector systems that articulate and enforce the rights of marginalized people and communities. They also established mechanisms such as legal defense funds and models of collective bargaining that provide recourse when these rights are threatened and broken.

### *Constituent power and representation*

Six grantees prioritized a focus on building the capacity of marginalized communities and “lifting up their voices” so that they are better positioned to lead political, economic and social reform; on providing training and leadership development for elections and governance; and on strengthening and sustaining local, constituent-based groups with financial, technical and moral support.

### *Thought leadership and shaping the narrative*

Four grantees brought allies together in novel ways to clarify the ideology of movements and develop a framework of action; created institutional partnerships with affiliates and communities so that research reflects their realities more fully; and, developed methodologies and research design to examine institutions previously hidden from view.

Given the short amount of time during which grantees have had BUILD funding it is too early to know if these near-term impacts will translate into long-term mission impact, but these wins

indicate that grantees are meeting their strategic goals. The impact of BUILD itself has been to help grantees stabilize and thrive during leadership transitions and to establish the conditions with which organizations can achieve mission impact in the future.

## 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The highly concurrent timing of the leadership transition, strategic revisioning, BUILD grant and contextual (political and funding) challenges can make it difficult to discern the exclusive role of the BUILD grant in supporting institutional strengthening or mission impact among these grantees. While it is clear that leadership transitions present particular opportunities for positive institutional change, as well as risks for organizational instability, other factors can also contribute to these shifts. Since the second phase of the evaluation will provide a longer window into the experiences of grantees, the upcoming work in 2020/2021 may clarify the specific ways that BUILD contributes to leadership transitions.

Grantees experiencing leadership transitions focus on their internal and external work. Both dimensions are enhanced with BUILD's long-term, flexible and dependable funds for general operating support and institutional strengthening. Internal institutional strengthening priorities include coaching and talent development, board governance and management structures, financial sustainability, equitable internal systems and processes, organizational culture, and diversity, equity and inclusion. In their externally-facing work, new leaders prioritize creating and deepening equitable partnerships with other organizations in their fields in order to achieve collective impact. In particular, grantees seek to identify the appropriate role they should play in networks and movements, create partnerships based on equity, and respect and build the capacity of allies in the process.

BUILD grants provide stability and a financial cushion for new Executive Directors as they go through a leadership transition. A longer lead time between the BUILD grant and the leadership transition may enable grantees to prepare fully for organizational change, including the process of developing a succession plan.

Achieving social justice and dismantling inequality are very long term goals. Grantees experiencing leadership transitions have used BUILD support to stabilize during the change of leaders and to thrive afterwards. This has contributed to meeting their strategic goals and achieving near-term impact, which sets the stage for achieving long-term mission impact in future.

## 7

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### TO GRANTEES

1. Continue (and create new ways) to share experiences and information on approaches to organizational development including models of leadership/leaderful, how institutional strengthening can reflect changing organizational culture, operationalizing racial equity, and board governance.
2. Consider testing innovative approaches to talent development that are linked to long-term organizational goals in order to encourage emergent leadership from within the organization.

## TO THE FORD FOUNDATION

1. Continue funding new leaders (particularly leaders of color) after leadership transitions and the modalities they have created to support one another in managing the stresses of leadership.
2. Provide a menu of resources that new Executive Directors can draw on for technical assistance (e.g., executive coaches, rebranding firms, approaches to organizational culture change and diversity, equity and inclusion, data security and management).
3. Connect grantees to other donors for potential funding, including organizations and networks coming out of crisis situations.

## TO OTHER PHILANTHROPIES

1. Develop a grant-making approach that effectively supports new leaders, and particularly new leaders of color, and continue to fund them well after a transition.
2. Do not shy away from supporting organizations that are going through a leadership transition related to a crisis.
3. Fund training for new Executive Directors on issues including succession planning, management skills, organizational co-leadership models, and integrating diversity, equity and inclusion.



# GRASSROOTS MOBILIZING ORGANIZATIONS








**Lead author:** Ian Christoplos

## A BRIEF SNAPSHOT

The grassroots mobilizing organizations supported by BUILD have expanded their range of constituencies and/or geographically and invested resources in existing branches and partnerships. With BUILD support, grantees have increased the scope of their work and become much more intentional in terms of how they engage with frontline partners. This includes sharpening their narratives about fighting discrimination through closer dialogue between local and central levels and by expanding training financed by BUILD. These grantees are discussing how to maintain the verve and solidarity that is at the core of their organizational cultures while undergoing growth and formalization.

## KEY FINDINGS:

- Flexibility and stable staffing are important for being able to take advantage of changing opportunities. The unpredictability of the contexts where these grantees operate puts a premium on agile and iterative response.
- The BUILD grants are being used to strengthen capacities and continuity within networks so as to amplify the voice of grassroots constituents, while ensuring that they are more savvy about how to use knowledge and data to be more effective.
- BUILD has addressed gaps in the prevailing funding landscape to enhance the stability and strength of links between headquarters and branches/partners, while demonstrating the need to give priority to institutional strengthening of grassroots mobilizers.

-  [Overview](#)
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1

## OVERVIEW

This case study focuses on organizations engaging large groups of people in a grassroots manner. The analysis reflects on how institutional strengthening is enabling these organizations to operate in a more impactful manner at local level; reach small, often informal local partner organizations; and build linkages between this work and more macro-level policy change. An important justification for this focus is to better understand how BUILD can support those organizations working primarily at state-level in the US, and directly with marginalized populations in the Global South.

The analysis emphasizes how the BUILD grant is being used by organizations as they promote the voice and actions of the communities that they serve, including consideration of the different dynamics and challenges that the grantees face in working across challenging geographies, and institutionally within decentralized structures. Attention to context has been of particular importance at this frontline level, as it frames what is possible and what is important in confronting discrimination.

The analysis looks at how they **bring together advocacy with providing/channeling services to their constituencies**. Of particular importance is how they **leverage their core community organizing ethos to fight discrimination on a local level**. The intention has been to highlight areas where BUILD needs to be adapted to alternative perspectives on what institutional strengthening means.

### 1.1 SAMPLE SELECTION

The case study sample included grantees operating within a diverse range of geographies, organizing modalities and institutional structures. Most are 'grassroots-facing', i.e. they work with partners that are usually relatively informal community-based organizations, while some have direct, grassroots outreach. One is a global network dedicated to supporting grassroots slum dwellers' organizations. Three come from the Ford Foundation States Working Group and are leveraging their BUILD grants to reinforce state-wide structures. Three work with rights to natural resources, one in a single sub-national region, and the others on a national basis. Two are national organizations with a large number of local branches and use the grant to strengthen the capacities of these sub-national structures.

Some of the grantees work primarily at a relatively local level to influence sub-national government institutions and policies. Others use community work to enhance their legitimacy when representing their constituents at a state-wide, national or even global level. The sample includes grantees with headquarters that do direct organizing and service provision and others that operate through local branches or closely allied organizations. Some provide support, knowledge and dialogue platforms for partners engaging directly with grassroots partners.

Grantee/program area/ headquarters location	Year established	Annual budget size (USD at time BUILD grant was made; 2016-2018)	5-year BUILD amount (USD)	BUILD dependency (at time BUILD grant was made)	Primary geographic scope of activities
<b>Positive Women's Network</b> Gender, racial and ethnic justice Oakland, USA	2008	800,000	1,500,000		National
<b>Shack/Slum Dwellers International</b> Southern Africa Cape Town, South Africa	1991	6,000,000	1,700,000		International
<b>Indonesia Environmental Forum (WALHI)</b> Indonesia Jakarta, Indonesia	1980	1,926,568	1,500,000		National
<b>Indigenous People's Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN)</b> Indonesia Jakarta, Indonesia	1999	1,911,825	1,826,190		National
<b>Friends of Lake Turkana</b> East Africa Lodwar, Kenya	2010	1,071,615	1,500,000		Local
<b>POWER Coalition</b> States Working Group New Orleans, USA	2015	1,260,000	1,500,000		Local
<b>ISAIAH</b> States Working Group St Paul, USA	2000	2,300,000	1,500,000		Local
<b>Florida Immigrant Coalition</b> States Working Group Miami, USA	1998	1,460,000	2,375,000		Local
<b>New Florida Majority</b> States Working Group Miami, USA	2009	1,530,000	2,625,000		Local

Lower dependency (< 15%), Medium dependency (15%-30%), Higher dependency (>= 30%)

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The case study was undertaken using a modified **Most Significant Change** methodology in order to understand what changes grantees perceived to have been most important in their mission impacts, institutional development and positioning in their fields in recent years. Grantees were asked what aspects of BUILD may have contributed to these changes. The analysis included looking at how these changes were framed by the context and the historical/recent positioning and trajectories of

change in their organizations. The aim was to understand what their grassroots status has meant for the organizations in light of their role in their coalitions and fields. **Contribution Analysis** was particularly important for organizations that have long-standing relations with the grassroots, where a recognition of the role of contextual factors is essential for understanding what has often been an incremental BUILD contribution.

This case study was undertaken concurrently with a case study on **networks** that focuses on the relations between 'hubs and nodes' within networks. As recognized at the outset of the evaluation, there was a degree of overlap between these two case studies, including the fact that analysis of grassroots mobilizing organizations requires attention to 'hubs and nodes' as well.

Four of the sample grantees could be characterized as being large and complex organizations, wherein BUILD only constitutes a modest proportion of their funding. This makes it difficult to trace BUILD's contributions in processes that are primarily subject to other influences. The case study therefore seeks to bring out the trajectories of these organizations, while remaining cautious in making claims about BUILD's contribution.

