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Changing Minds
A Tool on the Road to Transformation

*Think broadly and embrace a long-term vision—
changing minds and policy takes time.*

Every time she steps into her office on Spruce Street, Linda Shoemaker (who is no relation to Paul Shoemaker) enters a piece of Colorado history. The mansion housing the offices of the Brett Family Foundation, which she and her husband Steve Brett established in 2000, is believed to be the oldest remaining brick home in Boulder. Built in 1875, with a classical portico, stucco façade, ornate ironwork, and fine chimneys, it's a magnificent example of the kinds of buildings erected by wealthy nineteenth century Coloradoans. And Anthony Arnett, the man who in 1866 purchased the land on which the house stands—now in the center of downtown Boulder, Colorado—was not just a rich industrialist. He was also a philanthropist.

Born in France in 1819, Anthony Arnett reached the United States with his family at the age of nine. An adventurer, gold seeker, and empire builder, he left New York for San Francisco in 1849, rounding Cape Horn on a square-sailed, steel-hulled windjammer, one of the era's grandest merchant ships. Ten years later, following adventures in California, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Panama, he traveled to the craggy mountains, wide plains, and dramatic canyons of Colorado, driven by the whiff of a precious metal.

While the Pike's Peak Gold Rush brought him to the Centennial State, his wealth was not amassed through prospecting. In fact, interests in mining, real estate, and freight shipping made Arnett rich. And he was generous with his riches, financing roads and railroads. Perhaps his most important gift, however, was to education. Arnett helped establish the University of Colorado in Boulder by donating not only land for a campus site, but also \$500 in cash—no small sum in those days—to help the institution get off the ground.

Like Anthony Arnett, Linda Shoemaker is a passionate and ambitious philanthropist. And like Arnett, her philanthropy extends to the University, where she serves on the CU Foundation Board of Trustees. However, while Linda shares the impetus to give to society with her nineteenth-century predecessor, she does so in ways that are more complex and sophisticated than those of Anthony Arnett. She believes that while directly financing issues such as education, social justice, or poverty alleviation is crucial (and the Brett Family Foundation does make such grants), a critical need exists for a different kind of funding—funding that brings about social change by influencing public policy and the legislative environment.

“I think about giving in a much more comprehensive way,” Linda explains. “Because when you have a goal of changing public policy and advocating for change in a public arena, then as a wealthy person you should look for a strategy that includes not just your charitable philanthropy but also what else you can do with your dollars.”

What Linda and others like her have realized is that philanthropy alone cannot fix the world's problems. To change society, they argue, all players must participate, from civic groups to religious leaders. Business, which generates employment and markets for essential services, is also a leading participant, as those supporting social entrepreneurs and social enterprise have recognized. And there's another party with an extremely important place at the table of social change—government.

Governments are funders, legislators, educators, health care providers, and employers, and as such, they shape the way society evolves. With annual budgets that even in hard times can be larger than the largest foundation endowments, governments have the power to promote education, create economic opportunities, and reduce poverty. Through their legislative powers, they can put a stop to injustices and foster a more equitable society.

Yet governments are pulled in countless directions. Their leaders' political views shape their actions. Politicians' desire to gain or hold onto office informs much of what they do. Those funding their election campaigns further influence their policies. The national agenda may hamper their plans at a local level, while bureaucratic inertia may hinder, if not halt, their progress.

Recognizing these roadblocks to positive policy change, advocacy philanthropists such as Linda use funding to nudge the complex juggernaut that is government in new directions—directions that will bring about longer-lasting impact on social problems than a single foundation or nonprofit could alone. “Take homelessness,” says Linda. “If you're a direct service grantmaker, you're addressing the current issue, which is the homeless population where you live. But if you're an advocacy giver, your aim is to reduce the need for homeless services in the long term. These problems are long-term problems, and you should fund long-term solutions.”

Unlike philanthropists who give their money directly to programs and nonprofit infrastructure, advocacy philanthropists immerse themselves in the world of ideas and information. With their eyes set on more distant horizons, they don't want to limit their funding to direct services—they want to work to ensure those services are no longer needed. They're in the business of changing the world by changing minds.

Going into Battle

Advocacy takes many different forms. You can advance your ideas by raising awareness of a cause attracting little attention, or by putting an issue in front of policymakers to encourage government action. To do so, you might file a lawsuit, testify at hearings, organize events, distribute information materials, write letters and op-eds in your local or national newspaper, or publish research reports. Most philanthropists will leave this kind of advocacy to the organizations that they fund.

However, even this type of philanthropy can be highly politicized, pitting left against right, liberal against conservative. Others may not approve of your ideas. And even if the

organizations you fund are politically agnostic, people with strong ideas and opposing views may run up against you. For this reason, as an advocacy philanthropist, you need to be certain of your beliefs and prepared to defend your principles. To bring about change, you must be ready to go into battle.

