✹ILLUMINATE

Funder Node Research

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www.systemsanctuary.com

Systems Practice, Peer-learning & ecosystem building

- We both have significant experience building our own networks and ecosystems for positive change in different contexts.
- We have been delivering peer-learning Cohorts for the last four years.

OUR WORK

THE SYSTEMS SANCTUARY

Masterclass in Systems

Practice

THE SYSTEMS SANCTUARY

Partner to create a

Peer- Learning Program
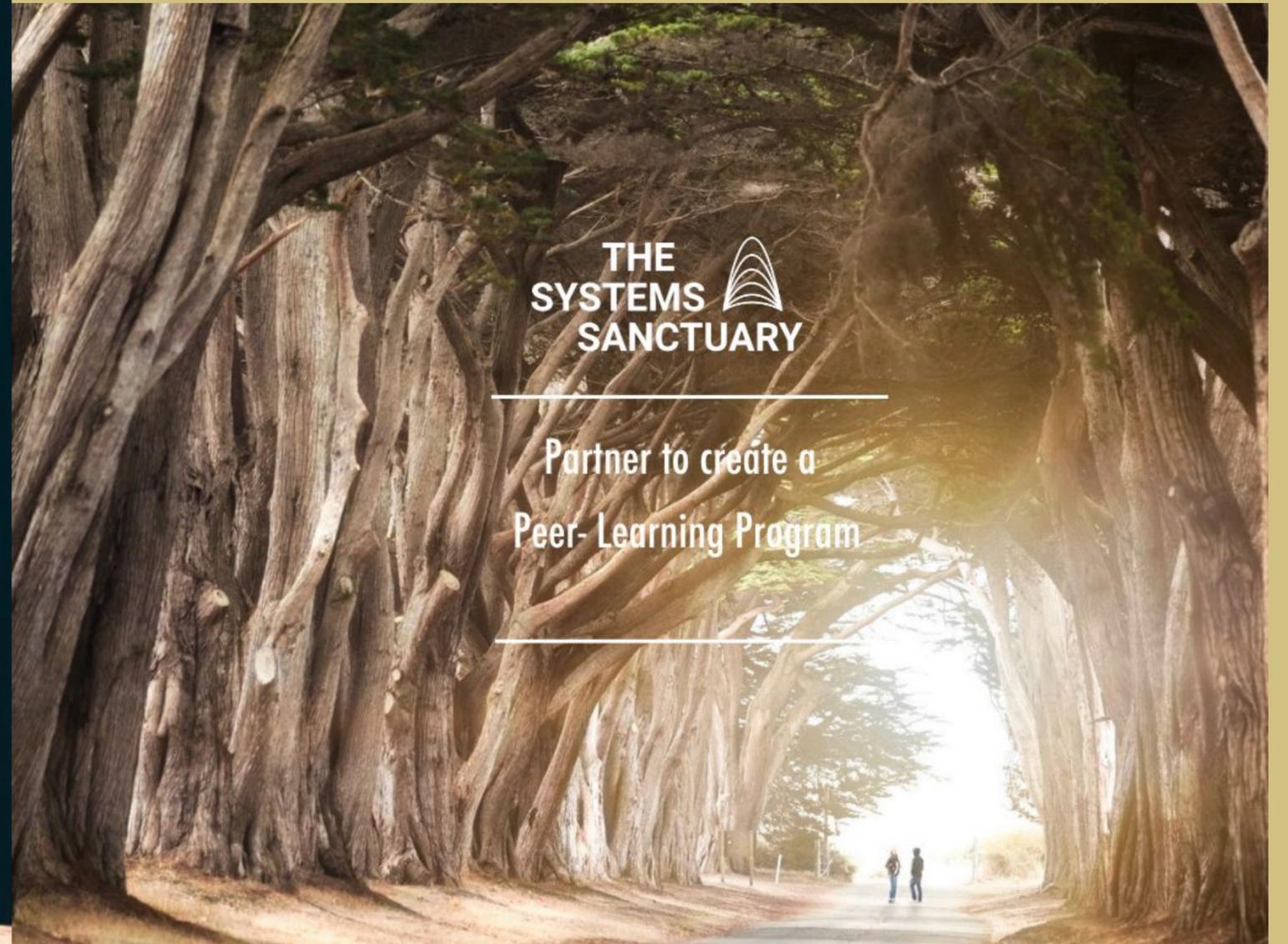
ILLUMINATE

A collaborative network designed to connect people and organizations committed to cultivating the field and practice of systems change towards a just, equitable and regenerative future for all.

