6. We Effect Positive Change by Collaborating with and Adapting to the Needs of our Communities.

We seek collaboration where it makes sense as a grounding principle of doing business, and we leverage partnerships for greater impact with nonprofits, public, private and higher education sectors, and community members with lived experience. We acknowledge and understand root causes for systemic challenges, and we take action by joining forces and allocating resources toward a common goal of addressing root causes and changing systems. We center the community we serve in informing our work and making our decisions. We value and promote a culture of humility, adaptability, and continuous learning where we encourage reflection on lessons learned, questioning the status quo, and taking risks in support of better service.

NONPROFITS

- **Embed collaboration as a core strategic value**; regularly seek community partnerships with other nonprofits and across sectors when necessary to better serve the community; invest dollars and staff time in collaborations; look beyond our own mission with a wider lens to see our role in an ecosystem and opportunities to address root causes, change systems, and improve outcomes.
- **Center the community and those most affected by our work as experts**, with meaningful roles in informing the work and making decisions.
- **Recognize and incorporate advocacy** as a collaborative tool to address root causes, change systems, and improve outcomes.
- **Commit to a culture of learning and improvement** by investing time in reviewing and understanding failures; with intention, embrace calculated risk for deeper gain, recognizing failure is how we innovate.

"One of the best things I learned from being an ED for so many years is to take more risks, have the opportunity to fail. Failure creates innovation."
—Local nonprofit leader

FUNDERS

- **Value the unique expertise that nonprofits bring**, and prioritize collaboration with nonprofits and private and public sector actors to change systems.
- **Learn about and reflect on the root causes** of the problems we are working across sectors to solve.
- **Provide meaningful grant dollars to fund**: collaboration, systems change work, continuous learning, risk-taking and innovation.
- **Invest in projects that have a high number of variables that can affect impact and thus have risk.** Clarify internally and externally how much of the grantmaking portfolio is made of high, medium, and low-risk investments. Take time to dialogue about grantmaking failures and missed opportunities in order to strengthen future grantmaking and outcomes.

Seek opportunities to collaborate across funding sectors to better leverage your investments:
- combine resources to take greater risks than you could on our own
- inform your giving through shared learning and data
- share expertise and expand networks
- decrease the application and reporting burdens on nonprofits through aligned grantmaking
- speak collectively and raise awareness on priority issues

"**COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY** is based on the premise that all communities have their own assets (money, skills, knowledge, networks, etc.). When these are pooled together, they build community power and voice."—Foundation Center's *How Community Philanthropy Shifts Power*

FUNDING INNOVATION: One discussion session participant from the business community noted that innovation in technology is fueled by specifically budgeting for experimentation, risk, failure, and loss. How willing are funders to support nonprofits' failures on the road to innovation?

"...funders have a powerful role to play that goes beyond merely supporting existing nonprofits. Private donors, foundations, and corporations have the clout, connections, and capacity to make things happen in way that most nonprofits do not. By becoming directly involved...these donors can leverage their personal and professional relationships, initiate public-private partnerships, import projects that have proved successful elsewhere, create new business models, influence government, draw public attention to an issue, coordinate the activities of different nonprofits, and attract fellow funders...All of these powerful means for social change are left behind when donors confine themselves to simply writing checks."—Mark R. Kramer's *Catalytic Philanthropy* in Stanford Social Innovation Review

MYTH: Let go of the myth that your organization has nothing to gain from collaboration. Collaborative partnerships are important because they increase the likelihood that partners will focus on the overall needs of the community, create more holistic approaches, and create synergistic benefits. At the same time, collaborations are not always what's needed and must be thoughtfully crafted—there are different and valuable ways organizations work together. **REALITY:** We can do more together.

MYTH: Let go of the myth that your organization or your funding expertise are all that's needed to create responsive, effective programs. **REALITY:** Good answers are found most often with people, communities, and organizations closest to the issue, and adaptation and growth require humility in how and with whom you identify challenges and craft solutions.