If you're about to embark on advocacy funding by establishing a new organization, you will want to familiarize yourself with the intricacies of U.S. tax law and to think broadly about channels through which to conduct your activities. These include 501(c)(4)s, which are tax-exempt nonprofit organizations that may engage in lobbying as a primary activity, as well as electoral activity. Unlike giving to a 501(c)(3), when giving to a 501(c)(4), you will not receive a tax deduction for gifts (see Appendix III, Campaigning Within the Law, for more details).

Less controversial and complex paths do exist in advocacy philanthropy. You might, for example, help enrich a debate in which you believe alternative voices would benefit local decision-making. By organizing town hall-type discussion evenings or sponsoring radio shows, you could help foster greater clarity or better information on a certain issue, not endorsing any one viewpoint but simply promoting a more informed debate, allowing diverse views to be aired. Or you might bring to the table the groups and individuals affected by an impending policy decision.

Your level of involvement will depend on your experience. If you don't feel equipped to engage in advancing ideas yourself, you could turn to established organizations with a deeper knowledge of issues and public policy than you have, using your dollars to support media groups or nonprofits that are advocates for your cause.

However, keep in mind that you may not agree with every activity undertaken by your grantees. Even issues that seem relatively uncontroversial, such as protecting the environment, can present difficult choices for funders—for while some see climate change as the most pressing global environmental challenge, others claim that the threat to water supplies is the world's most urgent problem. In advocacy, there are no easy answers. And your answers can come up against those of another philanthropist—perhaps even someone you know and love.

Like Winning the Lottery

Until 1999, Linda Shoemaker her husband Steve, and her daughter Emily, had lived a comfortable but normal life in Boulder, Colorado. Linda's friends were teachers, lawyers, and small business owners. Steve was working as general counsel at Tele-Communications Incorporated (TCI), and Linda, a former journalist, corporate attorney, and children's advocate, was busy serving as the elected president of a regional School District Board covering nine communities including Boulder.

For a year, Steve had been working on a deal to merge his company's operations with those of AT&T. As a corporate lawyer, he'd worked on many such negotiations before and had seen many promising deals fall through, even after months of discussion. Negotiations on this one had lasted a year, and it was unclear whether or not it would

close. Then, in March, the deal went ahead and Steve stood to receive money from the sale of his vested stock options. He had no idea what the final price would be but, confident of some sort of windfall, Linda and Steve decided to share the experience.

Linda and their daughter Emily, then fourteen, flew to New York to join Steve for the closing, staying at the famous Waldorf Astoria Hotel, where the company executives were staying. While Steve was working, Emily and Linda were sightseeing. After the closing, Steve handed Linda an envelope full of checks and asked her to process them. “We’d still not sat down and figured out how much money we’d be making,” says Linda. When she settled into her seat on the plane back to Colorado and opened the envelope, Linda was astonished by the total she found inside. “The checks were only a down payment on what we were going to get,” she says. “I felt like we’d won the lottery. I was sitting there thinking: ‘Do I go to my bank branch at my local mall and try to deposit these checks?’ I didn’t even know there was such a thing as private banking.”

But if she didn’t know much about financial management, she knew what she wanted to do with the family windfall—she wanted to put it to work to help change the world. She’d already been playing a role in shaping civil society by serving on the School Board. And she and Steve had always given to causes they cared about. But as she gazed at the checks, Linda felt acutely conscious of the fact that her philanthropic potential had, overnight, been transformed. Millions were now at her fingertips. “With the money came responsibility, and I felt I should use it to change my little corner of the world,” she says. Linda also knew what she wanted to fund. Rather than supporting only direct service charitable programs, she wanted to bring about long-lasting change—she wanted to become an advocacy philanthropist.

It was an ambitious choice. “It seemed like a huge leap for me,” she confesses. Advocacy, she knew, would take time and yield no immediate results or gratification. Impact would be hard to measure. And Linda had no idea how to go about putting in place the infrastructure necessary to influence policy. She needed to learn how to be a philanthropist.

Giving to the World of Ideas

Linda Shoemaker’s philanthropic journey would take her into the challenging world of social and political advocacy. However, as an individual donor, you can engage in this form of giving even if you don’t have millions to give or experience in political leadership. And if you don’t want to set up your own organization, you can fund nonprofits whose mission matches your philosophy, pooling your funds with those of others. You may also consider relinquishing your tax deduction to give to a 501(c)(4). By funding these kinds of groups, you get a vicarious seat at the lobbying table.

When considering making this kind of gift, look for organizations that have advocacy as their sole focus or as part of their portfolio of activities. Supporting leadership development is an important part of advocacy funding, so consider funding organizations that use this strategy, as well.

Take the Twenty-First Century Foundation. One of the few endowed foundations focusing on the African-American community, it has a range of advocacy programs. These include its “Black Men and Boys” initiative, that promote health, education, employability, criminal justice, and engaged fatherhood, and “Black Women for Black Girls,” a New York City-based giving circle in which investors—black, professional women—give money, time, and expertise to support low-income black girls. The giving circle also commissions research studies to inform policymakers about the needs of this population and members mentor the girls and donate technical assistance to the organizations serving them.