Background

- Funders around the world are slowly becoming more interested in or committed to creating systems change.

- Cluster of pioneers who have been working towards this goal, the practice is nascent, not well understood and there are many questions around how this can be done within the current bounds of philanthropy.

- There is a continuum of people who fund social and environmental change, who have begun to see the value in a systemic approach.

Background

- Philanthropists see the possibilities of connecting with other funders (SUSI & Catalyst 2030)

- There's an opportunity to bring together this disparate group of people internationally, to catalyse an exploration into how to better fund positive systems change.

- This research will help understand a breadth of needs of funders around systems change, to develop a funders node for Illuminate that genuinely adds value.

- We interviewed 18 funders in the UK, US, Canada, NZ, Germany

Overall

We found three groups of funders.

- **Beginners** - What is systems change? How do I apply it to my grantees? Who else is doing this? How does it work in practice? What strategies do they use? Who should I hire to help me?
- **Doers** - at least two years in to leading a systems change initiative. Always interested in new methodology, but don't patronise me. Have the war wounds from influencing internally. Want to meet others like me.
- **Questioners** - should philanthropy exist? Are we making any real difference here? I'm sick of the cognitive dissonance. How can we transform the system of philanthropy itself?

Field-level Challenges

- Money & Power

- Historical roots of charity

- Lack of diversity in the field

Field-level Challenges:

"Colonial - there's roots of patronizing charity mindset- we know what's best because we have all the money and can hire experts with fancy resumes - tell people what they should be doing."

"How to incorporate racial equity into systems approaches? You have to start with the question of power. Racial injustice happens because of power dynamics and imbalances."

"We are all operating in systems in the foundation we think have unhealthy power dynamics. They don't model the change we're trying to create. They are extractive. We are not separate from the systems are trying to change."

Leadership Challenges
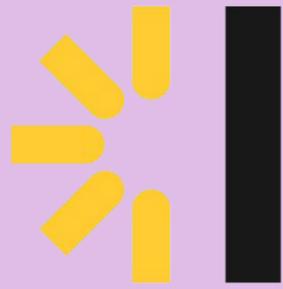
Leadership Challenges: Culture that's risk averse

"I'm moving intuitively in an organization that doesn't intuit much and doesn't trust intuition. It's a lot of work. I have to convince and persuade people to make sizable investments. This is the challenge we have. We have to get buy-in our organization, to do the work we want to do."

"People are afraid. It's a very risk averse group of people. Not in how they earn their money, but they worry about their reputation in philanthropy."
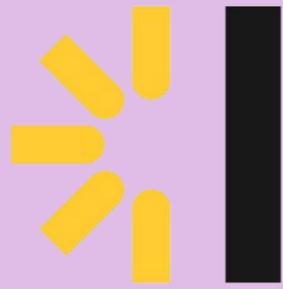
Leadership Challenges: Structures that are outdated

"The ways funders are is not nimble, not open-ended enough. They have a logic model way social change happens. They want to predict outcomes and certain deliverables, we're challenging that internally."

"We do collaborate with other partners, but they tend to be very cautious and careful in joining a larger funder table. If this was a formal funder collaboration that could be a higher bar."
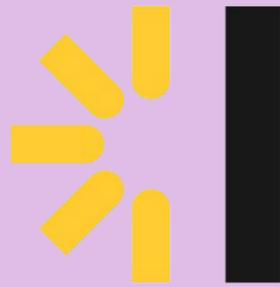
Leadership Challenges: Trustees

"The real challenge in how to bring how to bring trustees along on the journey. They tend to be very busy people with big jobs. Dipping in occasionally - don't really have deep involvement most of the time. "

"In many of these foundations, the criteria is still - does it make the Trustees feel good? Can they tell a quick story about the impact and the beneficiaries? Measurement, quantified data is proof that the money they put in has had a big impact. It's very much a business mentality even though consciousnessly foundation isnt a business."
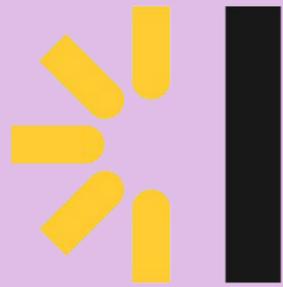
Leadership Challenges: Trustees

"Program officers are competing with each other to wow trustees. When a new program officer or Executive Director is hired, they want to have their whole new program."

