The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation envisions a California that manages, stewards, and conserves its water and land to support a resilient environment and healthy communities. This snapshot, prepared as the Foundation nears conclusion in 2020, documents a core strategy within its Environment Program.

Capacity building

S. D. BECHTEL, JR. FOUNDATION
STEPHEN BECHTEL FUND

The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation invests in capacity building to enhance the effectiveness of our water and land grantees and enhance the systems and structures surrounding their work.

Goal

Strong and resilient leaders, organizations, and fields guide California's efforts to manage its water and land.

Approach

▶ Weave support for building capacity and resiliency into program grantmaking.

▶ Invest in individual leaders, with an emphasis on relationship-building to promote cross-sector collaboration.

▶ Support organizations as they identify and build capabilities, knowledge, and resources for their work to be more effective and durable.

▶ Strengthen the water and land fields with support for networks, collective infrastructure, and shared knowledge.

▶ Assist efforts to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within grantee organizations and the land and water fields.

Progress

✓ **Since 2011, the Water Foundation**, a Foundation grantee, has delivered $40+ million in field funding, convened hundreds of diverse entities and groups, and helped secure crucial policies.

✓ **Since 2014, the Foundation seeded four cross-jurisdictional partnerships** to advance large-landscape stewardship; momentum led to the California Landscape Stewardship Network and support for the national Network for Landscape Conservation.

✓ **Launched in 2015, the PPIC Water Policy Center** activates a dynamic research network that approaches California water challenges from a range of disciplines.

✓ **Between 2015 and 2020, a network of California community foundations** supported frontline organizations to advance sustainable water management while connecting regional work to statewide policy goals.

✓ **In 2015, the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts** launched a Foundation-funded program to improve district performance, coordinate strategies, and boost visibility.

✓ **Launched in 2018, the Water Solutions Network** supports 100+ leaders from across sectors who collaborate for California's water future.

✓ **In 2018, the Foundation invested in the Water Hub and the Water Desk** to build public awareness of water as an economic, health, and social justice issue as well as an environmental one.

✓ **In 2019, board and staff leaders from several Foundation grantees engaged with the Center for Diversity and the Environment;** their organizations then began implementing long-term equity action plans.

Lessons Learned

▶ **Building nonprofit resilience requires long-term investment, holistic understanding of organizational health and culture, and significant grantee staff time.** One-off investments in organizational capacity building may overlook important underlying needs. For example, support for fundraising may meet limited success if an organization's communications capacity is constrained or if its strategic vision needs refinement. The Foundation partnered with grantees to build a shared understanding of internal and external operational context and made multi-year grants to support the full cost of building needed capacities. Flexible support ensured that grantees could adjust plans as they gained insight or when capacity-building work proved more time- and resource-intensive than expected, as was frequently the case.

▶ **Philanthropy has a critical, unique role to play in supporting collaboration and networks.** Successful collaboration takes significant time and dedicated infrastructure; it also requires making relationship building a priority. Foundation support for collaboration and networks allowed for flexibility in objectives and deliverables, remained responsive to emerging needs and interests of participants, and treated development of trust as a key outcome. It was important that the Foundation invested in making space for collaboration and enabling network participants to define their shared purpose and direction. It was also important for collaborations and networks to have professional coordination and facilitation.

▶ **California's dominant environmental movement must evolve to reflect and represent all Californians.** This evolution will require a shift in culture and operational norms, and organizations that want to make this shift must first support deep, personal reflection from their respective staff groups – ideally with the help of a skilled facilitator. These organizations must also identify and support internal champions and secure the commitment from board and staff leadership to make the space for conversations and prioritize change. Organizations should expect the work to be ongoing and iterative, as it will require a regular and honest evaluation of context and assumptions.

Opportunities

California can manage its water and land to benefit people and nature; to do so, individuals and organizations must work across differences and transcend real or perceived boundaries.
This work can take many forms, but it fundamentally requires trust and relationships. Philanthropy has an opportunity to support building trust as part of any program strategy.

A desegregated environmental movement that better reflects and represents all Californians will summon greater resources and bring forward innovative ideas and approaches that make its work more effective.
Philanthropy plays a key role in the evolution of the environmental movement and can take a range of steps to ensure it is centering strategies that are led by the communities who are most impacted by environmental challenges and who historically have been marginalized in the movement.

Resources

- Resiliency research and tools for nonprofits and funders, S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

- Community Foundation Water Initiative overview, S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

- *I/We/It: A Leadership Framework for Social Change*, informed design of Water Solutions Network

- "How a California Water Funder Turned to Community Foundations to Get Local," *Inside Philanthropy* (paywall)

- "Cutting Through Complexity: A Roadmap for Effective Collaboration," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

- *Generating, Scaling Up, and Sustaining Partnership Impact: One Tam's First Four Years*, research study

- "Navigating Purpose and Collaboration in Social Impact Networks," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*

- Resources for organizational work on racial equity from Equity in the Center

- "Reaching Conclusion: 2018 to 2020," Chapter 3 in the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation spend-down journey; includes content on the Foundation's capacity-building approaches (available October 2020)

The S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation invests in a productive, vibrant, and sustainable California through two program areas – Education and Environment. Learn more and access the series of program snapshots and reflections: sdbjrfoundation.org.