As well as seeking funding from individual donors for its programs, the foundation also allows philanthropists to give to its Twenty-First Century Foundation General Fund. This is an unrestricted fund supporting advocacy, community organizing, and leadership development focused on addressing root causes of social injustice.

Environmental Defense Fund also has a strong focus on advocacy. It has long made its voice heard in Washington as part of its push for stronger environmental laws. While EDF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, it has also established a sister 501(c)(4) organization, Environmental Defense Action Fund, which is not limited in what it can spend to lobby for environmental legislation. This has allowed EDF to achieve significant environmental changes in the law. In California, for example, its action helped the first statewide cap on climate change pollution to be passed.

Before making a gift, however, you need to identify organizations conducting advocacy in your issue area. Here, the Internet is again an essential tool. Type the word “advocacy” into the search engines of GuideStar or Charity Navigator and you’ll find pages and pages of nonprofits with “advocacy” in their title. On the site, you can refine your search geographically or by issue. You can perform similar searches on the online version of Publication 78, the IRS’s listing of organizations it recognizes as eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions.

On the organizations’ websites you can discover whether or not their activities match your giving strategy. Find out if a nonprofit is part of the broader spectrum of groups working in your area of interest. Is it, for example, part of a coalition working in that field? Is it building coalitions? One of the reasons that, at SV2, we chose to fund the Center for Resource Solutions (whose mission is to change policy around limiting carbon emissions) was that it works hard to bring renewable energy and energy efficiency into debates everywhere, from government and the public to other environmental organizations.

As an individual donor without the time or resources to become an advocacy philanthropist, helping change the law is not out of your reach. With diligent research and a donation, you can participate in democracy in a powerful way. You don’t even have to donate money—you can promote change as an individual by writing to your congressman or senator about a bill you’d like them to support. Some advocacy organizations make this easy for you by posting pre-written letters on their websites—all you have to do is sign, and press “send.”

Today, technology is making advocacy accessible to everyone. With its massive global connectivity, the Internet allows an ordinary citizen to spread a message in a way that was once only possible for organizations with large marketing budgets. Through technology you can raise your hand for a cause, and get other people to raise their hands with you. You can create a spark of social consciousness and watch it catch fire across national, or even global, communities.

Mobile devices are also powerful advocacy tools—something forcefully demonstrated by Erion Veliaj, an Albanian student. In 2003, along with three former high school friends, he founded Mjaft! (It translates as “Enough!”) in response to the poor state of public services in their country, as well as rising levels of corruption, poverty, and organised crime. The team used the multimedia tools available on cell phones to send text messages, images, and video to hundreds of thousands of subscribers, creating instant campaigns against corruption and injustice.

A year later, in the 2004 “Orange Revolution,” text messages helped Ukrainians protest against the results of the country’s presidential election, in which opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko lost, despite his 10 percent lead in the exit polls. As these movements show, wherever you are in the world and however small your financial resources are, you can participate in political and social transformation through virtual campaigns.

More recently, social media was among the forces that sparked the upheavals in the Middle East known as the 2011 Arab Spring. During the Egyptian revolution, for example, Wael Ghonim, a Google executive, helped rally pro-democracy demonstrators as the administrator of a Facebook group called “We are all Khaled Saeed” (named for a young Egyptian who died in 2010 after being arrested by Egyptian police).

The “viral” effect can be achieved using online tools, too. Social networking technology has opened the door to advocacy. In 2008, the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids worked with Grassroots Enterprise (part of Edelman, the global public relations firm) to develop a campaign called: “I Am Smoke Free.” Using a Facebook app users could send letters directly to their local officials about the need to protect people from the health hazards of secondhand smoke. Users’ activity was posted on the Facebook news feed (where people go to see what friends are doing on the network) and recruits were automatically added to the campaign’s mailing list.

Social networking tools are free, effective ways of promoting your cause. They help you attract supporters, create groups of interest, and encourage people already interested in your cause to spread the word to their networks, help raise money for a cause, or write letters to politicians.

Ning, for example, has a discussion forum and advocacy tool for citizens fighting for a wide range of causes. Hundreds of passionate groups and individuals who want to spread their message have established a presence on the Ning network. Environmentalists—one of Ning’s many social activist groups—use it to gather everyone

from cyclists wanting to reclaim the streets to citizens promoting recycling or rainwater harvesting. When you're looking for likeminded individuals to connect with, you simply conduct a search on the home page to identify advocates of all kinds.

Microblogging sites such as Twitter also provide forums for fast, compelling exchanges on the issues and causes. Through Tweets, you can create buzz and excitement around your cause (or even a relevant ballot initiative or candidate supporting your cause) and also respond to feedback with individual notes or mass communications.

