Ford Foundation

BUILDing Climate Community Report

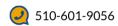August 2024

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Executive Summary

The BUILDing Climate Community was developed by La Piana Consulting in 2023 to respond to the self-identified needs of Ford Foundation grantees in the BUILD Natural Resources and Climate Change (NRCC) program. Prior to launch, NRCC grantees requested support with capacity building, ways to best manage multiple roles and responsibilities, and issue-area challenges including financial sustainability, leadership development, organizational growth, and organizational culture in global organizations.

In the foundational work of designing the BUILDing Climate Community, La Piana also conducted focus groups with leaders of the grantee organizations in order to establish trust, assess organizational needs and interests, and start to foster interpersonal connections within the cohort. Based on ongoing discussions with BUILD's NRCC team and leaders of the grantee organizations, as well as a review of background research, La Piana identified key challenges that became the focus of the BUILDing Climate Community.

BUILDing Climate Community Key Challenges

- Staff Burnout & Retention
- Equitable People & Culture Practices
- Real-Time Strategy for Financial Sustainability
- Transparency & Decision-Making
- Storytelling & Narrative Shifting
- Proactive Succession Planning

Accordingly, La Piana developed a program to provide peer support, topic-based learning, and individualized consultation that would help NRCC grantees address these challenges. The program was delivered to the 16 participating grantee organizations from October 2023 to June 2024.

Participating Organizations

NRCC – a program of the Ford Foundation's BUILD initiative – brings together grantee organizations around the world who work to ensure natural resource governance serves the public interest and reflects the aspirations of rural, low-income, and indigenous communities who claim customary rights to their land or have secured land rights. The following NRCC grantees participated in the BUILDing Climate Community:

- Business & Human Rights Resource Centre
- Earthsight
- Fern
- Forest Peoples Programme
- Friends of Lake Turkana
- Global Energy Monitor
- Global Greengrants Fund
- If Not Us Then Who?

- MiningWatch Canada
- Mongabay
- Natural Resource Governance Institute
- Publish What You Pay
- Rights and Resources
- SOMO
- The Tenure Facility
- TINTA - The Invisible Thread

Program Design

La Piana developed a three-tiered program consisting of: 1) **Communities of Practice**, 2) **Workshops**, and 3) **One-on-One Consulting**. These components were integrated to offer diverse forms of support that would be manageable for participating organizations to fit into their schedules.

La Piana undertook various actions to tailor the program content including consulting with BUILD's NRCC team for insights on cohort challenges, engaging in small focus group conversations with participants before the program launch to confirm their needs, and analyzing participant feedback from program activities as the BUILDing Climate Community was ongoing. Based on this information gathering, La Piana selected monthly themes to guide program delivery from January to June. These monthly themes informed content across all three programs tiers.

Peer support was also central to the program, as organizational leaders expressed a desire to connect with one another as a way to learn and grow. With this in mind, La Piana was purposeful in creating opportunities for different people across each organization to participate in the program.

Monthly Themes

- January: Staff Burnout & Retention
- February: Equitable People & Culture Practices
- March: Real-Time Strategy for Financial Sustainability
- April: Transparency & Decision-making
- May: Storytelling & Narrative Shifting
- June: Proactive Succession Planning

Communities of Practice

La Piana facilitated three concurrent Communities of Practice, each comprising diverse organizations meeting monthly for 6 months. Each organization had a team of 2-3 staff join the Community of Practice sessions, and each organization set an "organizational strengthening goal" for the program, providing a focal point for group discussion and a way to track growth over the course of the program. Part of each Community of Practice session was also dedicated to discussing the monthly theme.

Workshops

La Piana also gave three virtual workshops throughout the program – delivering tangible knowledge and resources on topics connected to the monthly themes. All workshops were recorded and made available on YouTube, so anyone from the participating organizations would be able to access the content.

- Workshop 1: Tools & Methodologies to Assess Organizational Culture & Take Action
- Workshop 2: Creating Equitable People & Culture Operations as a Global Organization
- Workshop 3: Strategies for Organizational Sustainability and Resilience

One-on-One Consulting

In order to provide guidance that was responsive to each organization's unique needs, La Piana also provided one-on-one consulting. Each participating organization had 10 consulting hours available to use at its discretion, giving the opportunity to receive support related to workshop topics, conversations from the Community of Practice, the organizational strengthening goals, or any other issue of interest.

Monthly Program Updates

To keep participants informed about ongoing program offerings, La Piana distributed a monthly program update email sharing the monthly theme, curated resources connected to the theme, upcoming and/or previously recorded workshops, and reminders about the Community of Practice meeting times.

Communities of Practice

La Piana facilitated three peer learning groups, called Communities of Practice, that convened on a monthly basis as a way of providing opportunities to exchange knowledge and offer support across different organizations. Every Community of Practice included people from 3-5 different participating organizations, with teams of 2-3 individuals per organization joining the sessions.

