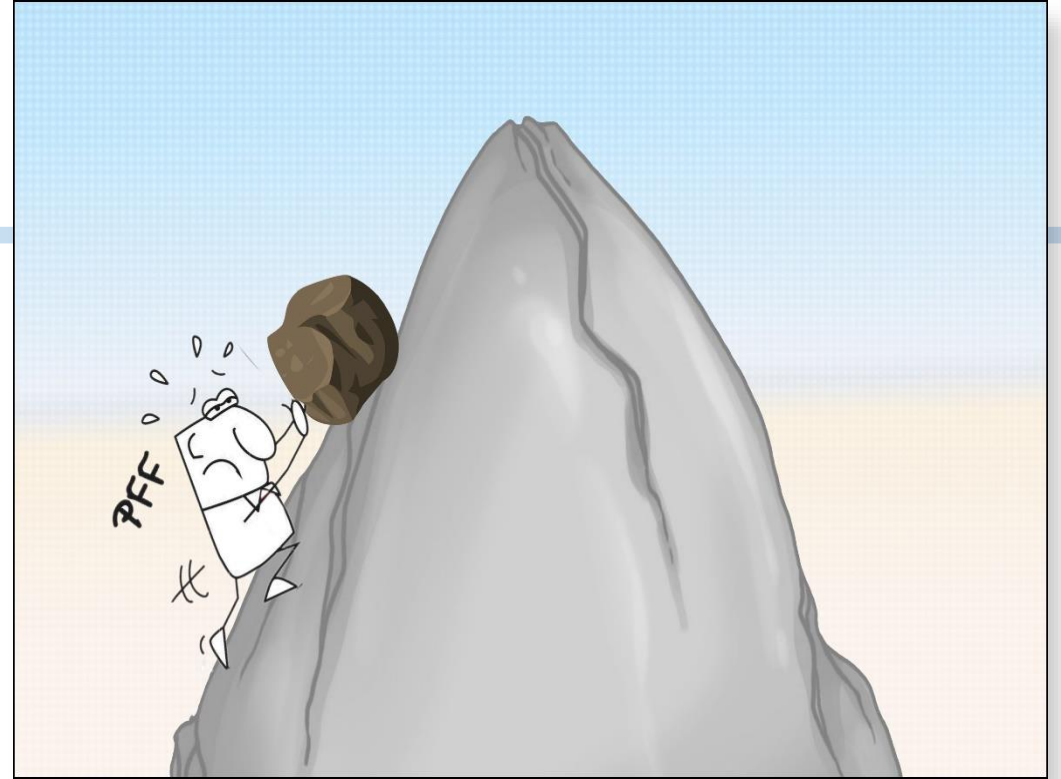


Beyond Sisyphus:

Getting Past
Social Change Roadblocks,
to Create a Healthy,
Humane World

Version 1.1
December 2019



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This slide deck is a working draft.

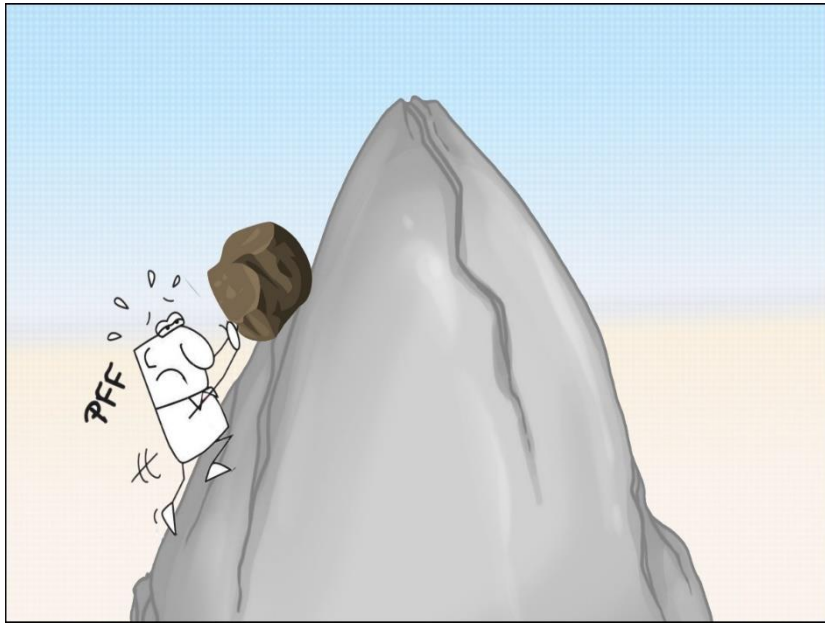
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Please send your comments and ideas to
<https://creatingthefuture.org/contact-us/>

Thank you!