As you do so, the websites of think tanks, nonprofits, government agencies, academic and research institutes can be critical sources of information about your cause. Many of these organizations conduct research and surveys and produce opinion papers and policy briefs, all of which are often freely available online and provide you with valuable, credible data with which to back up your views and make your arguments. Remember, when investigating issues and developing your own advocacy strategies, you don't need to reinvent the knowledge wheel. You can capitalize on the wealth of existing knowledge other philanthropists have funded—and most of it's free.

Of course, most institutions will have some sort of political agenda (even the nonpartisan ones) or may steer their research in a particular direction, depending on what they're trying to achieve. You'll often find papers on the subject that make opposing arguments. So it's critical to identify studies that match your beliefs and values and are addressing the same issues you want to address. Equally, it pays to learn about the arguments being made against your approach or beliefs—understanding both sides is critical to advancing your own.

If no one has conducted research on the particular issue you're focused on, and you choose to commission your own, the same principles apply—select an institution that shares your values, or an individual at that institution that does. On the other hand, you might want to fund research out of sheer intellectual curiosity and a desire to raise the level of debate on a particular subject.

Whichever form of research you commission or embark on, make sure it's available online once it's completed. After all, advocacy philanthropy is all about people coming together to share thoughts on the things they care about. And while you might fund research, it need not require any financial investment—you just need passion, a social networking account, and a few moments of your time to start becoming an activist. And this kind of advocacy will grow in strength as online technologies become available to everyone and smartphone apps turn mobile communication devices into tools for social reform. And because of the ability to reach such vast numbers of people, anyone with good ideas, strongly held opinions, and a compelling story to tell can start to change minds. Technology is empowering the collective voice for change.

Learning to Think (and Dress) Like a Philanthropist

Back in 2000, before Linda could become an advocacy funder, she had to familiarize herself with a whole new world—a world in which dollars were in abundance. And her

first lesson was not in how to write a check for a large sum of money or how to assess a grant application, but in what to wear.

Realizing she needed support during the sharp learning curve ahead of her, she joined the Women Donors Network, an organization that has evolved from what Linda calls a “random group of wealthy progressive women” to a “dynamic national forum for women’s philanthropy.” Being part of WDN opened up a whole new world for Linda. “But I remember walking into that first meeting dressed in my lawyer’s clothes—a conservative blue suit with a white blouse, pearls, and a scarf from Unicef, which had pictures of the world’s children on it. This in my mindset was what a wealthy philanthropist would wear,” Linda laughs. “Well, everyone looked totally different—they were just in their normal clothes, and I was *definitely* overdressed.”

By November that year, when she attended WDN’s national conference in Santa Cruz, Linda was no longer worrying about what to wear—she was thinking about how to pursue her goals. The meeting gave her the courage she needed. The message she took away from it was that as a philanthropist, you have capacity, clout, and connections, and those can and should be put to good use. “That’s where the whole thing galvanized for me,” she says. “I figured out that I was going to start a think tank.”

Identifying issues to address was no problem. Education was something about which Linda cared deeply. While on the Boulder Valley School District Board of Trustees, Linda had been dismayed by a decision to split the neighborhood middle school, and put high-performing students into a new charter school. “I was very frustrated,” she explains. “There are all kinds of constituencies for the gifted and talented, the disabled and those who speak English as a second language. But there wasn’t anyone to speak for the overall good of public education and what the average student needed.”

As well as addressing educational challenges, Linda wanted to help shift policy on TABOR, or the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights, a constitutional limit advocated by conservative and libertarian groups that severely restrains the growth of the government. Colorado’s TABOR is the most restrictive tax and spending limitation in the country, severely restricting state and local spending growth and requiring that all tax increases must be approved by the voters. While some argue that government should play a smaller role in providing public services, Linda believes restrictions like TABOR have a negative effect by limiting the taxpayer revenue available to fund essential services such as public education and health care.

More broadly, Linda also believed policymakers needed better information on which to base their decisions, whether on education, democracy, social justice, equal rights, or the needs of underserved communities. “Most elected officials do a really good job with the information they have—they’re honest and work hard,” she says. “But they don’t always have good information.”

To change this, as well as endowing the Brett Family Foundation with \$10 million, Linda wanted to establish a progressive think tank and policy institute that would provide Colorado’s policymakers, funders, nonprofits, and other decision makers with

research and analysis to help them promote effective public policies. It would be an ambitious step in her journey as a philanthropist. And all this sprang from a sudden and surprising financial windfall. An unexpected twist of fate had propelled Linda up to a level of giving on an entirely new scale.

This next step in Linda's philanthropic career was to be a big one. For a start, by entering the world of wealth and large-scale giving, she had to adopt a new identity. "A lot of women donors are not public," she says. "But there was no way to do what I wanted to without being public. For fifty years my whole identity was built on being a normal person, and now I'm a wealthy person and a philanthropist," she says. "I still struggle with it."