Because the sample is very heterogeneous in terms of different relations between organizations and the 'grassroots', caution has also been applied when deriving generalizable conclusions, with the case study more focused on raising awareness of the diversity of approaches being applied.

## 2

## INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

With the exception of one grantee that was already overstretched, the sample organizations have all expanded both geographically and/or their range of constituencies. Some have invested more resources in existing branches and partnerships that were ostensibly in place before their BUILD grant but had very limited activities. With BUILD support, grantees have both **increased the scope of their work and become much more intentional around what the role of frontline partners is expected to be.**

Other grantees have sharpened the narrative about fighting discrimination through closer BUILD-financed dialogue between local and central levels (including investing in technologies to enable this) and training to ensure broader understanding of common goals and how the organization operates. The nature of these efforts to 'get on the same page' differs according to the relative formality or looseness of the networks. Some address getting on the same page through assemblies, platforms and governance structures. Others use hotlines and other technologies to not only provide advice to members, but also listen to the issues they are raising and make sure that these are reflected in the organizing and policy agendas. For most of the grantees, **getting onto the same page is not just about member/partner organizations, but also about managing volunteers and constituents.** Staff are expanding their capacities to work with constituents and volunteers to help craft a narrative that everyone can promote.

In terms of limits to growth in constituencies, there are fairly obvious differences among the organizations. Some are defined by their role, e.g. working with women living with HIV, indigenous peoples or slum dwellers. Some roles are more fluid and related to defining their organizations' position within broader civil society, while recognizing that others are already in place or better at reaching some groups. Some grantees have striven to fill gaps in civil society engagement, primarily youth, and in very few instances people with disabilities. Interviews suggest that BUILD contributed



to these changes through resources for expanding, investing in local offices, training and strategic clarity around growth, largely in support of trajectories that the grantees were already pursuing. Grantees are very clear that they reject donor attempts to steer their growth agenda. They experience such pressures from other funders, but do not perceive BUILD to be part of that problem: instead, they see it as helping them to manage the growth trajectory that they have already chosen.

**Growth in programming requires growth in numbers of staff and volunteers, and that in turn requires training.** BUILD has helped scale this up: funds are used to enhance the skills and work quality of volunteers and more junior staff. This is in contrast to the support of some other electorally focused US funders that just provide set amounts for knocking on doors and collecting voter registrations. One grantee expressed exasperation about how such funders were solely interested in numbers of registered voters and oblivious to whether or not voter registration could be used to inform and educate those voters.

BUILD is frequently cited as filling a considerable need in terms of expanding communications capacities, both within an organization and with its partners and direct constituents/members. Given their focus on grassroots mobilization, grantees tend to describe BUILD's contribution to communications in relation to **keeping volunteers and partner organizations mobilized during campaigns and other activities.** Somewhat less attention has been given to using BUILD support for regular advocacy aimed at the general public, though it is not absent.

BUILD resources have enabled organizations to expand and equip their staff, most notably organizers. In some cases, this growth has been substantial. Nonetheless, the needs still far exceed the capacities. In light of this, BUILD's contribution to strategic clarity has involved institutional reflection on ambition levels. One grantee stated, *"We only have one organizer for all of South Florida and people want us to be present at everything... Question is what our role is when can't be everywhere."*

Another human resource development role played by BUILD has been to provide resources for longer-term contracts, self-care initiatives, etc. so as to guarantee a modicum of staff employment security and also lessen the tendencies of organizations to over-work their staff. Though by no means an issue unique to this case study, there are particular **pressures which lead staff to over-work themselves due to their direct contact with distressed constituents.** One grantee stated *"Now we're doing more humanitarian work given what people are facing, but in the long term we need to think about staff being able a chance to rest and deal with trauma... We work so much because the communities need us, but it is really toxic."* Part of this has been about better anchoring in local communities through selection and support for field staff: *"Making sure that it is folks from the community who are knocking on the doors and that they are getting paid a living wage."*

### Managing volunteers demands strong staff

There are issues around how to manage growth in the volunteer base to ensure an appropriate balance with staff. Given the delicate position of many grantees that are dealing with hostile authorities who are watching them closely so as to attack them if they make small mistakes in relation to their legal status and mandate, too many volunteers without the staff required to train and manage them is a high-risk proposition. BUILD-related investments in staffing and training may ameliorate this challenge, but (for example) during an election period, when interest spikes, the grantees continue to recognize the need to exercise caution.

Investments are also being made in self-care, including, for example, team building, regular staff retreats, closing offices during long holidays to force staff to rest, and generally encouraging people to think about self-care. BUILD has granted organizations the **confidence to see that it is okay to make these investments and work actively to avoid staff burnout.**

Governance is perhaps the clearest indicator of whether or not BUILD has contributed to genuine grassroots-owned and driven institutions, but approaches are very diverse. Governance may consist of member assemblies or boards and committees made up of leaders of local chapters, of local partner organizations, or of leaders of both. Some of these governance processes are rather formal and strict (at least on paper), whereas others are more fluid, driven instead on (sometimes shifting) coalitions of actors that come together around initiatives that they value. Some have geographic structures with branches in different areas, whereas others are structured around grassroots institutional partners dedicated to a certain constituency, that join campaigns according to their level of interest.

Overall, the process of mobilizing members, partners and constituents in general assemblies and other forums to determine priorities for the organizations has also been at the core of mobilizing them to exert their political muscle. **Strong governance and strong voice are closely interlinked.** For example, one grantee convenes their members in large gatherings to learn what they care about. Their board is made up of chapter leaders who bring out grassroots experiences from the local level. The national field organizer brings in the voices of non-chapter affiliated leaders (while helping them form chapters). All of these discussions set the organization's direction. Then staff gather and translate information to make it accessible and activate the membership to take action. BUILD has often been used to cover the considerable costs of these forums.

Grantees generally report that they have broadly improved their financial resilience in recent years, including some expansion of regranting and strengthening the capacity of branches to generate their own resources. It is difficult, however, to discern whether or not BUILD has made a significant contribution to this. It seems to be more part and parcel of the overall institutional strengthening process.

### Electoral cycles strain stable capacity and momentum

Financial resilience is, for the grantees dealing with swings related to electoral cycles, a factor that underpins general institutional stability. They are resigned to a significant degree of expansion and contraction, but largely due to BUILD they have gained enough financial stability to keep a reasonable proportion of staff on longer term contracts. Being able to plan more intentionally around how to manage these fluctuations has been a game-changer in most cases. Even if BUILD does not constitute the main proportion of overall funding, it has contributed to a modicum of stability, which enables more proactive forward planning and, most importantly, a sense of confidence that it is safe to provide longer-term contracts.

This has led to a range of positive knock-on effects. One grantee stated that *“Keeping staff on has enabled us to develop to a different level [...] Now we have ability to think and process what is happening. Has given that flexibility. And the reserves have provided a layer of sustainability.”* The same grantee stressed that longer contracts enabled them to become more efficient as they did not have to waste time retraining staff and rebuilding their organizational structures in the run-up to each election.

In various ways, most of the grantees bring out how they were already moving towards longer-term and less restricted funding, although at different stages depending on their donor landscapes. One grantee described a growing tendency to talk about changing funding structures, but little change in practice as their donors “*speak with forked tongues*”. Being a BUILD grantee seems to have had a positive influence, but in about two thirds of cases was described as playing a modest role in shifting the needle towards unrestricted and/or longer-term funding. Two organizations mentioned the credibility that comes from being a BUILD grantee as important, with BUILD being a “*third party validator*”.

Some grantees see BUILD’s contribution as a way to move on **from years of being a ‘scrappy’ local mobilizer to being seen as a more formal policy advocate that deserves to be taken seriously**. One grantee described this as follows: “*We go around in buses and eat tamales. Austerity is our way of mobilizing. Others are staying in hotels, we stay in houses with few bathrooms. We are the king of sweat equity, but that is not sustainable. BUILD is helping us to move from sweat equity to being relevant to the powers of the state, and to do so we need capacities.*” For the ‘kings of sweat equity’ that predominate in this sample, strategic clarity is about enabling grassroots to become more intentional and thereby lead the overall network while moving towards more formalization. Formal planning requirements as conceptualized by most funders are a potential obstacle though, as they do not allow for the time needed for dialogue with grassroots partners. Investments in internal communications are part of this. BUILD support is recognized as an opportunity to do things differently by financing and allowing time for these conversations both at field level and across the different levels of the network. The grantees are discussing **how to maintain the verve and solidarity that is at the core of their organizational cultures while undergoing growth and formalization**. One grantee described how they were iteratively developing these processes to formalize how central and grassroots levels are linked: “*BUILD has helped us in rectifying some of the vagueness in how institutional strengthening leads to mission impact. Institutional strengthening tends to be about formality, but with grassroots levels it is different, rooted in mission impact. We have to ensure that the changes at central level, which are necessary, do not create tensions at grassroots.*” For others, this shift, sometimes gradual and at different stages in the formal-informal continuum, has been between the secretariat and members: “*A few years ago it was ‘[...] is so cool, they do this and they do that.’ Now it is ‘we did this, and we are doing that.’ A lot more ownership by members – we have worked hard on that shift.*”

The scale and costs of better managing these headquarter to grassroots relations vary according to the different geographies. Working within a single state in the US is very different from operating a national organization in the US or Indonesia, or a global network. The **vastly different geographies also influence their ambition levels in relation to reaching local communities**. The two Indonesian grantees work on a national basis in what is the fourth most populous country in the world across a vast and diverse archipelago. Their branches are small units with responsibilities for trying to reach out to millions of people. As such, their engagements in grassroots mobilization are more about creating conditions and communication conduits than about actual community organizing per se. A basic infrastructure for this was in place pre-BUILD, but generally very weak. BUILD has helped to strengthen these small offices with huge constituencies through training, equipment and by helping them to achieve some basic wins in terms of land and indigenous rights above all else.