Do you ever feel like Sisyphus in your work to create a more humane world?



Do you ever feel like the struggle to

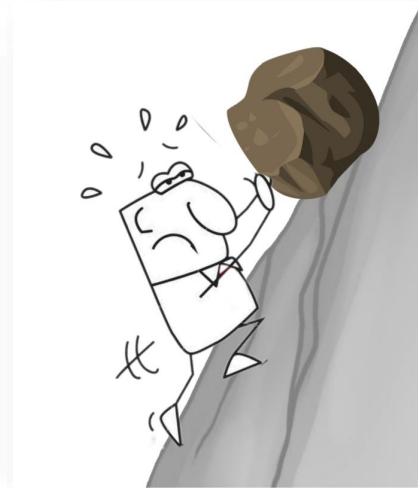
- ➡ raise money...
- ➡ stay competitive...
- ➡ do more with less...

...is just as hard, if not harder, than
the real work of your mission?



With the health and humanity of our planet increasingly at risk, changemakers shouldn't have to ALSO battle the systems intended to sustain their work.

- ***Funding***
- ***Planning and Evaluation***
- ***Leadership and Equity***
- ***Community Engagement***
- ***and all the rest***



Creating the Future is in the inquiry stage
on a project to move beyond those roadblocks,
to design systems that smooth the way for
social change efforts to
create the future they want to see.





Here's our story...



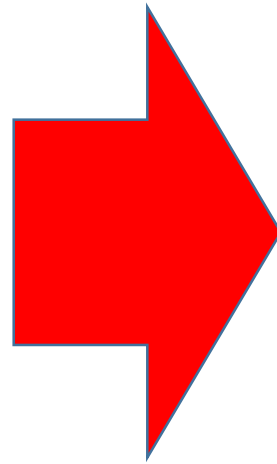
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The Struggle



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**To create a world
that is equitable,
humane, healthy...**



The systems we use
to create that world
would themselves
reflect equity,
relationship, trust,
and enoughness.



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Unfortunately, that isn't the norm for the systems upon which social change efforts rely to support their work.



For example...



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Resourcing / Funding Systems would demonstrate...

- Equity
- Relationship and trust
- Sharing resources
- Enoughness



Current Systems demonstrate...

- Inequitable power dynamics
- “He who has the gold makes the rules”
- Scarcity
- Hunger Games-esque competition for the means to survive





Organizational Structure would demonstrate...

- Networked relationships resembling natural ecosystems & communities
- Boards (where required) as support to the people doing the actual work
- Porous “walls” around organizations, allowing for open flow of ideas, people and resources between community and organization



Current Systems demonstrate...

- Top-down command and control (military origins) that maintains power & privilege
- Boards at the top, pretending to lead
- Organization is “in here.” Community is “out there” (e.g. going “*out to the community.*” e.g. Rich Harwood’s encouragement to “*turn outward*”)





Evaluation & Learning would demonstrate...

- Ultimate goal: Learning what works and sharing that broadly so that everyone has that knowledge.
(e.g. delivering programs as a path to learning what works vs. programs as ends unto themselves)
- Shared learning elevates the whole field, to move together towards what is possible (future focus)
- Emphasis is on relationship and stories, as those are primary way humans learn.



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Current Systems demonstrate...

- Little value placed on learning, as evidenced by lack of consistent funding for evaluation
- Evaluation as compliance, to justify past performance
- Information & learning are hoarded within individual organizations (competition)
- Metrics / numbers (quantitative) valued over stories (qualitative); “hard” evidence over “soft” *(i.e. human-centered)* evidence



Planning & Decision-making would demonstrate...