"If I put the word systems change into a grant proposal – UK trustees gets anxious. The Board doesn't like the idea of systems change. We actually very conservative board."
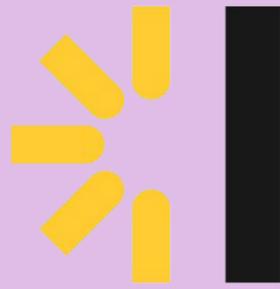
Leadership Challenges: Burn-out

"When you change your institution and make it agile and iterative with a systems change approach, your ability to work with other people is impacted. Everyone's talking about it. It burns your team out. They can't carry the weight."

"Mental health and the capacity of people humans doing this work. The levels of exhaustion and not being able to rejuvenate. I wonder around the fragility of the system."
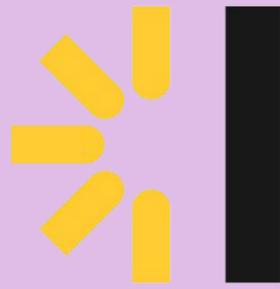
Leadership Challenges: Measuring Impact

"Monitoring is a live one. It was picked up in our audit. We're not doing monitoring should be doing. But asking to send us an annual report, created extra work for our grantees."

"There's a tension between demonstrating impact and the fact that systems change is very hard to show over a short period of time. There's the contribution, attribution question. We have to have the the tools to evidence. To show there's been progress towards something and has value in impact language."

Needs

Needs and opportunities

The roles funders can play in the field of systems change are crucial to its evolution.

- The application of transformative systems change concepts is nascent among all but a few innovators globally.

- The needs, and the number of inquiries from funders are growing with their recognition that multiple complex challenges they are working on continue to move in the wrong direction, despite their best efforts.

- There are still very few opportunities available to funders who are on this learning journey to be in a Community of Practice with peers to learn with and from.

Needs

Some of the needs we identified amongst funders who want to gather were as follows:

- We're busy - this must meet my specific needs
- Peer learning opportunities
- Culture: warm, honest, depth, support
- Ideal participants: doers, not usual suspects
- Build capacity to work systemically
- Shifting philanthropy

Needs

Some quotes from the funders we interviewed:

"I'd need a clear understanding of what's required to contribute and benefit and how consistent that needs to be over time."

"I want to be with people who really believe and wade through their cynicism and positional power and be excited as humans right now in this time, together we can really move things forward for everyone."

"It would be interesting to be in a conversation with other funders at a deep level. Crossing with personal and work related. To build a sense of community and trust and deepening together."
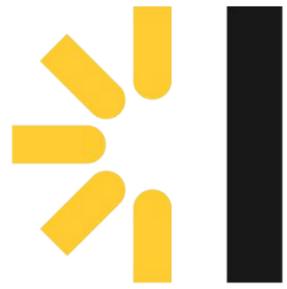
Needs:

"(I'd love it if) You don't have to show up with your 'know it all' persona. There is a culture of trust and support. No dumb questions."

"Have porous edges- bring people in who are outside that system to illuminate, learn, provoke, spark something. That is enlivening and enriching."

"It's hard to know without a formalized education, to understand the landscape of what I need to know."

"I have a strong belief that philanthropy needs to work differently."

Some of their Questions

What Does Funding Systems Change Look Like?

- "What does this look like in practice? Really interested to see what everyone else is doing."

Strategy

- "What other things could we be focusing on to help them increase their impact?"
- "How does a funder participate as a partner in this work?"

People Challenges

- "How do you influence for systems change?"
- "Internal dynamics about making the case. I'd like to hear from people involved who are on that journey."

Monitoring & Evaluation

- "Monitoring evaluation. How to deal? We need techniques, approaches. Accept that we can't measure the impact on a society level or system.

Equity, Power & Justice

- "Equity, intersectionality, justice and systems change. How to incorporate racial equity into systems approaches. Who's doing work around systems change and justice?"
- "Power. How systems change connects to grassroots leadership. Power for domination but power for change. Where those conversations are happening?"