Most of the grantees, albeit in different ways, are engaging in community level consciousness raising. This is not a new role but, partly due to BUILD, **an infrastructure of trained staff and more clearly defined operating procedures are in place** to support a shift to promoting more profound change. One grantee stated: “*With comms we want to bring a new level to the arena of battle and contestation [...] now see that we need a Gramscian approach to changing minds.*”

*Evolved from a comms shop in campaigns to the arena of contestation.*” A striking finding of this case study has been the **use of BUILD to develop knowledge**. This goes beyond what civil society organizations usually classify as ‘knowledge management’. In some cases, it includes collection of better data by headquarters and its use for better planning. But a perhaps greater emphasis is on enhancing the knowledge of their constituencies. This sometimes refers to voter education and Freirean consciousness raising, including education directed at constituents who themselves hold racist or homophobic views. In other cases, it is about supporting constituents to learn to know how to use data to influence policy themselves and to ‘speak truth to power’. For two of the Global South grantees, consciousness raising has tended to focus on training people from their communities to not only advocate for change, but also to develop relevant capacities and campaign as candidates for political office to take their rightful place within local government.

The role of BUILD in capacity development and consciousness raising has been subtle. Grantees generally had some systems in place for this already, but BUILD resources have helped to scale up and improve the quality of training and dialogue between headquarters and partners working directly with constituents (and/or the direct training of constituents). For some organizations, this has been about an expansion of the quantity and quality of initiatives, while for others it has involved the more basic level of putting long-standing plans into action.

It is apparent that **there is a continuum of approaches to strengthening constituencies/communities**. Some organizations described this as something that ‘we’ do for ‘them’. For others, it is more related to creating channels and communication tools to amplify and clarify ‘their’ voice.

3

## NETWORKS AND FIELDS

The scope of networks varies according to whether the grantee is itself a network (where its members work with their respective constituencies), an organization that primarily reaches out to constituencies directly, or a hybrid between these two. The sample includes all three types of organizations, and the **networking dynamics differ greatly** across them. It is therefore not possible to generalize from the sample in this regard. The grantees that operate largely or entirely as coalitions of grassroots organizations tend to have relatively weak secretariats. Those that work with constituents directly or through the organization’s own branches tend to have stronger head offices, and have been leveraging their BUILD support to decentralize to their branch offices that have direct interactions with constituencies, or coalitions with relatively informal local groups. The hybrid organizations have a mix of both of these sets of characteristics. Most of the grantees in the sample appear to fall into the hybrid category, with their own organizers and also partner organizations that work directly with grassroots constituents.

In the Global South there is a greater proportion of networking directed towards local government than in the US, i.e., not just engaging in advocacy aimed ‘at’ authorities, but also joining task forces ‘with’ these authorities. This approach is seen as a way to **ensure that the data and concepts arising from the grassroots communities are included in the political process**, and also that politicians understand how political choices impact on different communities. Activities such as mapping rural communities and their forests or collecting and analyzing data about urban services are ways to create a joint conversation about how to solve local problems.

Some of the grantees in the Global South stress that they have a different and important complementary role in relation to the wider civil society community due to their legitimacy in actually (and genuinely) representing the grassroots communities. Where **BUILD-related investments have been used to**

**amplify grassroots voices and narratives, this has in turn helped to reinforce legitimacy.** At a time when civil society organizations are coming under greater scrutiny globally, being able to demonstrate such legitimacy is of growing importance.

One grantee in the US stressed how it has been able to represent grassroots actors and help them assume their rightful place in leading civil society. In the past, national legacy civil rights organizations with little or no experience, capacity or legitimacy at local level tended to ‘parachute in’ with far greater financial resources than those available to local actors (especially during election periods). This grantee worked within state-level coalitions to redress this imbalance and seek to **prove that there are more legitimate and effective alternative channels available at local level.**

In Indonesia, the grantees also saw their grassroots role as providing a counter-narrative to that promoted by the very strongly resourced international conservation NGOs, which were threatening the rights of forest dwellers. Collusion between these international organizations and government to expel people from the forests and criminalize their livelihoods has been a major concern. The grantees are working to **ensure that these conservation NGOs are not seen as legitimate actors in the networks involved with rights to land and natural resources.**

BUILD has generally not been used to change the overall institutional structures of grantees’ relations to their different types of coalitions, but rather enabled them to operationalize these structures according to largely pre-existing goals. On the whole, **they are satisfied and even proud of how they are positioned in their networks, but want to act on this positioning in a more forceful, effective and rigorous manner.** BUILD is helping them to do this. Some are being more intentional and strategic about where how act to expand their networks, for example by striving to have greater representation in state capitals, reaching youth, or achieving a more appropriate racial/ethnic balance. This may involve developing more regionally specific awareness where communities may have vastly different cultures, priorities, threats and opportunities. Networking is a way to address these knowledge gaps and generate trust in places where an organization does not have a significant historic footprint. This costs money, and BUILD is paying some of those costs, first and foremost for bringing representatives of grassroots partners to capital cities and political forums where they can ‘speak truth to power’, and thereby ensuring that headquarters elites do not ‘speak on behalf of’ the grassroots. Communications and data collection investments more generally have been used to craft narratives that can be the basis for broad buy-in. In various ways, grantees tend to describe efforts to forge common agendas as being about developing these shared narratives and **strengthening their credibility and depth through a discussion about data.** As stressed throughout this case study, foregrounding the voice of partners is central to what the organizations do, and BUILD is part of making this happen in a stronger way.

## 4

### BUILD MODALITIES

Flexibility has been regularly cited as important for ‘leaning into’ opportunities and other aspects of nimble management. The unpredictability of these grantees’ loose networks puts **a premium on agile and iterative response.** One grantee described how they were working to retain strategic clarity in a chaotic situation: *“We’re fixing the crazy while also being able to focus on the real problems. Having stable funding lends itself to having a more stable environment to do this.”* Another grantee highlighted how their unrestricted BUILD funding gave them the independence to carefully select communities that are responsive to issues they were working with. It also enabled the organization to be more nimble and quick to respond to trending issues.

Another grantee, for which BUILD constituted a relatively small proportion of their funding, explained the value in relation to their peace of mind and ability to get away from conventional funding treadmills.

The nature of grassroots and network management make the **distinction between institutional strengthening and general operating support somewhat blurry** in the view of most grantees. For example, both are about investing in internal communication and training, but the differentiation between creating stronger systems for training (institutional strengthening) versus doing more training (using general operating support) is rather fluid. One grantee mentioned that having a defined split between institutional strengthening and general operating support was useful, though, as it blocked pressures to let resources slide into operations.

Given that most of the grantees were relatively well established and already had a high degree of strategic clarity, BUILD has been more about strengthening capacities and injecting resources to put those strategies into action. But this is not valid for all. Two of the grantees were using resources to develop their strategic thinking. The iterative approach encouraged by BUILD for institutional strengthening was described as particularly significant given the importance of anchoring this thinking in praxis when engaging directly at the grassroots.

One grantee has stressed that, with BUILD institutional support, **they have established the organizational and physical infrastructure that they needed**, and now it is time to use it. They are therefore looking for more (non-BUILD) general operating support, as well as more projects in order to engage their staff and volunteers in relevant activities. This is seen as a balancing issue. Because of this dichotomy, discussions at leadership level in the case of other grantees have also tended to frame efforts as institutional strengthening (developing systems for training), while at decentralized levels BUILD is perceived more as a channel for unrestricted general operating support (being able to do more training). Most of the grassroots mobilizers are struggling even more than other BUILD cohorts to break out of narrow, restricted project modalities, which is particularly unfortunate given the importance of continuity in building and maintaining contact and trust amid diverse partnerships and constituencies. As mentioned above, other donors are starting to acknowledge their failures in this regard, but limited progress has been made in terms of changing their practices.

Somewhat surprisingly, no concerns were expressed about the Organizational Mapping Tool not being network-oriented. In general, the Organizational Mapping Tool was described as being interesting to open up a conversation, but not extremely useful since the grantees were often discussing these things already. One grantee said that the facilitator recommended was not familiar with the grassroots context, and therefore the exercise was not very useful.

The grantees' view of convenings was vague but positive among most of those who have attended one or more. A notable exception is a grantee that was invited to attend and make presentations at what they saw as too many convenings and other Ford Foundation events, to the point that it is becoming a **very heavy strain on leadership resources**.



CAN'T EXPLAIN SPECIFICALLY HOW BUILD CONTRIBUTED. MOSTLY THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT MONEY ALL THE TIME. WE CAN SAY WHAT WE WANT TO SAY IN MEETINGS AND NOT THINK ABOUT HOW THE DONORS WILL REACT."