- Plans and decisions reflecting the values changemakers want to see in the world
- Future-focused, aimed at visionary community-focused results
- Co-created with anyone affected by those decisions / plans - “confluence” of interest
- Mindfulness re: the influence of privilege and equity in all decisions & plans



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Current Systems demonstrate...

- Organizational and community values eclipsed by what can be easily funded
- Incremental plans, reacting to problems and intervening vs. creating the future we DO want
- Planning & decision-making as internal functions, often excluding community members and line staff (mistrusted as having “conflict” of interest)
- Assumptions that social change groups are naturally inclusive, ignoring privilege & equity issues



Leadership would demonstrate...

- Shared leadership and shared power, within each organization, and between organizations and the community
- Leadership transition focused on vision & values
- Leadership reflecting the community served (race, ethnicity, age, ability, gender, sexual orientation, other factors)
- Active pipelines for developing leaders within affected communities



Current Systems demonstrate...

- Power is held closely by those designated as leaders within the organization.
- Succession often replaces visionary, values-based leadership with more bureaucratic management skills
- Social change organization leaders are overwhelmingly from the dominant culture, often lamenting “We can’t find any qualified _____” (*i.e. no pipeline*)





Communication & Engagement would demonstrate...

- Collective strength towards community-focused goals. Value placed on what we can accomplish together.
- Openly sharing resources and knowledge with everyone who cares about the same issue
- Connection, Relationship, Inclusion, Equity, Alliance and Trust
- Finding common ground as allies



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Current Systems demonstrate...

- Marketing mandate to differentiate from other orgs
- Assumptions of competition limit trust and sharing
- Relationship-building seen as a function of fundraising, favoring those of financial means over “regular people”
- Relationships with organizations doing similar work are competitive, working at best as “friendly competitors”



Accounting & Accountability would demonstrate...

- Primary accountability is to the people served by the org's work. Stewardship programs aim at that accountability FIRST.
- Accounting processes & tools focus on ends first (reports re: community impact), then on means (reports re: money)
- Ongoing board, staff and community conversations dedicated to determining how to assess and report impact.



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Current Systems demonstrate...

- Primary accountability and stewardship to donors and funders
- Accounting processes & tools solely focus on money (means)
- Inability to determine how to assess and report impact leads to *counting what is easy to count* while defaulting on the kinds of inquiry that would lead to meaningful assessment



Program Design would demonstrate...

- Program emphasis on the self-determination and agency of community members, building on community strengths
- Organizational staff serving as facilitators of co-designed, strength-based, community-based programs, adding content expertise as needed



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Current Systems demonstrate...

- Program emphasis on “doing for” community members assumes communities are “weak and in need of fixing,” perpetuating dependency and ensuring the org is needed for years to come (organizational self-perpetuation)
- Programs are developed by organizational staff, often excluding affected community members from that discussion entirely

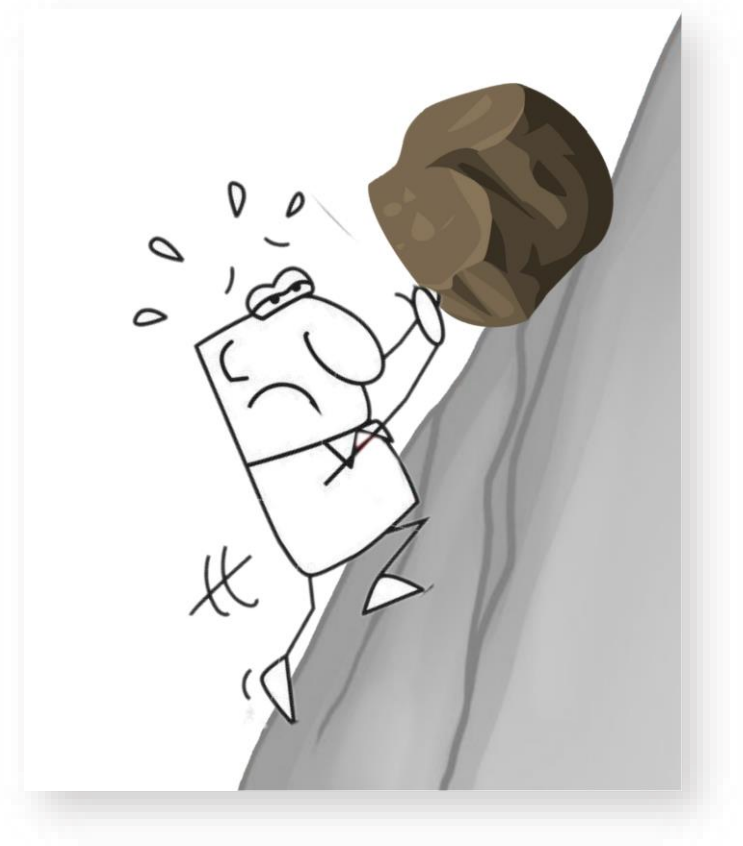
When those with money make the rules about who gets to create what kinds of change...