75% of BUILDing Climate Community orgs participated in a Community of Practice

Each Community of Practice session consisted of two parts – the first half was an open discussion centered on the monthly theme, and the second half was an opportunity for one organization to share their organizational strengthening goal or a challenge their organization was facing in order to receive focused advice and feedback from their peers. Below are examples of strengthening goals chosen by organizations that participated in the Communities of Practice.

Examples of Organizational Strengthening Goals

- Creating effective performance management, evaluation, and mentoring in a flat organization
- Developing new international HR policies spanning different legal requirements and cultures
- Improving financial resilience and fundraising, including impact reporting and related communication
- Leading effective teams during leadership and strategic change
- Transforming organizational structures to keep up with a growth in demand for services

Exit Survey Findings

In an exit survey for Community of Practice participants, respondents shared that the top three things they appreciated most about the sessions were: 1) receiving insight from peers; 2) knowing they are not alone in their challenges; and 3) receiving insights and suggestions from their Community of Practice facilitator. Below are additional findings from the Community of Practice survey (based on 9 respondents):

- **89%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their **team was able to make progress on their organizational strengthening goal** throughout the Community of Practice sessions.
- **100%** of respondents reported that the **monthly themes they discussed and received resources for were relevant** to their organizations.

Workshops

La Piana offered three workshops – open to all staff from participating organizations – that covered topics in-depth building on the monthly themes. The March and May workshops included optional 30-minute Q&As following the main session where participants could stay on to ask organization-specific questions. These Q&As were well-received by participants, gave La Piana further insight into specific challenges that each organization faced, and, in some cases, provided a segue into One-on-One Consulting projects.

75% of BUILDing Climate Community orgs participated in at least 1 workshop

Workshop Topic/Link	Key Areas of Focus	Attendance
December 2023: *Tools & Methodologies to Assess Organizational Culture & Take Action* ▪ Presented by Ali Carella	▪ Techniques to assess organizational culture ▪ Key questions to ask related to equity in global nonprofits ▪ Actions to take to advance a constructive culture	▪ 16 attendees from 8 organizations ▪ 49 online views
March 2024: *Creating Equitable People & Culture Operations as a Global Organization* ▪ Presented by Humberto Camarena and special guest Philippe Berhault	▪ HR practices to accommodate cultural differences, including communication styles, work hours and training & development ▪ Actions to ensure HR policies comply with local and international employment laws and standards ▪ Key considerations for developing a robust HR strategy ▪ Resources for effectively collaborating with a team dispersed across geographies and cultures	▪ 17 attendees from 8 organizations ▪ 21 online views
May 2024: *Life after BUILD: Strategies for Bolstering Organizational Sustainability and Resilience* ▪ Presented by Christine Chen	▪ Frameworks for strategy development and how to foster strategic thinking throughout the organization ▪ Steps to take to develop and use a narrative to diversify revenue streams from a position of strength ▪ Key actions to bolster financial resiliency through multi-year & scenario planning	▪ 11 attendees from 6 organizations ▪ 13 online views

Note: Workshop recordings and slides were distributed to all BUILDing Climate Community participants after each workshop in order to make them more accessible.

One-on-One Consulting

All participating organizations were offered up to ten consulting hours, which they could use to continue working on an organizational strengthening goal, receive executive coaching, or request support on a topic of their choice. Below are examples of projects that La Piana did with participating organizations through One-on-One Consulting.

50% of BUILDing Climate Community orgs used One-on-One Consulting hours

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Examples of One-on-One Consulting Projects

Fundraising Plan Development

La Piana supported the co-creation of an organization's fundraising plan to grow its capacity for institutional and individual giving. La Piana provided support including:

- Developing a special anniversary campaign case for support, donor ask letter, and detailed budgeting goals

- Recommended next steps to build the organization's individual giving capacity, including tactics for increasing acquisition and retention, growth plans, and the creation of a planned giving program

- Recommended frameworks to build the organization's institutional giving capacity by helping the organization to organize, track, manage, and delegate roles for its grants life cycle.

International HR Policy

Through a series of meetings combined with feedback on iterative documents, La Piana provided an organization's HR team with input on their developing international HR policy. The aims of this work were focused on:

- Understanding and ensuring compliance

- Uplifting equity across regions

- Providing clarity and transparency across roles to allow for more effective management.

Measurement, Evaluation, and Learning

La Piana facilitated sessions with a cross-functional strategy team of an organization who recently approved a new strategy and theory of change. The organization sought to better understand how to develop impact metrics, as well as ambitious yet realistic targets for implementation. Through the sessions, the team:

- Thought through its learning agenda

- Co-created and prioritized a set of key programmatic and institutional indicators of success to measure, which would connect its activities to the strategy it is advancing.