5

## MISSION IMPACT

In describing how they are achieving mission impact, the grantees note extraordinary obstacles and frustrating environments. One grantee stated, *“Doing immigrant rights right now is just too much.”* They also make clear how there are opportunities nonetheless. Grantees have achieved what they themselves describe as almost surprising successes and near successes in supporting progressive agendas in electoral processes for local government, in protecting land rights, and in changing policies. **Discrimination is getting worse, but possibilities are there.** Grantees make clear that in the current context, with escalating levels of discrimination and marginalization, they feel that their work is more needed than ever and that they can make progress. The energy this generates resonates in all the interviews, driving grantees’ creativity to break out of past assumptions about what grassroots organizing consists of, and to explore new ways forward. One grantee stated, *“People are sick and tired of just being sick and tired, so people are seeing that they have to work, even within a crap system. Ready to call out politicians when they don’t work as they have said.”*

The stories from the grassroots cohort make clear that most of these grantees are **facing challenging environments, due in many respects to their work at the ‘frontline’ with vulnerable constituencies.** Their institutional strengthening is in many respects about building resilience to violent attacks.

One of the grantees described how understanding and dealing with contextual reality has meant working with right-wing communities, and that even these groups *“listen when talking about the realities of their situation”*, including issues such as gun violence that affect everyone: *“Key thing is that we listen to folks.”* Grantees display a keen recognition of the need to focus on drivers of discrimination. Reactionary forces are the most obvious one, but there is also awareness of discrimination being driven by what are often seen to be ‘progressive’ agendas, e.g., conservation that drives indigenous people away from the forests or ‘big green’ that fails to recognize local livelihoods.

Due to the **high levels of vulnerability to climatic and other natural hazards (earthquakes, floods and tsunamis) and urban risks faced by their constituencies,** these threats are of particular

### Wicked problems in prioritization at the frontline

Prioritization of ‘which grassroots to mobilize’ is inherently difficult and becomes acutely apparent at the frontline. Grantees face a complex mix of discrimination. One stated that *“whether one project succeeds or not relates to how poverty is not homogeneous.”* This generates wicked problems when trying to decide how to target and retain a clear identity while also demonstrating commitments to the broad mobilization needed to respond to different forms of poverty and exclusion. Grantees face criticism from constituencies, who are alert to what they see as signs of favoritism, and also from donors, who often drive such favoritism. One grantee stated: *“Philanthropy has taken a liking to Latinx communities and funding more than Black communities. We make sure we can match when funding goes to Latinx with a Black community. Realize that there is competition out there, but we make sure we have balance and equity.”*

There are also difficult choices to be made around how to define constituencies and prioritize. Some grantees work with what could be described as single constituencies (e.g., people living with HIV, indigenous peoples, or those affected by a given set of extractive industries). Others are oriented towards more mixed constituencies, with sometimes diverging interests that need to be jointly mobilized to drive policy or electoral change (e.g., bringing together Latinx and Black communities, or immigrants and refugees).

importance to grassroots mobilizers. When a disaster strikes, strengthening local leadership and applying their local knowledge (as opposed to what one referred to as “*just coming with blankets*”) is sometimes described as an important niche by some grassroots organizations. One US grantee described how mobilizing volunteers as first responders after a hurricane was a way to respond to constituents’ deep concerns and to learn about their conditions and problems. “*We do step in and provide services as needed. But we understand these are political issues. We are strategic in where we are working and seeing where the spaces are.*” Given the very high levels of disaster risk in Indonesia, strengthening capacities for disaster management and acting as a conduit for relief supplies, are of strategic importance for ensuring the legitimacy of local branches. This may seem out of place in relation to grantees’ advocacy roles, but is actually very much inter-related with broader issues of land use and rights to land and other natural resources. A small proportion of external resources is set aside for an emergency fund by both of these grantees.

Grassroots mobilization in the US builds largely on an organizing tradition, whereas in the Global South the work has emerged more from civil society efforts directed towards local community development. The latter has evolved from the deployment of tools that were generally introduced by international NGOs in the past. In both the US and the Global South, **BUILD is part of how they are trying to transcend these organizational models to (re)position themselves** and find new approaches for reaching communities. One US grantee stated: “*We came to this differently. I was not a true believer at the beginning. Didn’t like the ‘door knocks’ thing. For us it has been about using data, base building. Not being afraid to talk about power.*” However, these efforts predated BUILD and it would be inaccurate to state that BUILD was a game-changer in this regard.

Particularly in the Global South, most BUILD grantees position themselves in relation to grassroots resistance to exploitation by the private sector, from oil companies to slumlords. In some cases, the collusion between governments and extractive industries that are trying to usurp the rights of marginalized populations has meant that grantees see their role as one of oppositional advocacy. In other instances, a more constructive approach is taken wherein they try to work together with (primarily local) governments to help them understand what rights are at stake and how to best respond. They thus **act both as watchdogs and also by trying to show the way forward through a critical partnership.**

Grassroots organizations report being able to maneuver delicately when dealing with issues that are divisive among their diverse constituencies. Some report having to “*step back*” from LGBTQI and abortion rights in order not to alienate some of their constituents. They emphasize political education and consciousness raising as a way to enhance awareness of common concerns and the nature of discrimination. Grantees also recognize that the provision of actual services (largely legal and immigration related, but in some cases even emergency response) is an essential starting point to bring together the communities they work with, even though they are at odds with one another politically.

Forums such as public assemblies are an opportunity to enable the grantees’ members to decide how to balance services and advocacy and to find a consensus on what campaigns to support. A distinguishing feature of this cohort is the **existence of democratic structures to amplify the voice of members and constituents.** This is not to say that these structures are sufficiently strong, and BUILD funds are used to finance and develop these fora by covering the costs of meetings and political education.

It would be inaccurate to claim that all grantees are prepared to respond flexibly to what they hear from their constituents. There is inevitably some filtering of engagements to reflect the sectoral strengths of organizations. For example, one grantee’s approach is to engage with communities that are responsive to the issues that it is devoted to. By contrast, the grantees in the States Working Group



have a diverse membership with diverse interests, as is needed in organizations with a strong focus on electoral work. For grantees with more specific constituencies, the scope of intended mission impact is clearer. Because of its strict and clear focus on women living with HIV (which in practical and strategic terms means mostly serving women of color with low incomes), one of the grantees is able to achieve a very high level of coherence and consistency.

Among the two Indonesian grantees, the common denominator for achieving mission impact has been found in representing grassroots communities that recognize the need to protect indigenous and community land rights. These grantees have been very involved in ensuring that local government is aware of, and replicates, national norms for community control over natural resources within their jurisdictions. These are not new agendas, but BUILD investments in strengthening both the internal communication between headquarter and branches and the knowledge and general operational capacities of the branches have enhanced outcomes in influencing local government policies and practice.

Some grantees see BUILD as enabling them to act on their recognition of the need to redouble efforts to engage a part of their constituency. **Youth is often stressed as being the priority.** In the US, this is partly related to their low electoral participation rates. In the Global South, it seems to be related to grantees seeing youth as having potentially stronger influence on politicians and the public discourse more generally. Responses to populism and fundamentalism are also seen as arenas where youth have a central role. The scaled up training of volunteers is a way of reaching young people, since volunteering is a common entry point to their organizations, and youth are seen to be open-minded and interested in engaging in political discussions.

One grantee described their approach to anchoring strategic clarity in grassroots perspectives as “*We only bring up the big issues if they can be tracked back to the local process.*” Choice of focus areas for mission impact is thus related to how to identify and utilize the added value of having an engaged grassroots constituency, both to leverage the credibility that this provides and to ensure that the constituents recognize that this is their voice.

## 6

## CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The discourse within this cohort refers to the **need to establish or strengthen capacities to amplify the voice of grassroots communities while ensuring that they are more aware, knowledgeable and savvy about engaging that voice for change.** Grassroots ownership and use of data are an important part of this. How they do this varies enormously across the grantees, but they have in common their positioning at the frontline of discrimination and marginalization. Furthermore, they are both growing and formalizing their modus operandi while remaining cognizant of the need to preserve an organizational culture that maintains the vitality that drives their missions. Grantees also face dilemmas as they struggle with how to target certain marginalized groups and retain a clear identity while also demonstrating commitments to the broad mobilization needed to affect change. The grantees working simultaneously with broad and narrow constituencies have considerable experience with bridging different engagements.

BUILD has been used by most of the grantees in this sample to address gaps in their organizational infrastructures and capacities, rather than for transformational change. These organizations were already generally strong in their evolving strategic thinking, but had few opportunities and insufficient human resources to put this thinking into action. Gaps were mostly about financing the conversations within

their networks, honing their narratives, formalization, and in some cases strengthening the operational capacities of their rather weak skeleton structures at local level. One grantee stated that *“Where we stand overall is that we have built the house, now it is time to use the house. The house is still empty. The needs are still there. We have divisions working with all of these issues. We need to use them to tackle the problems. We have systems in place, now we are ready to become more operational.”* BUILD has helped grantees move towards this operationalization.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TO GRANTEES

1. Grantees would benefit from actively exploring ways to share related experience, most notably in relation to the use of data and knowledge exchange to strengthen grassroots' voice in policy discussions.
2. Coalitions could come together to craft a potent narrative about the need for continuity when working directly with marginalized people. BUILD is generating a powerful body of experience that can contribute to shifting away from unhealthy, short-term funding modalities.

### TO THE FORD FOUNDATION

1. Given the Ford Foundation's primary focus on more macro-level social justice engagements, it is particularly important to maintain a portion of its grant portfolio invested in areas that directly generate concrete change for marginalized people.
2. The importance of stability and the concerted strengthening of links from headquarters to branches/partners so as to respond to drivers of discrimination at local level justify giving priority to the institutional strengthening of grassroots mobilizers. BUILD-like support is particularly important as a counterbalance to the top-down instrumentalism of other funders.
3. It is also important for the Ford Foundation itself to overcome its own bias towards supporting grantees based in certain major urban centers. The BUILD approach is particularly well-suited to organizations that are otherwise often forgotten or subject to erratic funding cycles and which are particularly in need of being able to respond in an agile manner to changing opportunities and challenges on the ground.