When learning is hoarded for the sake of competition, accounting emphasizes dollars over impact, and communication emphasizes differentiation vs. finding common ground with like-kind efforts...

When organizations adopt a top-down, command-and-control leadership and power structure, with a handful of primarily dominant-culture individuals making decisions and plans that affect everyone inside and outside the organization's "walls" ...



...the social change arena is
actually modeling and
perpetuating
the very conditions
it is seeking to change.



What Has Been Tried



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There have been many efforts
over several decades,
intended to address this situation...



Efforts tried to date have included...

Governance As Leadership
Doing Well By Doing Good
Forced Collaboration
Social Enterprise
Holacracy
Charity Navigator
Outcomes Measurement
Donor-centered Philanthropy
Run Like A Business
Policy Governance
Standards For Excellence
Logic Model
Impact Philanthropy
Grantmakers For Effective Organizations
Collective Impact

... and many more



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New initiatives to infuse more Diversity, Equity & Inclusion are being launched across the whole social change arena, along with efforts to reinvent philanthropy and governance, all foreseeing the coming of a “new normal.” *

* Deborah Elizabeth Finn has assembled a [running list of articles and books](#) about the current “revolution” in philanthropy. As of December 29, 2019, the list contains over 100 articles and books.



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And evidence of widespread changemaker frustration is strong

- ❖ Dan Pallotta's TED talk, "***The way we think about charity is dead wrong,***" has **4.8 million views** *
- ❖ Vu Le's "***Nonprofit AF***" blog, critiquing the daily realities of nonprofit life, has **32,000 subscribers**. His Facebook group "Nonprofit Happy Hour" has **45,000 members**. *

* As of December 2019



Why Reforms Have Not Worked



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Why Reforms Have Not Worked

- #1: The systems used to support social change were built for other purposes (Business, Church Charity, Military), which embedded those systems with questions and assumptions that go counter to the results we want to create.
- #2: Reform efforts are, by definition, reactive attempts to fix symptoms within a narrow view of what is causing the problem. And within an interconnected ecosystem, one-factor-at-a-time interventions to fix what we do NOT like are incapable of creating the world we DO want.
- #3: The desire for replicability often leads to prescriptive checklists of things to do. And while the thinking and questions that went into the initial success are often replicable (leading to a wide variety of answers and actions), “doing” is rarely replicable across a broad spectrum of organizations, locations, and cultures.



When the questions, assumptions, and approaches that support an effort go counter to the results that effort is intended to create, the results are guaranteed to disappoint.



Dr. Steven Kerr* described this misalignment of means and ends as
“The Folly of Rewarding A, While Hoping for B.”

The misalignment of means and ends has led to...