Mentorship and Feedback

La Piana assisted an organization with a non-hierarchical structure to improve their peer feedback and mentorship processes. The focus was on handling issues that are not severe enough for termination but are still worrisome. During the project, La Piana evaluated:

- Common problems that arose and their effects on the organization

- How to make feedback more practical

- Strategies to keep positive communication systems that encourage development

- Critical protective policies for severe cases and beneficial frameworks, such as restorative justice and conflict resolution.

Staff Evaluations & Peer Reviews

La Piana worked closely with an organization to assess and refine its existing annual self-review and peer-review processes in order to make better use of its annual self-review process and align with organizational strategy, goal-setting, and skills development. Through a document review and series of meetings, the organization refined the tools and created a new process and training to support both managers and staff with the process, reducing the abundance of tasks that the Executive Director was carrying independently.

Storytelling

La Piana designed and led multiple leadership team sessions to help an organization create, refine, and rehearse pitch presentations for funders, partners, and potential users of a new program. Through this project, the team was able to:

- Think through audiences, team roles, and desired outcomes for different kinds of presentations
- Align on key content messages, images, videos, metrics, and outcomes
- Get feedback on how to share their story more effectively
- Finalize a deck and script variations for future use by the whole team.

Strategy Support

La Piana supported an organization through its ongoing strategy development process by providing thought partnership during coaching sessions with its leaders and a facilitated leadership team meeting, providing feedback on developing documents, and helping the leaders design a staff retreat.

Systems

La Piana was able to start work with an organization on brainstorming systems and processes that would support more collective decision-making across a global organization. This work is still ongoing, but will be completed in the coming months.

Program Takeaways

Finding 1: Leaders are looking for opportunities to collaborate with peers and foster internal connections within their global teams.

Participants valued having the opportunity to share and discuss challenges and solutions with their professional peers. Many participants shared resources and ideas to support one another throughout this program. When leaders shared challenges in Communities of Practice, it was not uncommon for others to join in and echo similar challenges. The feeling of not being in this alone resonated with participants, and peer learning is a tool that can continue to support nonprofit leaders.

Program participants also expressed a strong desire to foster connections within their own teams. Due to organizations being spread across multiple locations, often with varied time zones, many challenges were intensified by the difficulty of having teams that were far apart. This issue came up in conversations around communication, culture, role clarification, project management, fundraising, and more.

Communities of Practice remain an invaluable peer sharing space, but it is important that these spaces are designed around some key shared challenges and scheduled to provide consistent, in-depth interaction over a minimum of 6-9 months. Trust and sharing can be accelerated when members of the group share at least a few key characteristics (e.g., field of work, values, organization size, approach, geographic region served). At the same time, the presence of *some* differences among these organizations provides helpful fodder for engaging discussion and ensures a noncompetitive environment.

When situated within a larger program, establishing connections to other types of programming (e.g., relevant workshops, 1-on-1 support) can help frame additional shared lessons and encourage more points of discussion with the Community of Practice space.

Finding 2: Leaders continue to prioritize the need to increase financial sustainability and strengthen funder engagement.

Financial sustainability was a topic being covered in other Ford grantee offerings and was also addressed in this program in response to need. Simply put, organizational leaders are still challenged by the nature of the funding system. Often, leaders feel like they are "doing everything right" and yet financial sustainability is still a significant challenge. Some program participants felt challenged by the need to "outcome harvest" to fit donor agendas. This approach may be considered inauthentic among Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), as it centers their organization in grant reporting rather than the broader ecosystem that contributes to impact. Leaders are also challenged with balancing strength versus need and trying to move away from a place of scrappiness to placing value on the work the community is taking upon itself to do (even if the community would do that work without compensation). Framing impact and success in any way other than growth is challenging for many organizations, because it is the pathway they see towards more funding. Many also struggle to balance fund development needs with their programming and operations. Supporting organizations with articulating impact that resonates with more funders and increased support for fund development capacity feels vital for many BUILDing Climate Community organizations.

Importantly, participating organizations that were generally not as worried about financial sustainability after BUILD were those that were able to leverage funding to build internal capacity for fundraising and alignment around narrative. Participants had a desire to foster a culture of philanthropy within their organizations, as many Executive Directors are currently taking on the sole responsibility of fundraising. **Program participants want funders to know that organizational change and strengthening infrastructure takes time.** They also expressed wanting funders to understand the added challenges for rural organizations and uplift the important role of fostering trust in multi-year support.

Finding 3: The needs of global organizations differ from US-based organizations, particularly in areas related to people and culture.