### TO OTHER PHILANTHROPISTS

1. BUILD is showing the central importance of financing the conversations that need to occur between headquarters and field levels. Philanthropists need to support grassroots mobilizing organizations to link their micro and macro level work, especially where this brings out grassroots voices that speak truth to power, even if these investments do not generate measurable results.
2. Instead of an either-or approach to priorities (as is common), philanthropy should strive to link advocacy with providing/channeling services. Part of this is about helping grantees to leverage their core community organizing and service provision ethos to fight discrimination that is anchored in their local power structures.
3. Support to grassroots mobilizing organizations remains a preserve of some striking 'worst practice', as exemplified by the narrow modalities used to fund voter registration efforts in the US. Lessons can be learned from the BUILD experience, most notably regarding the need to broaden objectives and loosen funding structures related to tasks such as voter mobilization or the selection of community development modalities.



# CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

**Lead author:** Ian Christoplos

## A BRIEF SNAPSHOT

Grantees are facing intensifying risks, primarily related to shrinking civic space. BUILD has assisted them with strengthening their digital security and supported the design, improvement and implementation of security protocols to respond to a range of hazards. They have also enhanced their ability to manage increased scrutiny from authorities. Grantees whose institutional vulnerability is related to physical premises saw BUILD as unique in allowing the use of resources to renovate and build safer offices. Recognition of challenging environments means acknowledging that risks are not always predictable. BUILD has provided opportunities for honest conversation about what can be achieved in problematic environments, including the need to acknowledge threatening scenarios. A flexible and stable grant gives organizations more time, headspace and freedom to foster their foresight as they manage a complex set of challenges and do what they know is best in a risky environment.

## KEY FINDINGS:

- Some grantees were quite strong in their approaches to safety and security even before the BUILD grant, but most were able to use BUILD to make important, though largely incremental, improvements.
- BUILD has provided grantees freedom to be open about their internal vulnerabilities and those of their constituents, and to recognize the need to think outside the box about how to manage the risks they face.
- Internal processes to reduce vulnerabilities that may not be widely recognized as related to safety and security per se, such as human resource management, self-care and peer reflection, are providing a basis for moving from individualized responsibilities for responding to risk to a shared organizational culture of protection.

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1

## OVERVIEW

This case study addresses what safety and security mean for grantees facing a broad range of acute and chronic risks, including actual or potential threats related to digital security, environments marked by rampant criminality, political harassment, threats, intimidation, legal suits, chronic or acute violence and natural hazards. There are notable differences between the risk landscapes in the Global South and the US, with the former emphasizing acute life-threatening hazards. In the US risks are perhaps more subtle, though equally pervasive. Both relate to political polarization and the growth of 'uncivil society', but the nature of polarizations and lack of civility are highly context-dependent.

The recognition of the importance of a case study looking at these issues became apparent in the Familiarization Phase, when the Evaluation Team found indications that the **safety and security assistance offered through BUILD may have grown beyond the relatively technical and infrastructural support initially foreseen**. It became evident that some grantees were moving towards utilizing BUILD support to engage in a more profound and self-critical rethink about how to enhance their organizational **culture of protection** towards their staff, partners and constituents.

The overall approach reflects analytical conceptions of risk management that see risk as emanating from the interface between hazards and vulnerability.<sup>1</sup> The intention has been to learn from grantees how BUILD may be contributing to their ongoing risk management efforts.









### 1.1 SAMPLE SELECTION

The sample includes eight organizations facing a broad range of hazards, evenly divided between the US and the Global South<sup>2</sup>. For some of the grantees, primarily among those in the US, the issue of safety and security has been somewhat of a new concern, whereas most grantees in the Global South were facing more endemic hazards. The magnitude of risks facing organizations in the Global South has also been more grave.

The organizations were invited to participate based on their relevance to the case study issues and other criteria, most notably the different risk environments they face, to ensure wide variety. As a result, the sample is very heterogeneous.

1 This understanding of risk is commonly described as Hazards x Vulnerability = Risk. See e.g., <https://www.undrr.org/building-risk-knowledge/understanding-risk>

2 Some of the BUILD grantees that were facing the most acute threats at the time of selection were not included because they were deemed unsafe to visit.

Grantee/program area/ headquarters location	Year established	Annual budget size (USD at time BUILD grant was made; 2016-2018)	5-year BUILD amount (USD)	BUILD dependency (at time BUILD grant was made)	Primary geographic scope of activities
<b>Global Witness</b> Natural resources and climate change London, UK	1993	11,564,000	2,500,000		International
<b>Restaurant Opportunity Center United</b> Future of Work(ers) New York, USA	2001	5,340,000	6,125,000		National/local
<b>Legal and Human Rights Center</b> East Africa Dar es Salaam, Tanzania	1995	1,841,176	2,000,000		National
<b>Color of Change</b> Civic engagement and government Oakland, Washington, D.C., New York, USA	2005	3,500,000	9,500,000		National
<b>Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez Human Rights Center (Centro PRODH)</b> Mexico and Central America Mexico City, Mexico	1988	1,330,567	1,500,000		National
<b>New Orleans Workers Council for Racial Justice</b> Just Cities and Regions New Orleans, USA	2007	3,100,000	3,800,000		Local
<b>Campaña Global por la Libertad de Expresión A19, A.C.</b> Internet Freedom Mexico City, Mexico	2008	780,623	400,000		National
<b>Indonesia Corruption Watch</b> Indonesia Jakarta, Indonesia	1998	1,333,539	2,250,000		National

 Lower dependency (< 15%),  Medium dependency (15%-30%),  Higher dependency (>= 30%)

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This case study has largely applied *critical incident analysis* to look at specific events impinging on safety and security and how they were perceived and managed. The intention has been to understand grantees' risks and their responses to them; to explore how grantees are changing their approaches

to protecting staff, constituents and partners; and to examine if and how grantees are trying to influence their fields around issues of protection. Discussions with grantees involved reflection around the context of the hazards faced in their environments, how they have responded (not always with BUILD resources) to specific threats (independently or in partnership with others), and their physical, institutional and cultural capacities and vulnerabilities in relation to confronting these hazards. Key features of these critical incidents are presented in this case study to illustrate responses, but the need to maintain anonymity has meant that full descriptions of events cannot be included.

The grantees' experiences revealed a wide range of risks and response strategies. Strategies were often unique to a given grantee context, and their application varied. In many instances, only one or two grantees were utilizing a particular risk management strategy. Therefore, it has been important to bring out illustrations while remaining cautious about generalizations when drawing conclusions. Revealing examples have been analyzed even if they only appeared in one context or organization. Given the fact that all the organizations in the sample were already undertaking safety and security initiatives before becoming BUILD grantees, BUILD's contribution has largely been incremental. The case study has sought to reveal the specifics of this contribution while acknowledging that it has generally been modest.

### **1.3 Hazards**

The growing hazards encountered by the BUILD grantees, particularly those in the Global South, include the following:

- *Polarization, along with refusal to acknowledge discrimination and impunity:* Norms of public discourse have deteriorated, which empowers those who attack actors working for social justice via government platforms and in mainstream and social media.
- *Uncertainties about what to expect in an increasingly volatile context:* New fronts ranging from novel forms of social media attacks to digital insecurity require a highly agile, and often costly response.
- *Surveillance:* More sophisticated digital monitoring of social justice actors, primarily by states, has increased the risks faced by both staff and constituents.
- *Digital attacks:* The ability of opponents to infiltrate and damage or distort digital advocacy is getting stronger.
- *Physical attacks:* Primarily affecting the grantees' constituencies, but in some cases staff as well. Grantees are facing heightened threats of arrest, and from criminal and extremist groups able to act with impunity.
- *Social media smear campaigns:* Online trolls are creating new threats and severe stress among staff, who in turn need to develop new skills to manage these hazards.
- *Libel/defamation suits:* Depending on the legal frameworks in different countries, a growing counterattack against anticorruption efforts is underway that is creating new and potentially costly risks to organizations that 'name and shame'.
- *Attacks from organized crime (sometimes in collusion with the state and private sector):* Particularly when dealing with rights over natural resources, organized crime and private firms are increasingly brazen in physical attacks on those protecting people's rights (especially indigenous).
- *Frustrated and angry constituents:* Polarization and threats are creating tensions wherein constituents are demanding far more support and protection than grantees can provide.
- *Natural hazards:* Declining capacities of state institutions are placing a growing and often unrealistic burden on civil society to respond to natural hazards, including earthquakes and pandemics, which is also affecting the staff and facilities of grantee organizations.

The evidence gathered strongly emphasizes, in many instances, the extent to which **hazards relate to shrinking civic space**. Prospects for achieving mission impact diminish when grantee activities and engagements are curtailed, partly due to safety and security concerns. To a large extent, shrinking civic space is being driven by political efforts to stigmatize civil society, eliminate political opposition and stimulate hostility towards civil society organizations among the general population and civil servants. With the **global rise of political leaders who are hostile to civil society and related watchdogs, grantees have experienced a precipitous increase in threats**, including death threats, assassination attempts, abductions, arrests and physical attacks. This hostility and polarization have also encouraged aggression from both governments and other reactionary actors, including trolls and violent groups. These hazards are apparent with right-wing governments that have long harbored hostility towards what they see as oppositional civil society organizations. Surprisingly, hostility from the ostensibly more progressive current government in Mexico has also generated frustration among civil society and uncertainties regarding how to deal with its constant media attacks. In various contexts, political polarization and targeting by the government has meant that grantees have to deal with the implications of being portrayed as the opposition when they draw attention to corruption, malfeasance and human rights abuses. This is true in several countries, including increasingly in Tanzania, which was historically quite tolerant of civil society organizations. Grantees described how the wide appeal of populists (even those assumed to be progressive) has meant that these criticisms of civil society now have a greater tendency to 'stick'.