Moreover, her plan to start a state think tank was ambitious. After all, few have done so alone—think tanks tend to be high-level institutions formed by groups of people not individuals. Linda knew that for the think tank to be sustainable, she would need the right allies, partners and investors to commit to the effort long-term. Linda was about to go from life as a modest giver to engagement in one of the most complex types of philanthropy possible. Her years spent serving as an elected leader, a corporate attorney, a nonprofit board member and a strategic giver were about to pay off.

Happily, while Linda embarked on her learning curve, she was temporarily able to remain "in the closet," as she puts it, about her new wealth. While Steve had been a senior executive at TCI, he was not sufficiently prominent to warrant mention in news coverage of AT&T's acquisition, so Linda was able to remain on the Boulder Valley School Board until her term ended without anyone knowing about the windfall. The period of anonymity gave her a few precious months in which to equip herself. She started reading all the relevant books and articles she could find. She joined the board of the Women's Foundation of Colorado. She met with the President of her local community foundation to find out what strategies they employed to make change and what kinds of advocacy other philanthropists were engaged in. She talked to anyone who would meet with her and teach her something.

Perhaps most importantly, she attended a lecture at the WDN conference by Jean Hardisty, author of *Mobilizing Resentment*, and founder of Political Research Associates, a national think tank. Professor Hardisty's lecture demonstrated that conservatives had been winning the ideas game for so long in large part through their use of think tanks at the state level. Hardisty challenged the group, telling them that progressive philanthropists needed to catch up. "I listened to her lecture, bought the book right there and then, and grabbed her at lunch the next day after spending all night skimming her book," says Linda. "I told her I was considering taking her advice and starting a progressive think tank in my own state and asked her if she thought I could do it. She said 'Absolutely!'"

Empowered, Linda got started, consulting with Jean Hardisty and WDN members throughout the country. In the summer of 2000, she hired someone part time to conduct research on existing think tanks and other advocacy organizations so she could determine whether Colorado really needed what she had in mind. Discovering a strong

conservative infrastructure, but few progressive organizations doing advocacy, she promptly began funding most of the ones whose viewpoints matched hers.

Linda's next step was hiring an off-duty state legislator to draft the think tank's Strategic Plan, which she used to sell the idea to those who would become her philanthropic partners and members of the nascent board of directors. Linda knew she had only a fraction of the resources to sustain a policy institute over the long term; she knew she had to leverage her contributions by finding others who would share and extend her commitment.

In 2001, Linda and her partners launched the Bell Policy Center, a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan think tank, which she funded through the Brett Family Foundation, as well as a sister organization, the Bell Action Network, a 501(c)(4), funded with her own money. Linda recruited funders who would commit to giving long-term general operating support to both organizations. Named for the Liberty Bell, the think tank uses research and advocacy to promote policies that help Colorado individuals and families access economic opportunities. Meanwhile, in order to balance her long-term goals with serving immediate local needs, through the Brett Family Foundation, she continued to fund direct service organizations supporting underserved communities, particularly disadvantaged youth and their families.

Her main focus, however, would be funding those in the business of changing minds through the four strategies of research, civic engagement, leadership development and messaging. So it's no surprise that she would be among the early funders to the American Independent News Network, which generates and distributes investigative stories to enhance public debate through a series of state-based online news sites. Through training programs, mentoring, and editorial support for online journalists and bloggers, the network promotes high-quality reporting that covers complex and underreported public interest issues.

In 2006, when former journalist David Bennahum founded the network and selected Colorado as one of its two first states, Linda gave it a grant of \$5,000, for its first year of operation. That initial seed funding was critical. "Colorado was the first site," explains David, now president and chief executive. "And because it went well in the first few months, it became our calling card." Linda's investment also served as a signal to other potential funders about the organization's value and credibility. Because of its success in Colorado, the network has grown rapidly and now harnesses the energies of more than a hundred reporters across the country, with websites in a number of states, as well as an award-winning national site.

As newsrooms across American have shrunk and newspapers have gone out of business, the network helps fill the void. More importantly, in his mission is to foster journalism that creates change, David talks about what he calls "impact journalism." To track these kinds of successes, the network has a rigorous process of reporting and feedback on its news stories and features. As well as an annual report, it produces bi-weekly e-mail updates on whether or not recent stories have resulted in action being taken to curb an

injustice or address a societal need. “The news media is a key driver of debate in any democracy,” says David. “And we want to see consequences from our reporting.”

Such words come as music to the ears of Linda Shoemaker, who also sees the media as a vital force in any democracy. And the potential for the American Independent News Network to enhance public debate is a good example of the kind of organization you can support as an advocacy funder. While you’re not the activist, through the organizations you choose to fund and the leadership you help to foster, you’re playing a critical role in changing minds—both of fellow givers and the broader public.

Measurement, Cooperation, and Collaboration

While the American Independent News Network can track some of its impact, measuring the consequences advocacy funding can be tough. Advocacy and policy work requires a lot more energy and investment than, say, writing a check to a relief organization, which might be able to give you immediate feedback on exactly how many hungry, homeless, sick, or injured individuals your dollars have helped. It also requires investment in evaluation so you can track your progress over long periods of time, noting which sorts of policy or advocacy efforts resulted in what kinds of social changes for larger populations—enabling you to help shift more fundamentally the trajectory of an issue that’s causing widespread suffering.