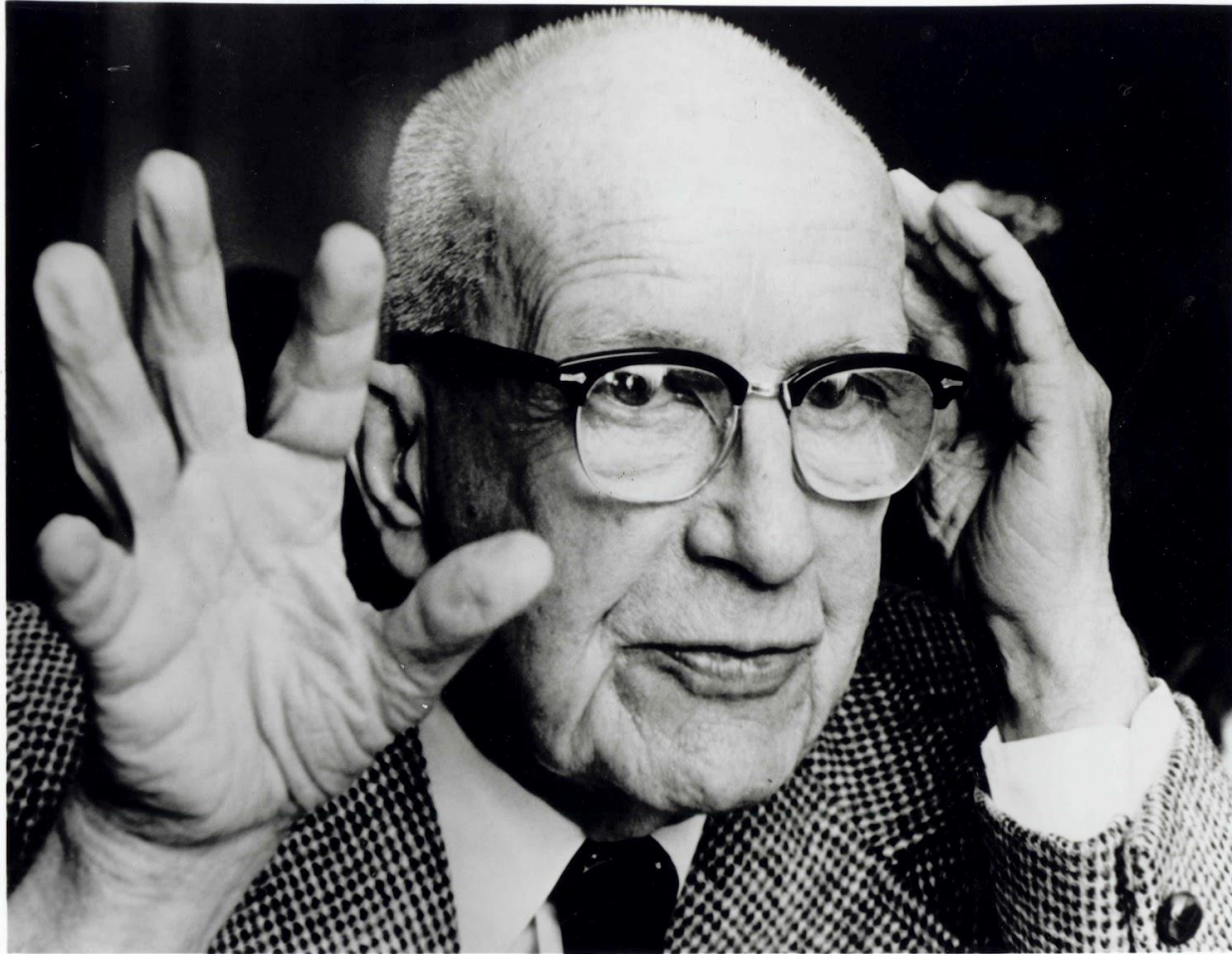
- ✓ The proliferation of social change orgs fighting for money
- ✓ Underutilization of ALL resources – people, time, money
- ✓ Assumptions that change is hard, slow, incremental, leading to a sense of futility, frustration, burnout
- ✓ Inability to pay decent wages (more frustration and burnout)
- ✓ Growth of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex – a market that thrives on the frustration caused by misaligned systems
- ✓ **Most importantly, it puts a cap on the amount of real change that is possible**



What WILL Work



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"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

- *Buckminster Fuller*



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What WILL work:

