

## BUILDING NETWORKS

# Key Takeaways

### 1

#### **"NETWORKING" CAN MEAN MANY THINGS.**

This chapter covers broad ground, looking at the many ways in which the Pioneer organizations are working in more “networked ways.” This can mean a mindset and cultural shift, but also new ways of behaving, seeking trust over control, breaking down or bridging internal and external boundaries, and focusing on shared values more than ideological differences. By exploring what it means to become a “networked nonprofit,” the Pioneers are showing the way for the rest of the sector.

### 2

#### **REPLACE CONTROL WITH TRUST, AND TRANSACTION WITH TRANSFORMATION.**

Networked work requires leaders to let go of control and hierarchy, focusing instead on building trusted relationships. As a result, interactions between organizations become less “transactional” (using one organization to fulfill your own agenda) and more transformational (working as partners to explore emerging opportunities for true collaboration).

### 3

#### **SHARE INFRASTRUCTURE AND BUILD "BACKBONE" ORGANIZATIONS.**

The emerging field of “collective impact” has begun to champion the notion of creating backbone organizations, or hubs for networks where common resources can be centralized and shared. Several of the Pioneers (most notable, caa through aacre) have experimented with creating shared platforms so that smaller nonprofits don’t have to create duplicative services. In doing so, they are learning that by thinking outside the traditional organizational box—and focusing instead on identifying needs and leveraging (or creating) shared assets—they can free up activists’ time to focus on what is most important: the social justice work.

**Source:** <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/Levi-Strauss-Foundation-Pioneers-in-Justice.pdf>

## 4 START WITH SMALL COLLABORATIONS AND BUILD ON THEM.

As the Pioneers have sought to work in more networked and collaborative ways, they have also learned that sometimes the easiest way to get started is to try some “little bets.” They’ve found smaller bilateral opportunities to collaborate with another organization or two, where the risks and complexity are relatively low. By starting small, and then learning together, the Pioneers are building their collective capacity to collaborate: creating trust, understanding, and a relational foundation on which to build. Many have then gone on to larger, more complex collaborations, piggybacking on these initial early bets.

## 5 COORDINATE ACTIVITIES UNDER A SHARED BRAND.

In the case of Advancing Justice, four organizations found it advantageous to run campaigns and programs together under a shared brand. In so doing, they are leveraging all of their assets and relationships while consolidating their size and power and minimizing brand “noise” in the system—all to increase their impact. These nonprofits have pioneered a new approach that other organizations working on similar issues might want to emulate.

## 6 CONNECT THE GRASSROOTS AND THE TREETOPS.

The design thinking and innovation fields have increasingly brought attention to the importance of “human centered design.” In a similar way, the Pioneers have realized that their work is most effective when they engage directly with constituents and connect them to broader advocacy campaigns, breaking down the barriers between grassroots communities and the political establishment. Iccr, for example, works especially hard to engage its constituents in identifying real community needs and to elevate these issues into larger policy agendas.

## 7 BREAK DOWN SILOS AND WORK IN THE INTERSTICES.

All of the Pioneers share a willingness to break down silos in their fields. Rather than focusing on what separates or differentiates their work, they are looking instead for the intersections: the metaphorical Venn diagram between related but adjacent issues. In doing so, they have also found ways to engage “unlikely” allies—stakeholders who wouldn’t normally be considered supporters or advocates of an issue who can be persuaded to support it because of its relationship to their own movements and causes.

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