Grantees also report an increase in what can be characterized as **regulatory, legal and administrative hazards**. Some of these take the form of laws that limit free speech, dissemination of research and a free press. In other cases, governments and individual politicians and powerful businesspeople are launching libel/defamation suits<sup>3</sup>. There is a general view that when they 'name and shame', the risks for grantees and their local partners grow.

This set of risks also involves grantees' more subtle concerns in relation to the considerably more intense monitoring of administrative requirements in the Global South and the narrowly defined adherence to the restrictions inherent in 501c3 status in the US. Both are perceived by grantees as directly related to efforts to limit their work.

Grantees described in various ways how they are confronted with both direct and strategic legal threats. The former are directed towards staff and the organization, e.g., libel/defamation suits and accusations of engaging in partisan advocacy. Strategic legal threats are largely directed towards their constituents, e.g., failures to recognize state collusion with organized crime leading to physical attacks and land dispossession, restrictions on the right to protest, and failures to apply gender protection laws. These are somewhat separate issues, but there is a recognition that perverse systems of jurisprudence and/or politically motivated investigations may generate both types of hazards.

These **contextual hazards have led to a growing unease**. In some cases, this has in turn led to tensions between grantees and their constituents who, due to fears, frustration and uncertainty, feel that the organizations acting to protect them are not doing enough. Grantees described how the weakening of public institutions, including factors related to political interference and state-mafia collusion, are generating unrealistic expectations regarding what civil society should and could do to respond. This is compounded, in some instances, by the worsening destitution and desperation of these constituents. One grantee observed that *"immigrants are focused on survival and not policy change."* Survival, however, is related to a range of structural factors and day-to-day severe acts of discrimination that the grantees have limited opportunities to influence.

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<sup>3</sup> The extent of this hazard varies according to the nature of the libel laws in a given country.



### External threats can even generate tensions within grantee organizations

In Mexico, Article 19 seeks to protect journalists facing physical threats, a situation that is increasing in magnitude, difficulty and complexity. Expected political support for the journalists' plight under the new government has been absent. Where data related to the journalists' cases is available there has been a public response from Article 19, but responding is often impossible because data is seldom available. This creates frustration and tensions among and between constituents and staff. When a journalist is extracted from a dangerous situation, they break contacts with their families and social networks and experience huge economic impacts. But extraction may be the only tool available, and Article 19 has insufficient resources to fully absorb the responsibility. Staff tries to explain to journalists that Article 19 is not the government and cannot replace the responsibilities of the state to provide them with comprehensive protection. Nonetheless, journalists have great expectations and get angry when support is limited. They also know how to go public with complaints, particularly on social media. It is difficult for Article 19 to experience these attacks without getting upset. One staff member explained: *"I was not afraid something violent would happen, but feared being put in the spotlight. It is hard to determine where to set the limits of our support while telling people to calm down and take a deep breath."* Article 19 has invested BUILD funding in systems to support staff in dealing with stress, such as dialogue platforms to manage what is becoming an increasingly tense and dysfunctional workplace environment.<sup>4</sup>

There are a few small, bright spots in this largely deteriorating context. In Mexico, the role of the state in enabling violence is now at least more acknowledged than in the past. In Tanzania, there have been some successes in challenging government around repressive laws and policies. In the US, when the government itself blatantly disregards legal norms, this has created opportunities for grantees to draw attention to abuses and pursue lawsuits to demand respect for the rule of law. Grantees also describe how they are finding different interlocutors in government and among other civil society organizations when the entry points for policy dialogue used in the past are blocked. Most of the grantees also described, in different ways, how a base in a major city provides a safer environment than they would experience in the rural areas where much of their constituencies are based. This is a major feature of the prevailing risk landscape, where in small towns and rural areas attacks are more likely to be under the radar of the media and civil rights defenders.

## 2

## INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

BUILD has enabled grantees to **bring in technical support as needed to enhance their resilience to the risks they face** (albeit rarely directly through Cohort, Convenings and Technical Assistance efforts, as will be discussed below). This includes strengthening digital security awareness and procedures, financial management and diversification of funding, communications, stronger advocacy, and managing social media engagements. One grantee noted how digital investments were also enabling them to work more effectively amid the constraints imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ford Foundation program officers have played a supportive role, e.g., by assisting in identifying resource persons for IT, legal compliance and financial resilience. Investments in administrative systems have enhanced grantees' abilities to manage increased scrutiny from authorities. One grantee in the Global South described the results, stating that *"They [government authorities] were shocked at how confident we were to supply every document."*

<sup>4</sup> Grantee name used with permission.

Designing, improving and implementing **security protocols** of various kinds, from staff travel to procedures for responding to smear campaigns, is important for most grantees, and BUILD was seen as enabling this. Examples of security protocols and procedures being introduced by grantees include:<sup>5</sup>

- Closing offices promptly at a set time and not permitting late work in them;
- Leaving offices in pairs;
- Communication trees for security check-ins;
- Use of detailed forms to assess travel risks, combined with engaging competent and highly experienced outside advisors (i.e., not just relying on staff experience and judgement);
- Protocols for data storage and transmission;
- Specific procedures for the use of mobile devices; and
- Procedures for responding to social media smear campaigns.

Investments are also being made in these areas to prepare to respond to attacks:

- Having a lawyer on retainer or a local CSO partner with litigation skills to deal with legal threats to expeditiously deal with legal threats;
- Retaining a security firm to respond to attempts to enter offices/residences without permission;
- Adapting systems to document and report aggressions and suspicious behavior around offices; and
- Ensuring that partners are forewarned when potentially controversial reports are released.

For some grantees, institutional vulnerability is related to **physical premises**. One grantee's office was vulnerable to physical attacks and required extensive reconstruction. Another grantee's office was damaged by an earthquake. Yet another was unhealthy due to vermin and generally decrepit conditions. In addition to factors affecting their head offices, some grantees were also concerned about physical conditions for staff travel, including potential vulnerability to assault and harassment related to reliance on unsafe accommodation. Responses brought out the need to use accommodation of reasonable quality that was nonetheless low-key.

In addition to relatively observable, physical, digital and legal/administrative safety issues, feedback overwhelmingly emphasizes how grantees are equally concerned, if not more, about **psychosocial well-being**. Some grantees relate this to a recognition of the importance of a far more intentional

### Procedures for managing risks associated with the release of data and reports

The release of data and reports is an example of an area where systems are being tightened to reduce risk. Caution sometimes relates to how to engage with social media to avoid a backlash or defamation suits. It may involve being more meticulous about data before releasing a report to lessen the risk of losing credibility in the likely event of an onslaught of (largely social) media attacks. One grantee brought up how they were making sure that all staff were clear regarding who decides if and when to release a report, so that steps to deal with backlash were in place and coordinated. In various ways, grantees expressed that they are reflecting more on how their reporting and advocacy could be (mis)interpreted, and the implications of this for generating risk for them and their constituents and partners. One grantee employs a strategy of sharing information that is also positive about the government in order to reduce government's antagonism.

<sup>5</sup> It is generally not possible to ascertain the extent to which BUILD may have indirectly contributed to these procedures, though it is likely that these have been planned within the 'headspace' it provided.

approach to human resource management. One grantee described putting responsibility for organizational health into the director's job description as an example of what they recognized as a seeming obvious step not considered before. Another grantee saw long-standing conflict within their leadership as the main factor limiting their capacity to achieve strategic coherence in responding to outside threats. Another informant pointed out that provision of long-term contracts, made possible due to BUILD, encouraged staff to think more about the role of the organization, rather than just their role in the timebound project they may have been involved in. Another described the "integrity" that comes with a formal and transparent salary structure as contributing to stability in the organization and, with that, readiness to respond to threats.

Timing is also a notable factor in mobilizing efforts to enhance safety and security. Leadership transitions can create **openings for taking a fresh look at how to best respond to a challenging environment**. For some, the arrival of the BUILD grant at a time when threats due to political changes were increasing provided a driver for greater intentionality around safety and security.

Responses were mixed regarding whether BUILD had contributed to greater financial resilience in the face of contextual hazards. Half of the grantees in the sample felt that there was no change, while others noted a contribution towards an overall increase in diversity and non-restricted funds that enable more nimble response to their volatile environment. Two of the grantees experienced a major drop in funding since receiving the grant, and both felt that BUILD helped them manage this during periods of high levels of external threats, which was very valuable. For one grantee, the BUILD grant helped to stave off an extreme financial crisis, and led the way for other donors to resume funding.

In various ways, grantees described how they have moved towards **organizational norms that rely on systems rather than just the common sense of individual staff to assess and respond to risk**. This may be most clearly exemplified by trends towards formalization through stronger organizational procedures and protocols rather than allowing staff to rely on their individual judgement when confronting risk. This implies a profound shift for some civil society organizations, including other aspects such as measures for joint organizational reflection about how to manage their risk environment instead of allowing individual staff to bog down in their personal tensions and stress. The ultimate goal has generally been to alleviate the pressures felt by staff when they strive to achieve unrealistic or risky personal goals, which in turn lead them to take inappropriate exposure to danger. Instead, efforts focus on moving forward as a healthier organization. There has been clear recognition of the importance of reaching beyond the head office to support the frontline, where staff engage with those experiencing human rights violations and those facing impunity.