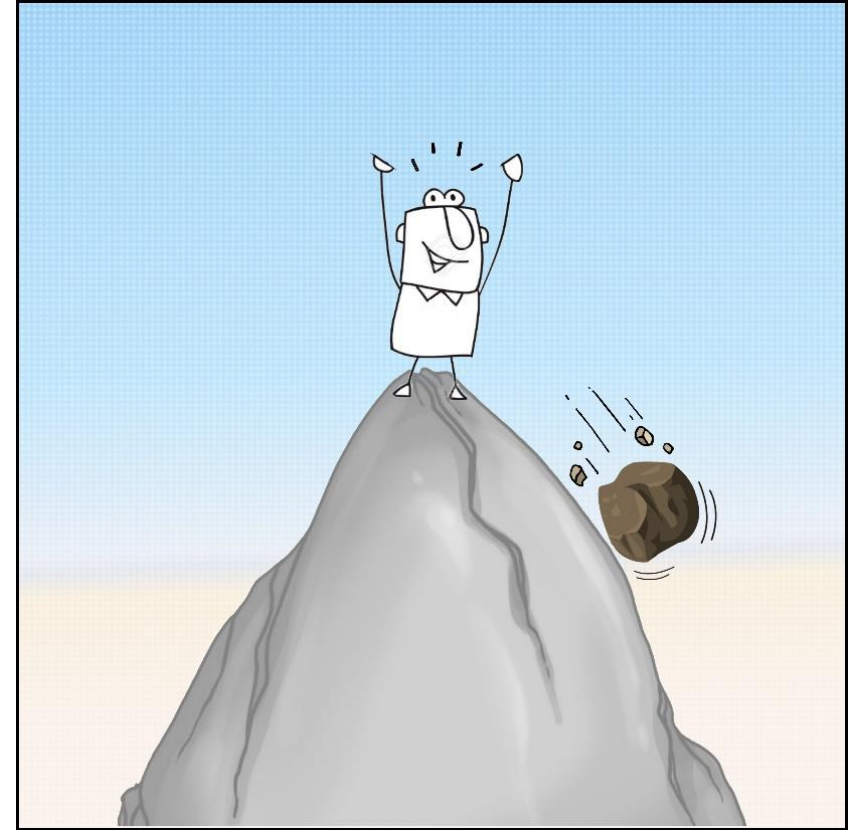


- 1) **Thinking:** Align the questions and assumptions that support social change work with the values of the equitable, healthy, humane world we want to see.
- 2) **Actions:** Re-imagine *each and every social change support system* to align with that thinking. Create what we DO want vs. reacting to what we do NOT want. Replicate the questions and the thinking vs. the doing.



This will require asking questions like...

- What would GOOD look like for *each and every system* social change organizations rely upon?
- What supports would align with organizations' desired end results?
- What supports would themselves model the world we want to create, BEING the change we want to see, in every way possible?



Those are the questions at the heart of
Catalytic Thinking –
a framework for bringing out the best
in any situation,
through the questions we ask.



With Catalytic Thinking guiding all our work at **Creating the Future**, we are excited to explore what is possible for reimagining the interconnected systems that currently support the social change arena.




Who we are

Creating the Future's Vision:

 A healthy, humane world that works for everyone.*

Creating the Future's Mission:

 To create the path towards that vision, show people how to re-imagine and re-create systems via the questions they ask (Catalytic Thinking). With a 10-year clock on our mission, in 2026 we will evaluate the degree of change we were able to effect in that time.

Creating the Future's Work to Accomplish the Mission:

- a) Demonstrate that re-imagining the systems we all encounter is possible (Experiment)
- b) Share what we learn about how systems change happens (Education programs)

* The phrase "*a world that works for everyone*" is most often attributed to Buckminster Fuller

To date, our work has included* ...

2011 – 2019

Intention:

What we committed to accomplish

Demonstrate that Catalytic Thinking works to help groups and individuals reach their potential, and teach others to use that framework for their own systems change work

How:

Experimenting

Creating the Future's teams experimented with our own organizational systems (open engagement, board work) and external organizational systems (demonstration projects)

How:

Sharing what we learn

To share what we learned in those experiments, Creating the Future's faculty developed and taught classes, from click-and-play recorded classes to months-long immersion courses



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* For details about our accomplishments, head to
<https://creatingthefuture.org/990-funding-and-annual-reports/>

What We Propose:

In this early inquiry stage, we will continue to engage groups and individuals in conversation, to determine what actions will create the most impact. That is one of the many reasons we want your thoughts in reading this draft.