What’s more, policy change takes years to effect and involves a multitude of constituents, from politicians, donors, businesses, and civil society organizations to the media and voters. Even if when policy changes materialize, it’s tricky to tease out exactly how much they were due to a philanthropist’s actions and funding and how much resulted from political and other pressures. And some advocacy funders have been reluctant to submit their activities to measurement in the belief that evaluating impact by narrow measures, such as legislation passed by a certain date or number of op-eds published, might limit broader advocacy activities, such building talent or raising public awareness of an issue.

However, a new wave of accountability is sweeping through the philanthropic world. These days, donors and boards want to know their money is being spent wisely and not disappearing into a black hole. It’s all part of the new era of giving. Return on investment and performance management are no longer concepts reserved for the corporate sector. As philanthropists today, we all have to track and assess the impact we’re making.

And when it comes to advocacy philanthropy, as research reports from Blueprint Research and Design and the Annie E. Casey Foundation highlight, more effective ways do exist to assess whether or not advocacy efforts are making a difference.

As an advocacy philanthropist, you can use a number of strategies to do this. Start by defining what you mean by policy or social change (is it limited to the passing of legislation or can a shifting political landscape and rising awareness of an issue be counted?). It’s also useful to define categories of outcome, such as media coverage,

increased public awareness, rising voter registration, strengthened alliances, improved organizational capacity, and the passing of legislation. Then establish the role each category plays in achieving your broader long-term goals, whether that's banning smoking in public places or eradicating homelessness.

Other processes include setting timelines or milestones with which to monitor your progress (whether that's actual policy change or improvements in the policy environment), and measuring the effectiveness with which you're reaching those milestones. You also need to be flexible—external changes beyond your control may mean you'll need to set new milestones and let go of others. You may need to adapt your strategy to meet new political realities, shifts in the balance of power, or social developments. And evaluation of your effectiveness helps you understand what's working and what's not.

You may also help win others to your cause; the challenges of measuring impact have often deterred donors from funding advocacy. So by devising a robust form of assessment that demonstrates the difference you're making, you could also help increase the pool of funding available for this form of social change, benefiting causes beyond your own.

As well as bringing in new funders, as an advocacy philanthropist you need to be good at working with others. Legal limits on lobbying within a nonprofit context mean you may want to partner with all kinds of entities, including grassroots organizing co-operatives, unions, regulators, political groups, and for-profits. “Encourage co-operation,” says Linda. “Think comprehensively, and fund a constellation of different groups that are able to work in partnership with others in order to achieve public policy goals.” Some philanthropists even provide extra funding to require their grantees to meet as a cohort and share ideas and strategies—and personal connections can often greatly increase both tangible and intangible impact.

Linda's Foundation, for example, funds a nonprofit called the White House Project, a national organization that trains anyone running for public office (with a focus on women). Because the White House Project is a 501(c)(3), and so unable to support its trainees after they assume public office, the organization works closely with the Center for Progressive Leadership, a 501(c)(4) that provides political leadership development programs nationally.

Aside from legal considerations, advocacy is about convincing policymakers that the issue you're concerned about affects everyone, so you need to ensure everyone is at the table, and that all voices are heard.

You also need to be prepared to take a hands-off approach. While in other areas of philanthropy, you might play a direct role—volunteering as a hospice worker or funding the education of an Afghan girl—as an advocacy philanthropist, you are one step removed from the process. “As a funder you are just a facilitator,” says Linda. “You have to have respect for the organizations you fund—you have to learn from them. You can't

dictate to them; you need to understand the clientele they serve, and the strategies they choose to employ.”

This is something Linda has had to learn. “I’m very autocratic by nature and like to run the show,” she says. “And I’ve learned that I can’t dictate, but that I have to work in partnership with others. I also need to give credit to others.”

Above all, your mission as an advocacy philanthropist is not to serve the needy or fight injustices, but to help create a world where those services are no longer needed and the injustices no longer take place. And while our egos might tell us that the philanthropic world—at least our corner of it—will collapse without us, in fact, we will have achieved real change when we cease to be the most vital cog in its wheels.

Looking through a Longer Lens

Perhaps the most challenging part of being a philanthropist is the fact that you’ll have to turn down worthy applicants for funding. “What I like the least about my form of philanthropy is saying no,” says Linda, “particularly saying no to immediate needs, because with my strategy, I’m sacrificing the immediate needs.” For Linda, supporting long-term policy change has meant watching as multi-million dollar funding shortfalls have forced her local schools to cut staff and programs. “I care passionately about education,” she says. “But I’m not going to give the schools any money. I’m giving my money to try to change the long-term fiscal landscape in Colorado. That’s really hard because people I know are coming to me to ask for funding, and it’s very difficult to say no.”

