



**CREATING THE FUTURE**  
Change the Questions. Change the World!

## ***Documenting and Sharing Our Case Studies***

Nonprofits and civil society are the only sector dedicated 100% to improving life on our planet. Sadly, that work has always left those organizations to play defense against the problems in our communities, and, in these historic times, playing defense for our very existence.

There is a clear choice in front of us: Continue that status quo, or take this opportunity to help our communities (and the nonprofits that serve them) to step into their power & potential. Changemakers deserve the latter – the ability to live up to the potential of our work.

Stepping into that potential will require not just a change in how organizations do their work, but a change in the mindsets that determine that work in the first place. Those mindset shifts start by changing the questions our work is answering, to aim our whole sector at what is possible.

**Creating the Future has developed a formula of questions that transforms every aspect of nonprofit work into a force for community health and well-being.**

Since 2011, we have performed over 30 demonstration projects, proving the power of QUESTIONS to make social change work more transformational. By changing the questions at the heart of their work, those 30+ efforts became more radically inclusive, more radically visionary, and more radically strength-based. And they served as examples to others in their communities, creating ripples that, in many cases, reached far beyond that individual project.

Creating the Future is seeking funding to document and broadly share the results of those demonstration projects. Those case studies will provide capacity builders (nonprofit resource centers, academic institutions, consultants, foundations, etc.) with examples of more powerful questions to embed into their workshops and interventions. The ultimate goal is that those capacity building efforts lead to more visionary improvement in communities – all via the questions they encourage changemakers to ask.

The consequence of NOT shifting the orientation of capacity building is simple: The problems facing our communities – and facing nonprofits themselves - will remain the same. Nonprofits will continue to play defense for their very existence, living in scarcity and dependency, feeling subservient and powerless - all while playing defense against the problems in our communities.

That is both the urgency and the potential that this moment represents for the entire capacity building field. And all of that is what Creating the Future is seeking to address with this project.

### **Our Story**

In the early 1990's, Hildy Gottlieb and Dimitri Petropolis, dissolved their multi-million-dollar business turnaround and management firm to do work that made more of a difference in the world. After several years of consulting to nonprofits, they faced a reckoning: Their work wasn't leading to improvement in their clients' communities. Asking their consulting friends if they were seeing things change from their own work, the answer was also a resounding "NO."

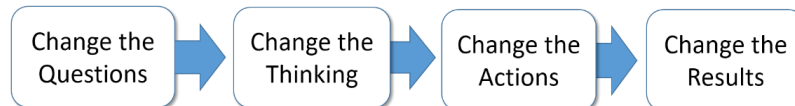


Hildy and Dimitri began experimenting, changing the questions they asked of their clients. As their questions led their clients to create greater results in their communities, the team codified those questions into the ***Catalytic Thinking framework***.

### ***Catalytic Thinking***

Social change work is constantly seeking answers. What will cure poverty? What will end violence? When one approach doesn't work, we seek the next action to take.

Unfortunately, changing our actions without changing the thinking that created those actions will lead to no change in results. From their consulting experience, Hildy and Dimitri saw that ***the gentlest way to shift mindsets is to change the questions those mindsets are answering***.



The questions of Catalytic Thinking therefore aim at the following mindset shifts.

- From incrementally reacting to what's wrong, ***to creating what is possible, seeing visionary change as an achievable goal, to create a future different from our past***
- From competing / thinking we know best ***to building trust and relationship, to accomplish together what none of us can accomplish on our own***
- From going it alone ***to the power of Collective Enoughness, sharing and building upon each other's strengths***

With Catalytic Thinking, instead of challenging groups to focus on social justice, the questions do the heavy lifting. And because those questions can be asked about any topic, they have the power to infuse a social justice context into standard capacity building topics such as fundraising, strategy, program development, board development, etc.

The framework consists of only seven questions. You can see the questions, as well as further explanation of the framework, in the fact sheet attached in Appendix A.

### ***Creating the Future***

In 2011, Hildy and Dimitri formed the nonprofit Creating the Future to demonstrate and share the power of Catalytic Thinking. A global think-and-do tank, Creating the Future's mission is to make those questions ubiquitous throughout the social change arena, shifting changemakers from incrementally reacting to what is wrong in our communities, to creating what is possible. All the organization's work is guided by our [Statement of Values in Action](#).

After several years, Creating the Future set a 10-year clock for our mission. That created an urgency that is absent from programs that see themselves as existing long into the future. We broke that 10 year project into three phases.

**Phase 1:** Experiment and demonstrate the power of the Catalytic Thinking questions

**Phase 2:** Document the results of those experiments with resource documents that will be the basis of Phase 3. *(Phase 2 is the phase for which we're seeking funding.)*



**Phase 3:** Create a FREE library of resources to support the work of changemakers to ask more effective questions in their own work. Engage capacity builders to share those resources in their own efforts.

