

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION^{Review}

Editor's Note

Don't Forget the Public Sector

By Eric Nee

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Don't Forget the Public Sector

All too often, social innovation leaders have given up on creating positive social change through public sector institutions, and instead focus their efforts on creating nonprofit and for-profit organizations. That is a mistake. The public sector has many more resources and much more power than the nonprofit sector, and more of a mandate to address social problems than does business.

In this issue of *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, we have three articles that examine ways to engage the public sector to create positive social change. One of these is our cover story, "How Philanthropy Can Create Public Systems Change," that explores how a group of funders and nonprofits reshaped California's higher education and prison systems.

Five years ago, few incarcerated Californians could access higher education, and when they got out of prison, they had a dif-

ficult time in college and university. Today, almost 6,000 men and women in 34 of the state's 35 prisons are enrolled in classes taught by faculty from the state's community colleges. In addition, 30 of California's 115 community colleges, 9 of its 23 California State University campuses, and 6 of its 10 University of California campuses now offer support programs for formerly incarcerated students.

These dramatic improvements were the result of a strategy to change public institutions. "Thinking of existing government agencies as partners who present opportunity, rather than as entities for friction, may be foreign to some advocacy groups and foundation staff," the authors write. Government agencies often deserve criticism, but "they will still be here after advocacy organizations lose their champions and philanthropy moves on to different priorities."

Our Case Study, "A Community Foundation for the Nation," takes a different

look at the role of the public sector. In 1959, the French government created Fondation de France, a community foundation for the entire country that is partly governed by public sector employees and works closely with government institutions to launch and eventually take over new programs.

This model is different from most countries', where foundations by design function independent of government. Nevertheless, Fondation de France is an interesting example of how government and philanthropy can work closely to tackle social ills.

The third article is "Codesigning Better Futures with Citizens." Most citizens only have influence over public policy or government programs when they vote. It needn't be that way. In Singapore, New Zealand, and France, the national government engaged ordinary people in policymaking and program design. In New Zealand, 45,000 people participated in discussions to help the national government reform its educational system, leading to new approaches to early learning, reform of vocational education, and reviews of curricula.

"By opening space for public discussion where people can feel heard and respected, democratic societies can not only achieve better results, but also restore a level of trust in institutions and a sense of belonging to communities that are dangerously crumbling," writes the author. —ERIC NEE

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