However, as Linda points out, you can support nonprofits whose funding requests you have turned down in other ways. You might suggest other resources to which they might turn. You could even facilitate, with introductions to foundation and nonprofit leaders in your network.

To satisfy your need to see immediate results, you can establish some direct giving programs in addition to your advocacy funding. This also allows you to engage in activities that might not be legally permissible through your private foundation. Linda, for example, set up a donor-advised fund at Boulder’s Community Foundation, which, because it is a public foundation, can fund certain kinds of advocacy (such as ballot issue campaigns and voter registration drives) that would be impossible for the Brett Family Foundation, which is a private institution. As an individual donor, you can use various legal vehicles to achieve your goals.

And while what defines Linda’s giving is advocacy, her portfolio of philanthropic activities is broad. While maintaining her donor-advised fund, she continues to volunteer, sitting on the boards of a variety of organizations. She was past president of Boulder Professional Women, which promotes participation, equity, and economic self-sufficiency for working women. A program run by the I Have A Dream Foundation of Boulder County allows Linda and Steve to sponsor forty at-risk students in north

Boulder (they're known as the Broadway Dreamers), helping give them tutoring, mentoring, and academic assistance.

Moreover, as with the best philanthropists, Linda never stands still. Her advocacy mission continues to evolve and she's now building on her roots as a journalist, fueled by a concern for the future of the media and what she sees as its critical role democracy. "My first ten years was devoted to think tanks," she explains. "In my second ten years, I'm going to be looking at the media sector."

Linda's brand of philanthropy involves immersion and intensity. For the think tank decade, that meant serving as the founding Board Chair of the Bell Policy Center, helping WDN choose a national think tank for a \$1 million grant, and serving on the national advisory board for progressive state-level think tanks, the Economic Analysis and Research Network. For the media decade, she's started by serving on the Advisory Board of the Journalism School at the University of Colorado, which is in the process of re-inventing its journalism program for the digital age.

Her ten-year plan is typical of an advocacy funder. For Linda stresses the importance of taking a long-term view. "I once expected quick results. I thought social change would happen more quickly," she says. "I'm naturally very impatient and I love to see things happen, but the thing I've learned is that you have to be very patient."

Patience, persistence and hard work pay off. Through the Bell Policy Center, for example, Linda helped convince voters to ease TABOR's spending limits. After the Bell built a coalition of individuals and organizations keen to modify the legislation, reform moved to the legislature in 2005, with Bell continuing to provide research, analyze options, and support political leaders in their efforts to shape a "Time Out from TABOR" compromise, known as Referendum C. Voters passed this in November that year, preserving vital funding for K-12 education, higher education, and indigent healthcare for the subsequent five fiscal years. This is the kind of victory for which, as an advocacy philanthropist, you strive. While you cannot shake the hand of the child you've directly helped to educate, your activities may mean more children receive an education.

"The hard truth about Colorado and TABOR," says Linda, "is that it's a continuing battle and a continuing focus for Bell Policy, which has spent ten years doing research, writing reports, building coalitions, and talking to thousands of groups of citizens throughout the state about the continuing need for systemic fiscal reform."

While many of us would be daunted to take on philanthropic commitments with the complexity of Linda Shoemaker's giving strategy, in other ways, you can still be part of this movement. Whether funding other organizations or starting an online campaign, advocacy philanthropy requires commitment, courage, and depth of knowledge about an issue. You need to pay attention to changes in the world that might demand a re-think of your funding. And you need to be persistent when a new issue distracts attention from your cause. You'll face controversial choices, conflicts, and frustrations.

Advocacy allows you to play a vital role in the evolution of a just and equitable society. Your efforts and investments can help shape decisions that affect millions —and often those people are in communities that would otherwise have no voice. “It’s the whole idea of the people’s lobby,” says Linda. “It’s a lobby for opportunity.”

Making it Happen

What to Ask Yourself When Considering Advocacy Philanthropy:

- Are you prepared to fight for long-term change, even if in the short-term, the tangible results of your funding are hard to identify?
- Are you prepared to face the controversial publicity that may arise when you take a stand on your cause or issue?
- Are you prepared to accept personal enmity on the part of those who oppose your views?
- Do you have sufficient knowledge of an issue to engage directly in advocacy or should you fund organizations with an existing infrastructure and espouse policy change as their formal mission and existing infrastructure?
- Do you want to fund advocacy or give your time and energy by embarking on a community organizing effort?
- Do you need to set up a 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) to fulfill your advocacy goals?

What to Ask Advocacy Organizations You’d Like to Fund:

- What is the history of the organization?
- What policy gains or other significant accomplishments has it achieved in recent years?
- How, if at all, has the leadership of the organization changed over its lifetime?
- What is the organization’s social change agenda and what are the issues it aims to address?
- What strategies does the organization use (for example, voter engagement, coalition work, policy development and advocacy, public education, social media campaigns, or direct action)?
- Which communities does the organization consider to be its constituency and how does it engage them?
- What is the size of the organization’s constituency and does it plan to expand it?
- What infrastructure needs to be in place to achieve lasting policy change and how much of this infrastructure does the organization provide?
- What are the areas in which the organization needs most improvement, and how is it working to address those?
- What major programmatic goals does the organization hope to achieve over the next three years?
- What organizational capacities will it need to develop to achieve these goals (for example, a social networking site, a volunteer team, marketing strategy and materials, or media training)?
- How does the organization measure and report on its impact?