Those conversations will guide our decisions about what is next. What we do know is that whatever actions we take...

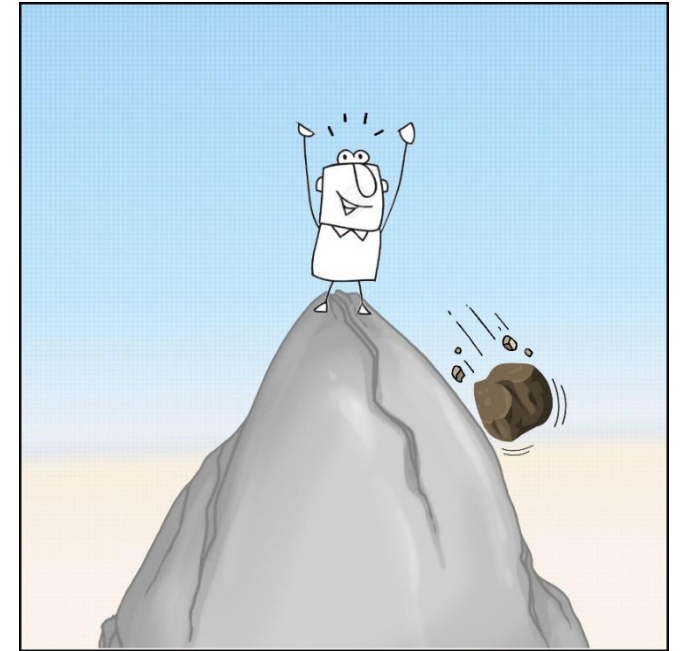
- Catalytic Thinking will guide that work.
- The work will be done via open engagement from the very early planning stages, as is all our strategy work.
- And importantly, the goal will be to ensure that ALL the systems and structures used to support social change are themselves examples of the humane, healthy, equitable future we want to see.

Walking the Talk of the future we want to create, here is just some of what we envision...

- ❖ **Resourcing** that walks the talk of cooperation, sharing, trust, and equity.
- ❖ **Organizational structure** that reflects an ecosystem vs. military command.
- ❖ **Evaluation** rooted in learning that is shared across all similar efforts, to enhance results across whole communities, countries, the world.
- ❖ **Leadership** that is radically inclusive, equitable, shares power, with a heightened awareness of all forms of privilege and power - all towards the goal of both organizations and communities that are highly participatory and engaged.
- ❖ **Accounting and accountability systems** based first on accountability to the community for end results, and secondarily on the means (money and donors).
- ❖ **Communication & engagement** intended to include, seeking out those whose voices are often ignored, where openly inviting participation is simply how we be.
- ❖ **Program design** rooted in deep community engagement, where people in community contribute their wisdom to the design of the programs.

Aligning social change support systems with the ends we want to see will result in...

- Less frustration and burnout, more joy and ease
- More connection, relationship, trust among changemakers doing similar work
- More resources of all kinds (not just cash)
- More sharing of resources, more sharing of knowledge, more cooperation
- And most importantly, more progress towards the equitable, healthy, humane world we all sense is possible.



It is time to build THAT.



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And we invite you to join us
as we explore **what it will take**
to make that the reality for creating
a healthy, resilient, humane future
for our world.



“The Twentieth Century will be chiefly remembered by future generations not as an era of political conflicts or technical inventions, but as an age in which human society dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective.”

~ Arnold J. Toynbee



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Creating the Future extends deep gratitude to the following individuals, whose thinking has contributed to this inquiry so far.

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Vu Le, Rainier Valley Corp
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Rachel Ramjattan, Network for Good
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Alandra Washington, W.K. Kellogg Foundation

In addition, Angela Eikenberry, Roseanne Mirabella and Billie Sandberg have assembled an excellent research-based analysis of many of the systemic issues facing social change groups. Their book, ***“Reframing Nonprofit Organizations: Democracy, Inclusion, and Social Change”*** is a must-read for systems thinkers who are seeking to change the social sector from the inside out.

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