3

## NETWORKS AND FIELDS

There was general consensus among grantees that increasingly **hazardous environments have made it essential to work in closer collaboration with partners**, for the sake of both mutual support and protection. As one director said, the political situation "forces us to work not in isolation." At the same time, as noted earlier, harassment and threats by government can understandably make civil society organizations fearful, rendering it harder or more cumbersome to pull together coalitions. One grantee described how the number of inter-agency coalitions and working groups dealing with security concerns was multiplying to the extent that it was too time-consuming to assess what was worth delving into and what initiatives they could legally join.

In various ways, grantees described collaboration as a way of capitalizing on different comparative advantages in risk management and of spreading risk and presenting a united front. One grantee referred to how they work with like-minded institutions as a way of not being singled out as a troublemaker. Initiatives are being pursued in collaboration with others to have a collective voice, so as not to be seen as the only ones speaking out against aggression. Other examples of leveraging comparative advantages include providing financial resources and training for partners, including on physical and IT security.

Grantees are aware of the **risks facing their local partners** and are taking steps within their capacities to reduce them through, e.g., protocols for how to manage contacts and some training for partners. Some of these partners are individuals or sub-contractors, rather than organizations per se. One grantee stated that they were aware of the risks facing their local partners, but that they were “*not there yet*” in terms of systems to manage these. Devolution of responsibilities is happening in some cases, but (with one exception) not seen as related to safety and security concerns. One organization mentioned that they take up sensitive issues that they uncover at local level within national advocacy efforts, which is seen as a modest way of deflecting attention and risk from their local partners.

In Mexico and Central America, joint and guided reflection over hazards and vulnerabilities as part of convenings has been useful for the grantees as a whole. In other contexts, some grantees are reinforcing their links with researchers to deepen their understanding of the contextual hazards and to share experience around what may constitute effective response. BUILD has also provided a vehicle for grantees to identify competence that they can draw on for specific technical needs, most notably digital security. In this regard, relatively spontaneous and informal networking among BUILD and other Ford Foundation grantees to enhance awareness, share experience and develop capacities has had significant impacts.

Overall, however, **BUILD appears to play a rather limited role in contributing to a more networked approach to safety and security**. Grantees identified relatively few examples of how networking among organizations to respond to security threats was being done, and BUILD does not appear to have contributed much to mobilizing a more joint or collective response. Safety and security largely remain a concern for individual organizations, and in some cases for their bilateral relations with local partners. Where the networking required has been underway already pre-BUILD, BUILD support for it has not been needed. When grantees described their own networking efforts to find better ways to address safety and security, the examples were largely outside of the Ford Foundation orbit.

## 4

### BUILD MODALITIES

‘Headspace’, through both **flexible and long-term support**, has been seen as an **important** element of the patience **to figure out how to respond in a strategic manner to diverse and dynamically changing hazards**. Interviews show that this can foster innovative thinking about new and different approaches to dealing with organizational culture and self-care issues, such as measures to reduce tensions among the staff and stave off burn-out. Grantees note that these concerns would probably be impossible to finance from other sources, and that drawing attention to such ‘dirty laundry’ could even reduce access to support from risk-averse donors.

Grantees value that a **flexible approach to funding enables them to respond to issues as they emerge**, what one described as the “*I don’t care how you get there as long as you get there*” approach to funding. Two grantees described how important it was to have the flexible resources

to respond forcefully to emblematic human rights violations. Even though these efforts were often unsuccessful, they exemplify how shifting resources to ensure a presence where the safety and security of a constituent was being threatened was vitally important to mobilize the community and energize staff.

Another example of BUILD's flexibility came from a grantee that was able to urgently repair their offices after an earthquake. They commented that as *"earthquakes are not related to human rights,"* another donor had refused the reallocation of resources. Readiness to accept the need to invest in safer offices was noted as an example of the flexibility and long-term nature of the grant being of great importance, and considered be unique in relation to the restrictions placed by other donors. A grantee referred to the ability to purchase new phones for staff after digital attacks as yet another example of where flexibility to reallocate resources was essential and timely.

Other grantees stressed, in various ways, that **given the persistent threats being faced, five years is not a long time**, and that BUILD was not a game-changer in the broader perspective. One well-prepared grantee described BUILD as providing important support during a specific period of time but constituting what were ultimately modest inputs within their much longer-term core commitments to take safety and security seriously.

Some grantees also described how the flexibility of the BUILD grant was important to address ongoing organizational needs so that programs could continue while operating in a challenging environment: *"It's important to have a program, but what about the working environment? The human resources? There are other things that are internal that need to be funded so the program can proceed."*

A **mix of general operating support and ring-fenced institutional strengthening** funding was seen as appropriate for enabling investments related to safety and security. For example, general operating support enables grantees to invest in staying at a safer hotel, while institutional strengthening funding goes towards protocols to ensure that staff realize that choosing safe accommodation is a requirement. The question of whether the mix was right was considered to be related to access to a healthy mix of the grantee's overall general operating support and institutional strengthening resources, as well as their mix of restricted and unrestricted funds. One grantee in the sample saw BUILD as a unique opportunity to invest intentionally and comprehensively in institutional strengthening and therefore allocated the entire grant to it, but could only do so because it had relatively ample access to other unrestricted funds. For grantees in a different financial situation, this would have been impossible, as they would have lost the much-needed flexibility to respond to a volatile environment.

With the notable exception of the Mexico and Central America grantees that have attended several regional convenings, including analyses of contextual hazards, the respondents had a hazy understanding of what the Cohort, Convenings and Technical Assistance consists of, and few thought it had a significant bearing on safety and security concerns. Technical assistance has been important for some grantees in dealing with security issues, most notably digital security. A few grantees were assisted by their program officer to identify technical assistance for digital security, legal compliance and financial resilience. Most of the grantees in the sample reported not having accessed specific BUILD support for this, but were able to draw on BUILD/Ford Foundation related networks and funding to sort it out for themselves.

Grantees present a **mixed picture regarding the extent to which they find that the BUILD model is very different from those of other donors in contributing to safety and security**. Relations with other donors were sometimes similar in their openness. In other cases they were very rigid in

refusing to acknowledge how high-risk environments may call into question fairly linear theories of change and results frameworks. BUILD was seen as very good practice in acknowledging risk and uncertainty, but not considered entirely unique.

Two grantees hoped that the Ford Foundation would use its convening power to draw broader attention among donors to risk management issues, but they were unaware of whether it had done so. Another grantee mentioned that the Ford Foundation had influenced other donors by making them aware of the importance of covering security costs. Yet another felt that the Ford Foundation could help other donors to increase their awareness of the value of flexible funding for grantees responding to volatile situations. A grantee also mentioned that the Ford Foundation's moral and financial support was important to them, particularly in that it allowed the payment of salary arrears from the BUILD grant, so that staff could continue their work when other donors were hesitating due to a volatile situation. The grantee also appreciated that the Ford Foundation paid specifically for training in protection.

5

## MISSION IMPACT: VULNERABILITIES, RISK MANAGEMENT AND THE ROLE OF BUILD

In describing their internal vulnerabilities and how efforts to manage them could lead to enhancing (or sustaining) mission impact, there is a strong view among grantees that they **had already established basic systems, but were ill-prepared for some new hazards**. Lack of human resources and hardware/software capacities to respond to digital risks were the most commonly recognized new forms of vulnerability.

One grantee described how they were reassessing their **strategic communications** role in the traditional and social media landscape to reposition themselves to better respond to new opportunities and threats. In general, it was felt that the **changing media landscape provides new opportunities to highlight cases of impunity, discrimination and corruption**, but also that the hostile reactions through smear campaigns and legal suits have become much more acute, and that managing these risks demands new skills and carefully designed, iterative approaches.

Overall, past approaches are coming into question. When discrimination, impunity and corruption become more openly accepted by government institutions, and to some extent by the general public, it is not self-evident that exposure of specific examples of these abuses is the best way forward.

Long-standing **vulnerabilities that are seen to limit effective risk management tend to be clustered around a range of organizational culture issues that existed pre-BUILD** and, in some cases, were seen as priorities to address in recent leadership transitions. Vulnerabilities related to organizational culture include a working environment that fails to address **disillusionment, tensions and stress**. Concrete manifestations of this include distrust of the formalization that characterizes security protocols, and dysfunctional inter-personal dynamics among staff under stress. This is aggravated by an intense sense of duty that leads them to engage in what they know to be high-risk behavior. Work in a high-risk and intensely mission-driven environment has long been recognized as inherently stressful, but the grantees describe, in various ways, how they are exploring more intentional ways to do something about it.

Risk management strategies that were enabled by BUILD can be characterized as falling into two categories: inward institutional procedures and outward ways of monitoring the risk environment and engaging with partners.

### Emblematic cases of human rights abuses as drivers of policy change

When interviews for this case study were conducted in late 2019 and early 2020, some grantees were revisiting what changing entry points for driving mission impact meant in a shifting risk environment. After a high-profile failure to protect an undocumented immigrant facing blatant and severe retribution for speaking out, one grantee reflected over their focus on emblematic individual human rights violations. Was it appropriate to highlight acute discrimination and human rights abuses when facing such an onslaught from reactionary forces and indifference from state institutions to what the grantee perceives to be symbolic cases? By contrast, another grantee expressed continued commitment to these emblematic cases inasmuch as their identity is that of *“being there with the victims.”* The grantee sees BUILD as having aided them to better understand how this role can be reinvigorated in the shifting wider media landscape, where the means of leveraging attention to a specific, given case to drive systemic change has been transformed in recent years.