Innovation Lab—Ideas to Test:

- Ask a nonprofit you support which policy issues are likely to impact its mission (such as a potential change to tax deductions, a change in political leadership, or a ballot measure)? If the organization does not know, ask it to find out.
- Step up your engagement as a local citizen by working to raise awareness about a policy that may impact you and your community. Perhaps ask friends or colleagues to join you in that effort.
- Identify a group of people who need a stronger voice and find out how you could help give them that voice (by, for example, creating a dedicated social network focusing on the issues they face, helping them write letters to local officials or politicians, or organizing a meeting to bring them together with others who might be able to support them).
- Spend an hour on the website of a think tank researching social issues that interest you.
- Consider supporting a national organization so that you can play a role in bigger policy issues.
- Instead of funding your alma mater's annual fund, direct your support to the research of an individual professor.

Where to Go for Research:

Research organizations are known as being conservative, progressive, or non-partisan. Please visit giving20.org for selection of well-respected organizations.

Nuts and Bolts:

Channels to Influence and Actions to Take

Goal—Policy Change:

- Channels to influence include state and national think tanks, political groups, academic institutions, and the media.
- Actions to take include political lobbying in Washington D.C., helping to shape national media coverage, providing strategic market “packaging” of ideas in order to influence public opinion, and giving the media information and resources that will inform how they report on issues.

Goal—The Passing of a Ballot Initiative:

- Channels to influence include local and state think tanks, political groups, academic institutions, and the local media.
- Actions to take include political lobbying at state government level, funding research studies around the public and economic benefits of your initiative, helping to shape local media coverage, and providing humanizing elements to your agenda—such as finding the right “faces” and stories for the media to profile.

Goal—Increased Issue Awareness:

- Channels to influence include grassroots organizations and the local media.
- Actions to take include local activism, producing reports or white papers (through respected academics or research centers), starting a campaign on sites

such as Twitter, Facebook, Jumo, or Ning, and helping to shape local media coverage.

Goal—Increased Research:

- Channels to influence include scholars, graduate students, the media, and college newspapers.
- Actions to take include motivating leadership in scholarship, providing funding for academics to frame historical events or political agendas in new ways, present issues from new perspectives, complete research initiatives, train the next generation of thought leaders, and help to create momentum around policy issues by supporting academic publications. Any of these actions could eventually influence policymakers—especially if promoted through credible channels.

For the Family

- Bring your children to a town hall meeting or do a tour of the city or state capital.
- Explain the concept of lobbying and how a bill becomes a law, and how elected officials represent certain viewpoints.
- If your children attend public school, discuss with them how they think the school system can be improved and how to bring about these changes.
- Create a campaign on a social networking site for a cause that all the family cares about and spend a night a week updating the site, adding news items and connecting with new members.

And Remember

- Build a coalition of committed funders who will make multi-year, general operating grants to one or more organizations advocating for the social changes you seek—this is especially important when you want to help change government policy.
- Be sure the people and groups you fund are hiring excellent communicators so that they can get their message out as effectively as possible, whether through pamphlets, TV ads, social networking sites, or print media.
- Policy change is impossible to do alone, so encourage cooperation and fund a range of groups that can work in partnership to achieve public policy goals (this also provides an excellent opportunity to give your “network” to an issue).
- Fund groups using any of the four basic tactics to achieve change—leadership development, civic engagement, media/messaging, and idea generation.
- Engage national groups that have the expertise to help state efforts.
- Since tax law limits charitable 501(c)(3) organizations from doing certain kinds of advocacy, think comprehensively and partner with other kinds of legal entities, such as for-profits, 501(c)(4)s.
- Because the political landscape can change at any time, make any benchmarks you expect grantees to meet flexible and achievable.
- Recognize that the best non-profits doing advocacy are those that have agility built in to their structures so they can change strategies when needed. Make sure your own goals are flexible, as well.
- As an advocacy philanthropist, you may sacrifice some privacy and receive more media attention than other philanthropists—the stakes are higher when a voting

public is involved and when social good is based on a specific set of beliefs and values.

- Family and friends may disagree with what you're doing as well as with your beliefs and goals.
- Be ready for battle. You never know who will come out in opposition to what you're trying to accomplish and the lengths to which they will go to prevent you from meeting your goals.
- Be patient. Changing hearts and minds, along with public policy, does not happen quickly but, with time, commitment, and persistence, this kind of giving has the potential to make big and lasting changes to society.

For direct links to the above resources and downloadable worksheets on this section go to www.giving20.org.