

capacity for all

what we did

From 2007 to 2014, Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) invested heavily in building the capacity of its grantees — not just with a goal of enhancing the operations of individual organizations within the community health center and domestic violence fields but also with an eye toward enhancing capacity field-wide.

BSCF's approach was driven by its desire to achieve two long-term outcomes:

- Greater access to health and domestic violence services within the safety net
- Improved systems of care within both fields

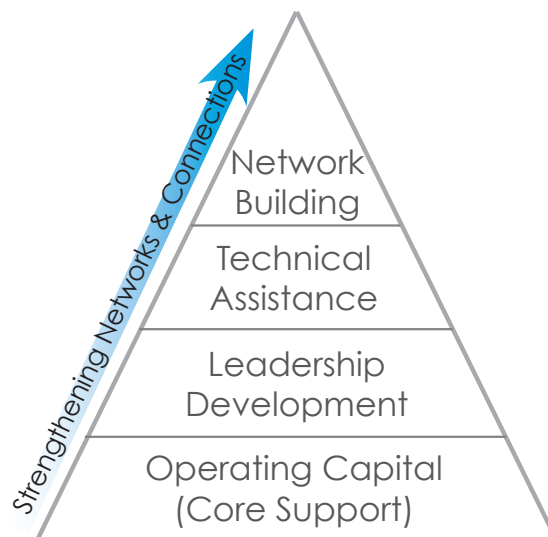
BSCF recognized that to realize these outcomes, organizations within both fields must have the capacity not only to improve their own operations but also to work with and learn from other organizations and think innovatively to elevate the capacity of the field as a whole.

how we did it

BSCF's approach to field-level capacity building included four elements: core support, leadership development, technical assistance and network support.

- Core support provided general operating funds to the widest range of grantees.
- Leadership development included programs in the Clinic Leadership Institute and the Strong Field Project.

- Technical assistance grants enhanced the technological, financial and business acumen of grantees and helped facilitate collaborations and restructuring.
- Network support connected grantees to other organizations and networks working on similar issues.



evidence of impact

Organizational Networks are Forming

The networking involved in field-level capacity building reinforces the connections created as grantees are brought together by the same funder, and under the same roof, to share their experiences around a common cause.

Leaders are Stepping Up

More leaders say they feel better prepared to assume both high-level roles within their organizations and field-level leadership roles at regional and statewide levels.

Operational Savvy is Growing

Conversations within both fields have shifted to reflect greater capacity and understanding in finance, management, data, technology and collaboration.

Field Leaders are More Connected

Leaders throughout the domestic violence field (and to some extent the community health center field as well) say that they feel more connected to their peers and have more opportunities to discuss ideas and work in collaboration.

Trust is Built

The Foundation's intentional research and information gathering, willingness to adapt and respond and focus on bringing grantee voices into the conversation every step of the way have created new levels of trust and transparency.

what we learned

- **A multitiered approach is key** — one that underscores baseline capacity improvements while providing more advanced opportunities for organizations that are ready.
- **Field-focused capacity building fosters collaboration.** It diminishes the sense of competition for funds, thereby opening the door to more innovation and resource sharing.
- **This is a long-term engagement.** However, stating a long-term commitment to grantees from the outset and reinforcing that commitment throughout demonstrates a funder's belief in the field's future and ability to improve.

capacity: one piece of the puzzle

While strengthening field capacity is critical, more is needed to create long-term change. The Foundation's logic model incorporates a wide range of strategies for adaptive leadership, capacity building, innovation and policy.

- **Field-level capacity building is broad by definition** and requires a comprehensive approach and willingness to accept new ideas and yet-to-be-defined rules.
- **Foundations are well suited to this work** and can influence broader shifts in conversation and thinking around capacity building.
- **Time demands on organizations are significant.** However, funders should be careful not to interpret waning engagement as a loss of interest.
- **Let the field inform the approach.** Flexibility and willingness to respond as the work progresses provide more added value than attempting to stick with a formal structure or predetermined plan.
- **Choose a defined field.** By narrowing its focus to just two fields, BSCF's capacity-building efforts have been deeper and more impactful.
- **Multiple connections may increase outcomes.** Several grantees that were engaged with more than one capacity-building resource reported a sense of improvement across multiple levels.
- **Leadership development is a crowd favorite** and is cited by grantees as one of the most valuable forms of assistance provided by BSCF.

Download the full *Capacity for All* case study at www.blueshieldcafoundation.org.