At the time of reporting this case study in mid-2020, emblematic examples of police brutality had assumed unprecedented influence on the global discourse surrounding state-sanctioned violence and discrimination. It would be premature to draw clear conclusions about how this will ultimately impact on how gross, emblematic human rights abuses are taken up to drive policy change – but it is clear that they are, and that this will shift the needle in a fundamental manner in the future.

Examples of inward approaches include:

- Strengthening/clarifying internal policies and procedures;
- Developing crisis management plans;
- Reflecting on strategies to realign with a more appropriate (and usually more modest) ambition level;
- Closer teamwork;
- Self-care, including reflection and coaching related to work/life balance; and
- Safer workplaces (and in one instance, the director’s residence) in relation to physical attacks and healthier working conditions.

Examples of outward approaches include:

- Better knowledge management systems to monitor hazards;
- Analyses and the engagement of outside expertise to determine more effective but risk-aware ways to engage in social media discussions;
- Better honed training to reflect an understanding of the actual risk landscape;
- Rethinking ways of working with local partners and constituents;
- More budgetary flexibility to respond to a volatile context;
- Partnering with like-minded institutions to mitigate direct confrontation with government and avoid being seen as the troublemakers; and
- A shift in focus towards influencing different institutions/levels of government and civil society where the past entry points for advocacy have been blocked.

In addition, the Mexico and Central America **regional convenings have provided an opportunity to bring together grantees and recognized experts to reflect on risks facing their regions.** For example, this has included a chance for comparing experiences between Mexico and Central

America, where there are related but also contrasting contextual factors connected to the political stance of the different governments, as well as the different types of ties between state actors and organized crime.

It is clear that grantees are **proactively reflecting on the hazards that they face in working towards mission impact and analyzing the vulnerabilities they must address to effectively respond to these hazards**. This comes naturally for the BUILD grantees given their obvious deep political awareness and engagement. BUILD has played a complementary role in creating opportunities for more intentionality and for broader reflection among peers. With regard to internal vulnerabilities, BUILD has created space for reflection and investments to change the way grantees work and even to address problematic aspects of their organizational cultures.

A striking finding has been that **mission impact is reliant on analyzing and addressing the hazards and vulnerabilities faced by both grantees and their constituencies**. Organizers and the people they are organizing are confronting the same state and criminal power structures. The risks they face may be different, but they stem from the systemic hazards, and in order to achieve impact they must be confronted together. If BUILD were to focus solely on the factors faced by the grantees themselves, as initially envisaged, it could miss the broader nature of the challenges faced: grantees clearly frame their perceptions of risk within a 'we're in this together' relationship with their constituencies and broader civil society. The wisdom of the grantees and their overwhelming solidarity with their constituencies indicates that this joint perspective is well entrenched and pre-dates BUILD.

## 6

## CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Recognition of challenging environments means acknowledging that linear paths to greater mission impact and institutional resilience may not be possible, and that this is part of the 'new normal'. Two grantees pointed out that an overarching approach to managing a deteriorating environment was to scale down goals and claims to a more realistic level. BUILD has been seen as an opportunity to have a more honest conversation with the funder about what can be achieved in a problematic and unpredictable environment. One grantee described reflection on how to remain relevant within their limited mandate as a healthy example of this transparency. Examples such as these indicate a need to break out of linear results-based management thinking to acknowledge that theories of change must be tempered in uncertain and threatening environments (a need reinforced by grantees' experience of the COVID-19 pandemic). BUILD has shown that if organizations are given the time, 'headspace' and freedom to revisit their strategies, they will be empowered to do what they know is best in a risky environment. Sometimes this means doing less, but doing it safely.

This relates to often implicit acknowledgement of the need to develop capacities for foresight. Grantees are frank about where they have been blindsided by security threats and the fact that they cannot predict the future. They also see that they can make significant progress in managing these uncertainties through investments in outside technical support, knowledge management, dialogue with researchers, and making space and blocking off time to step back and reflect on the changing hazards that they face. Foresight is also about thinking through how they are facing these hazards jointly with their constituents. They see BUILD as having contributed in various but often subtle ways to developing this foresight. This support has not been in terms of the direct provision of technical assistance, but rather of providing resources, opportunities and encouragement for them to invest in foresight capacities themselves.



One of the most notable aspects of BUILD has been the freedom that grantees have to be open about their internal vulnerabilities and their need to think outside the box about how to reduce them. While other donors might shy away from a grantee that acknowledged themselves to be a risky bet, BUILD has encouraged organizations to be open about threats, even where they have to do with problematic aspects of organizational culture. Leadership transitions have often been embraced as an opportunity to get a grip on problems that had been simmering for years.

Also, BUILD has helped grantees to respond to their own recognition that procedures, protocols and even buildings need to be upgraded to address emerging challenges. Proactive risk management is worthy of donor investment, rather than a precondition for what an organization should have in place before being eligible for a grant in order to reduce donors' risk exposure. It could even be claimed that BUILD's and the Ford Foundation's readiness to accept and confront the realities of working in hazardous environments in the funding decisions they make has enabled grantees to more openly confront the risks that they face. BUILD has made these contributions based on its commitments to listening to grantee needs, as opposed to a strict, predetermined approach. Flexibility and trust have contributed to an enabling environment for BUILD to make some important but risky bets.

Have the investments made resulted in the grantees being more resilient as a consequence of BUILD? The Evaluation Team judges that in some areas they are more resilient, such as with regard to readiness to manage digital threats and social media-related hazards. In other areas, the scale and rapid growth of hazards implies that only time will tell. BUILD is just one piece in a large and worrisome puzzle. With most grantees, it appears that changes due to the BUILD grant have been strategically important. However, with the notable exception of investments in safer offices and addressing urgent digital risks, the contributions have generally been incremental. This is inevitable and healthy in the iterative management of risk amid uncertainty. It also reflects the fact that some organizations were quite strong in their approaches to safety and security even before the BUILD grant, and others need space to find an appropriate ambition level. There is, in virtually all cases, no grand solution for overcoming security challenges. Instead, incremental is good.

## 7

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TO GRANTEES

1. So as to raise general awareness among peers and donors about the value of flexibility and 'headspace', grantees would benefit from finding ways to better explain how their institutional resilience is being pursued in relation to contextual threats (including how this relates to their use of the BUILD grant).
2. In documentation and dialogue, it would be useful for grantees to bring out how internal processes to reduce vulnerabilities (which may not be widely recognized by funders as related to safety and security per se), such as human resource management, self-care and peer reflection, are providing a basis for moving from individualized responsibilities for responding to risk to a shared organizational culture of protection.
3. Explore manageable ways to exchange experience around the introduction of new procedures and protocols among peers, while of course remaining vigilant to the need to protect confidentiality regarding these routines.

## TO THE FORD FOUNDATION

1. Reconsider how safety and security are framed in future grantmaking to emphasize how investments are responding to diverse risk landscapes.
2. Avoid tendencies to focus on solutions. Instead, embrace relevant but incremental risk reduction initiatives of the grantees. Focus convening efforts on enabling grantees to share these experiences among themselves.
3. Move from the current, relatively tacit recognition of grantee vulnerabilities to a more explicit and comprehensive approach, while realizing that grantees are skilled in finding their own specific solutions.
4. Recognize that grantees are able, with relatively modest and low-keyed support, to develop their own networks to access and tailor their own technical assistance.
5. Ensure that human resource management, self-care and stress-related organizational interventions are recognized as equally important as more conventional safety and security interventions. This may be even more crucial in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emerging economic crisis.
6. Inform other funders about what is being learned about working with safety and security and advocate that they provide flexible support to grantees in risky environments so they can respond to changing hazards.

## TO OTHER PHILANTHROPIES

1. Undertake risk assessment as a way to better understand where grantees need support in dealing with their challenging environments, rather than to assess their suitability for funding.
2. Reflect on how a volatile environment implies a need for nimble and trusting donorship, and what this means for adapting procedures and modalities.



# ORGANIZATIONS FOUNDED AND HISTORICALLY LED BY PEOPLE OF COLOR

**Lead author:** Susana Morales

Phase one of the evaluation, summarized in this Interim Report, included a case study exploring BUILD's interaction with grantees that were founded and historically led by people of color in the United States. The foundational basis for this case study was the research around how systemic racism, including in philanthropy, has impacted these organizations. The Evaluation Team met with seven grantees to learn about their unique strengths as organizations historically led by people of color as well as the obstacles they face and how BUILD affected both.

After concluding site visits, writing a draft report of the case study and sharing it with the grantees for feedback, the audio and video accounts of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor went public and the United States reacted in protest of racialized violence and with demands for racial equity. Soon the country was in a new, large wave of an antiracism movement described by Angela Davis 'an extraordinary moment which has brought together a whole number of issues.'

The Evaluation Team and the BUILD team find that publishing the initial findings without greater context and recognition of the 'extraordinary moment' would be a disservice to the case study topic and participating grantees. So, while the learnings of the case study inform the general findings of the Interim Report, the specifics of the case study itself will be published at a later date, including a summary of literature to date and updated information from grantees as they navigate their mission.

Interim Report

BUILD Developmental Evaluation

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