

Powering deeper change - funding advocacy

While facing economic, ecological, epistemic, and spiritual crises, we see a call to action and new possibilities, not a collapse into fatalism¹.

Many funders view advocacy as a vital lever for change and want to sharpen their understanding and practice in supporting effective advocacy. Three practical ways to do this were identified this year by five funders² in discussion with the Centre for Social Impact (CSI) and Philanthropy New Zealand:

1. Raise visibility of what's happening in Aotearoa around funding advocacy.
2. Gather funders to discuss their experiences and learning about supporting advocacy.
3. Identify advocacy spaces that funders can support collectively, alongside community partners.

Raise visibility

Mā mua ka kite a muri, mā muri ka ora a mua
Those in front give sight to those behind; those behind
give life to those ahead

JR McKenzie Trust showed leadership in 2019 by commissioning CSI to develop [this exploration](#) of the power of advocacy to support impact as a funder (see [here](#) for a summary). CSI has evolved this into [these resources](#) for funders interested in more consciously supporting advocacy, including several case studies:

- Clare Foundation's [experience and learning supporting advocacy](#) as a private ten year spend-down fund that launched in 2020. Clare Foundation views advocacy as
- Foundation North's [Gulf Innovation Fund Together \(GIFT\)](#), ran from 2016 to 2022 and aimed to restore the mauri (life force) of Tīkapa Moana/Te Moananui-ā-Toi (Hauraki Gulf). GIFT cultivated a community of changemakers focused on 'turning the tide' of environmental degradation in Tīkapa Moana.
- The experience of Te Taumata Toi a Iwi, Auckland's regional arts trust, in [mobilising the arts sector](#) to influence Auckland Council's arts policy and investment in a context of cost cutting.

a key lever for systems change, challenging the status quo by amplifying community voices, growing public awareness, changing narratives and minds, building alliances and influencing political will.

¹Cassie Robinson and Sophia Parker, *These Times ask More of Us*, 2025, *Practices for Transitions in a Time Between Worlds*, Stanford Social Innovation Review and Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society.

²Trust Waikato, Community Trust South, Foundation North, JR McKenzie Trust, Te Taumata Toi a Iwi.

Creating spaces for funders and community partners to share and learn

*He waka eke noa
We are all in the same canoe*

In 2026 the [Philanthropy New Zealand Conference in March](#) and the [Combined Community Trusts Conference in November](#) offer two significant opportunities to share and learn together.

Key insights about what is helpful in supporting advocacy include:

- Relationships and trust are the glue. Funders need to be willing to invest in and commit to forging deep relationships.
- Equity is a critical lens, in terms of who is most impacted by an issue and ensuring their voices, interests and aspirations are elevated.
- Timing is everything, including the ability to seize the day as energy, momentum and windows of opportunity open. This requires funders to have the flexibility to fund fast.
- If decision maker or political will is lacking, advocacy efforts can still organise for when influence is more favourable. This requires long term funder commitment to hold fast to a cause that may take years to bear fruit.
- Holding ground, which can be just as important as creating progressive change, especially when long held rights and social progress are being reversed or threatened. This might include increasing funding in times of adversity, known as [funding counter cyclically](#).
- Being flexible about what success looks like, acknowledging that supporting advocacy has wider benefits – including building capacity, strengthening networks and learning.

Philanthropy supports field building - intentionally bringing together organisations and individuals to address a common issue, creating a coordinated "field" that can achieve greater impact than anyone on their own.

In his article [An Opportunity to Build, In the Crisis](#) (2025), David Beckman notes a mismatch between common funder practices (funding programmes or projects, funding single organisations, low funding of collaboration and coordination or of leadership and capacity building) and what transformational change requires.

He suggests that philanthropy supports field building - intentionally bringing together organisations and individuals to address a common issue, creating a coordinated "field" that can achieve greater impact than anyone on their own. For Beckman:

- Funders should think more about strengthening formations or alliances of people and organisations and less about picking winners amongst them. The generation and coordination of collective impact approaches needs more funding support. Coordination also requires funding for shared infrastructure – online platforms, data, communications, training and mechanisms for connection.
- Field building and movements require support for diverse engagement, and especially for marginalised and lesser heard voices.
- Funders sharing power and working in relational and trust-based ways is needed to support the dynamic development of social movements. Participatory grantmaking, where those who know the field best are trusted to make funding decisions, supports field building.

Collective advocacy – conversations worth having

Whiria te tāngata Weave the people together

Just as communities work to build collective movements and action for greater impact, so can funders collaborate powerfully on issues of shared interest. Opportunities to collectivise and co-fund advocacy for greater impact are endless, but specific calls that CSI commonly hears from the community sector are:

- Fund advocacy support infrastructure, including training and professional development, narrative shifting, campaigns, communications, research evidence and the hard work of community organising.
- Fund facilitation and wānanga to explore common ground and strategise across sectors, localities or issues. Foundation North has funded several Future Search processes for example, and CSI has recently trained 39 Future Search facilitators (see [here](#) for more on Future Search, which is a ‘whole system’ approach to collaboration).
- Support the restoration and wellbeing of those at the sharp end of leading advocacy and social change. Advocacy is brave, hard, often thankless work that can take a high personal toll. Funders can support these leaders by backfilling roles to free advocates up from running organisations, funding restorative retreats and being led by advocates on what sustains and restores them.
- Funding the slow work of mindset and values shift, especially around Te Tiriti, anti-racism and inclusion.

A few funders globally are investing in developing new futures, such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s [Emerging Futures](#)³ (United Kingdom), which aims to speed the transition to a more equitable future for people and planet. Bringing together funders interested in this or something similar in Aotearoa holds significant promise. The invitation is for funders to support advocacy and collective action with more bravery, more collaboratively, and in ways that are informed by national and overseas experience.

³ From 2025, over a period of 5-10 years, Joseph Rowntree Foundation Trustees have committed to spending an additional £50-100 million on work that ‘supports and speeds up the transition to more equitable and just futures, where people and planet can thrive’.