Learn More

VISIT 7PRINCIPLES.THECNE.ORG TO ACCESS OUR LIBRARY OF TOOLS AND RESOURCES.
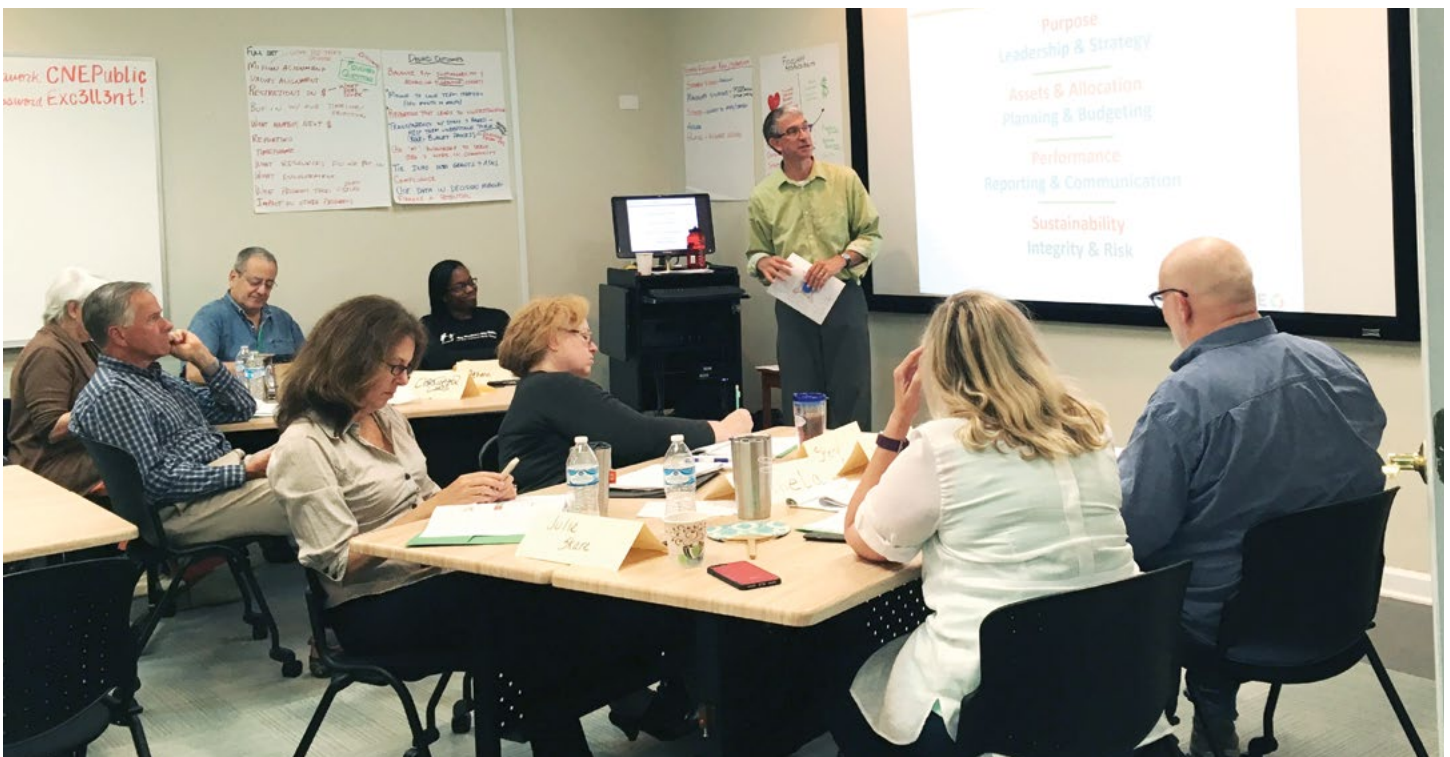
6.1: Do we seek out collaborations and partnerships when needed for greater impact with other nonprofits, community members, public, private, and higher education sectors?

YES   NO   NOT SURE   N/A

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   PRIORITY: High   Medium   Low

6.2: Has our board considered partnering with staff leadership to identify areas where collaboration is necessary and appropriate, and does that translate into the workplan and budget of the organization?

YES   NO   NOT SURE   N/A

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   PRIORITY: High   Medium   Low

6.3: Do we identify, thoughtfully evaluate, and participate in partnerships, collaborations, networks, and coalitions that contribute to positive change, and do we intentionally resource our roles and goals with them?

YES   **NO**   **NOT SURE**   **N/A**

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   **PRIORITY:**   **High   Medium   Low**

6.4: Do we look beyond our own mission, understanding how our work fits within a larger context, for opportunites to address root causes, change systems, and improve outcomes?

YES   **NO**   **NOT SURE**   **N/A**

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   **PRIORITY:**   **High   Medium   Low**

6.5: Do we understand how root causes, including racism, have created the unmet need or the condition that our organization addresses, and does that inform our work?

YES   **NO**   **NOT SURE**   **N/A**

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   **PRIORITY:**   **High**   **Medium**   **Low**

6.6: Do we center the community and those most affected by our work as experts, with meaningful roles in informing the work and making decisions?

YES   **NO**   **NOT SURE**   **N/A**

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   **PRIORITY:**   **High**   **Medium**   **Low**

6.5: Do we understand how root causes, including racism, have created the unmet need or the condition that our organization addresses, and does that inform our work?

6.7: Do we recognize advocacy as a collaborative tool, understanding how changes in the larger ecosystem affect our organization's ability to meet its mission?

YES   NO   NOT SURE   N/A

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   PRIORITY: High   Medium   Low

6.8: Have we evaluated whether any of our services are duplicative or similar enough to others in the community to be perceived as duplicative, and whether there is an opportunity to align with other organizations to partner, close programs, or merge?

YES   NO   NOT SURE   N/A

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   PRIORITY: High   Medium   Low

6.9: Do we have a process for reflecting on lessons learned, questioning the status quo, and taking risks, in support of improving service and impact?

YES   **NO**   **NOT SURE**   **N/A**

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   **PRIORITY:**   **High   Medium   Low**

6.10: Do we learn about other approaches, understand and act on what is working and what is not, and do we experiment and test new ideas to improve our work?

YES   **NO**   **NOT SURE**   **N/A**

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   **PRIORITY:**   **High   Medium   Low**

6.9: Do we have a process for reflecting on lessons learned, questioning the status quo, and taking risks, in support of improving service and impact?

6.11: Does our budget include organizational development support for learning and improvement, including centering community in program development and evaluation?

YES   **NO**   **NOT SURE**   **N/A**

If so, HOW? If not, WHY?

Brainstorm: How Do We Improve? Ideas, Learning, Next Steps   **PRIORITY:** **High** **Medium** **Low**