In 2013, Creating the Future's board opened all our board and strategy meetings for anyone in our community to be part of. They further determined that decisions would be made by those closest to the decision. In 2022, this led to engaging our community members to determine the next steps in our mission. The following plan came from those community discussions.

## Our Plan

If folks have to come to Creating the Future to learn the questions of Catalytic Thinking, those questions will never be ubiquitous. That learning must instead be accessible wherever people are already learning, meeting people where they physically are.

Our plan is therefore to provide resources so that others can teach Catalytic Thinking wherever folks are already learning - in high schools, university classes, adult learning settings, capacity building entities, etc., as well as via mainstream media, podcasts, and other media. Those resources will be housed in an online library that will outlive our 10-year mission. In addition to text resources, the library will hold video classes, podcasts, and other modalities. Capacity builders - including anyone funding this effort - will be encouraged to both use those resources and to white label / post those resources to their own online libraries, for use in their own work.

Content will include...

- **Theory:** What is Catalytic Thinking? How do I use it?
- **Case Studies:** Seeing what the framework looks like in practice, in a variety of settings
- **Pedagogy:** Sharing what we've learned about teaching the framework

Building that library and engaging folks to use it in their own teaching / consulting will be Phase 3 of this project. **Phase 2 – the phase for which we are seeking funding now – is the precursor to that library.**

## Goals, Budget, Funding Strategy, and Project Oversight

With Phase 1's demonstration projects completed, we are seeking funding to document those results in case studies like these (a complete list is in the appendix):

- Nevada Department of Education: Culture change
- Columbia College: Curriculum design
- Community Food Bank: Community impact planning
- Creating the Future: Our own community engagement and other systems changes
- Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations: Community-wide systems change

Phase 2 will therefore include the following:

- Design the research methodology for interviewing participants from the 30+ demonstration projects Creating the Future performed during Phase 1.
- Researchers will listen to meeting recordings and interview project participants, preparing notes for writers to turn into resource documents for each of the 30+ projects.
- Those resource documents will immediately be available at Creating the Future's website, and with grantors of this project, for your own use.
- Publicist to share the stories with capacity builders, university professors, and the media.



Creating the Future's funding to date has steered away from grants and major gifts. The urgency of our 10-year clock required that we get to work rather than taking time to chase the small grants that are often most available to start-ups. We therefore employed a shared-resource approach - volunteers, shared office space, stipend wages, etc. Cash needs have been covered by community support plus earned income from classes and public speaking. This allowed us to hit the ground running, with our cash needs met by actually doing the work.

To complete Phase 2 in a timely manner, that slow-and-steady approach will not work for this phase. Instead, the bulk of the funding for Phase 2 will come from one-time grants.

We anticipate raising 10% of the necessary funds from partners who want these resources for their members and students - statewide nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, etc. In addition, we will continue to employ a shared resource component to this phase – volunteers, as well as students in Qualitative Research classes at universities around the world. You can see this described in the proposed budget below.

Progress in this phase will be reported on an ongoing basis, via newsletters and other reports to our community, including discussions at our Integrity Body (aka board) meetings. At any point in the project that strategic decisions are to be made, those will be made in the same open, participatory way as all other strategic decisions in the organization.

<b>Budget: Phase 2</b>	<b>Shared Resources</b>	<b>Cash</b>	<b>Total</b>
Writers: 30 resource docs @ \$5k-\$10k each (5k-10k wds)			
1/3 volunteers / 2/3 paid writers	\$75,000	\$150,000	\$225,000
Interviewers: Masters Classes in Qualitative Research (Value = 2 Grad assistants @ \$50k/year)	\$100,000		\$100,000
Publicist to share with mainstream media		\$30,000	\$30,000
Compensation for Content experts (\$1,000 per case study) <i>We anticipate only ½ accepting compensation</i>	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$30,000
Project Management (1/2 time position, 1/2 of that volunteered)	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$60,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	\$220,000	\$225,000	\$445,000
10% Admin		\$22,500	\$22,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$220,000</b>	<b>\$247,500</b>	<b>\$467,500</b>

## **Be Part of the Change**

In this critical time, it is imperative that the nonprofit sector shift away from the status quo mindsets of dependency, scarcity, reactivity, and incrementalism. This is the moment to reach for the potential our communities have, to be the humane, healthy places we all want to live in. And it is a moment for nonprofits to step into their potential to help make that vision a reality.

Our communities – and the changemakers in those communities - deserve approaches that lead to real change. That is what we are proposing. And we invite grant-makers to be part of that change.