The experience of global nonprofits differs in specific, significant ways that merit their own focus when providing support (i.e., providing support from a non-US lens). This issue surfaced in the context of global HR needs, cross-cultural and multilingual settings, nonprofit governance, and internal cross-national policy making. Discussions on equitable people and culture practices highlighted increasing burdens felt by management. Additionally, developing and implementing equitable HR practices were common challenges that were frequently discussed. Interestingly, staff retention and succession planning tended to be less

urgent issues of concern for participants (although it did come up for mid-level management roles), but professional development and the ability to develop realistic career pathways emerged as important needs. **Further work can be done to create a pool of globally relevant resources, particularly around HR and governance.**

Finding 4: Leaders expressed a desire to strengthen communications, transparency, role clarity, and decision-making.

Smaller, flat organizations have found innovative ways to make transparency and consensus work by thinking about subsidization (giving away of power) vs. delegation (distributing tasks while still overseeing and retaining power). Many leaders, in fact, had some innovative and progressive solutions to how to foster strong communication and transparent decision making. At the same time, many participating organizations shared challenges and frustrations related to upholding accountability and clarifying roles for projects, departments, and organizational tasks, for example:

- Setting deadlines, sharing ownership, and creating change management plans to ensure that actions align with organizational goals
- Determining a flexible approach to decision-making that could be implemented across sites
- Developing formal processes for peer reviews, goal setting, and project management

Although the BUILDing Climate Community was focused more on strategy, structure, and culture, it is evident that many leaders are interested in tangible skill building or discrete help with specific projects in which they may have a skill gap. **While peer learning is important, the benefit of flexible, one-on-one ongoing support should not be overlooked.**

The Building Climate Community participants are enthusiastic leaders who truly valued and supported one another throughout this process. Because the participating organizations worked in similar issue areas and had international structures, they were able to understand the challenges each organization was facing with nuance and offer valuable insight and solutions. Overall, there is evidence that structured peer learning and one-on-one support can be invaluable tools for changing organizations – yet the need for time and focused infrastructure supports must also be addressed to further support organizations seeking sustainability.

Appendix: Curated Resources from Monthly Program Updates

January Resources on Staff Burnout & Retention

- The Bridgespan Group – Compensation, Wellness, Culture: Three Ways Nonprofit Leaders Are Tackling Employee Turnover
- Gallup – How to Prevent Employee Burnout
- Harvard Business Review – When Your Employee Tells You They're Burned Out
- La Piana Consulting – Infographic: 7 Tips to Address Staff Burnout & Retention
- Mayo Clinic – Job burnout: How to spot it and take action
- Nonprofit Quarterly – Avoiding Burnout and Preserving Movement Leadership

February Resources on Equitable People & Culture Practices

- The Bridgespan Group – Nonprofit Hiring Toolkit
- Harvard Business Review – What Does Your Company Really Stand For?
- Humentum – Who Represents Whom? A Conversation on Decolonizing Humanitarian Governance
- La Piana Consulting – Culture Change in Three (Not-So-Simple) Steps
- La Piana Consulting – Staying Connected: How to Build Strong Nonprofit Culture in a Hybrid Workplace
- The New York Times – The Hybrid Worker Malaise

March Resources on Real-Time Strategy for Financial Sustainability

- Center for Effective Philanthropy – EMERGING IMPACTS: The Effects of MacKenzie Scott's Large, Unrestricted Gifts
- La Piana Consulting – Principles for Strategy Development
- La Piana Consulting – Strategy Screen
- La Piana Consulting – Three Takeaways for Strategic Planning while in Financial Crisis

April Resources on Transparency & Decision-Making

Transparency

- Donorbox Blog – 8 Steps to Take for Complete Nonprofit Transparency
- Dot Org Solutions – Six Ways to Become a Transparent Nonprofit Leader
- Keela – A Comprehensive Guide to Nonprofit Transparency
- Urban Institute – Centering Transparency, Accountability, and Community

Decision-Making

- The Hum – 4 Decision-Making Methods for Decentralised Teams
- La Piana Consulting – Decision-Making Basics for These Times

- The Management Center – [MOCHA Explanation Videos from The Management Center](#)

- McKinsey & Co. – [Three Keys to Faster Better Decisions](#)

- Medium – [How to Use DARCI framework in project management](#)

May Resources on Storytelling & Narrative Shifting

- The Berkeley Group – [Ethical Storytelling for Nonprofits: Why and How?](#)

- Narrative Initiative – [A resource library for narrative change](#)

- The Opportunity Agenda – [Amplify Your Voice Tools](#)

- Race Forward – [Butterfly Lab Narrative Design Toolkit](#)

June Resources on Proactive Succession Planning

- BoardSource – [Executive Transition and Succession Planning Guide](#)

- La Piana Consulting – [Navigating Founder Transitions](#)

- La Piana Consulting – [Navigating Succession Planning](#)

- La Piana Consulting – [Succession Planning Toolkit](#)

- Stanford Social Innovation Review – [How to Build Nonprofit Talent Systems During Times of Rapid Growth](#)