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# The Program Officer: Negotiating the Politics of Philanthropy

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As a part of a larger study on the relationship between private philanthropy and farmworker organizing and community development across California's Central Valley, this paper concentrates on the central role of the foundation program officer in negotiating the process of grant making. The work of the program officer is revealed as both containing and opening up spaces for addressing political and economic inequity. It is argued that the work of the foundation program officer often limits the approach of granted organizations through professional processes and program frameworks that make poor people responsible for their own betterment while excluding the economic relationships that created the situations the programs seek to ameliorate. Yet findings also point to the role of the program officer as one of significant risk taking and advocacy during non-movement times. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with foundation program officers, consultants, and grantees, review of foundation program materials, and participant observation at foundation gatherings and presentations.

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Nowhere else in the world have so many foundations been so heavily staffed with *philanthrocrats* – the approximately ten thousand foundation professionals who, though not wealthy on their own account, often refer to themselves as philanthropists.
– Mark Dowie, *American Foundations*, 2001

'Philanthropoids' steadily acquire from their work an illusion of omniscience and omnipotence.
– Frederick Keppel, *The Foundation: Its place in American life*, 1930

No one ever got fired from a foundation for doing a bad job – only for sticking to a principle.
– Ben Whitaker, *The Philanthropoids, Foundations and Society*, 1974

## Introduction

Over the past century scholars and activists have launched significant critiques of private foundations as unaccountable institutions that use private wealth, often resulting from labor, environmental, and human rights abuses, to fund palliative programs that ultimately pave the way for continued capitalist development and structural inequity (Keppel 1930, Stormer 1936, Whitaker 1974, Arnove 1980, Roelofs 2003, INCITE! 2007). In 1974, Ben Whitaker argued that the only way that private foundations might move beyond their capitalist interests and make significant social change in the world is if the predominantly conservative foundation boards would listen to their more progressive program staff (Whitaker 1974).

At the time of Whitaker's writing private grant making foundations employed very small staffs, two or three for a well-endowed family foundation. Since then thousands of foundations have grown to employ large staffs and American philanthropy has matured into a full-fledged profession – with program officers designing, granting, and managing multiple program areas and regional initiatives domestically and abroad. Have these 'progressive' staffs challenged the still predominantly business-oriented boards of directors, as Whitaker hoped? While several

scholars have commented on the importance of foundation staff (i.e., program officers) in managing philanthropic contributions (Katz 1987, Roloefs 2003, Fleishman 2006, Dowie 2001), none have studied the specific ways in which program officers attempt to influence the practice of grantmaking. This paper is the first to address how 'progressive' foundation program officers negotiate the limits set by 'conservative' foundation boards.[1]

As part of a larger study on philanthropy and the historic farmworker movement in California's Central Valley, I explore the daily work of the 'progressive' program officer as a translator and negotiator between the worlds of farmworker and immigrant organizations and the oftentimes more conservative foundation leadership. Most of the program officers and all of the organizers and consultants interviewed work with Central Valley immigrant and farmworker communities. While the political dance of the foundation program officer can be found in any geographical context, the dynamics are particularly polarized when working within a poor industrial region such as the Valley. With the highest poverty and unemployment rates and the lowest educational levels in the country (Brookings Institute 2005) the need in this region is great. Poor in public and private resources, isolated from grantmaking conversations in the well-funded Bay Area and Southern California, and dependent on a globalized industrial sector, the Central Valley's relationship to private philanthropy is similar to a colonial third world situation where outside funders throw resources into large scale initiatives without addressing the root problems that have plagued these regions for decades. Eager to receive desperately needed funds,

[1] For the purpose of this paper, I define 'progressive' as a worldview that acknowledges and strives to address social, economic, and political inequity through community organizing, political participation, and increased resources and services for poor communities. The program officers interviewed used varied terminology ranging from progressive, to radical, to social change or systemic change oriented to describe their own work. The term progressive is used as a placeholder to encompass these self-definitions. 'Conservative' boards were described by program officers as boards with a majority of members having corporate business interests, an aversion to community organizing or activist approaches or a structural inequality analysis, and embrace individualist self-help approaches. Thus, while the terms 'progressive,' 'liberal,' and 'conservative' are used throughout this paper they are not meant to stand as unified categories with firm definitions, but rather as self-identifications and contrasts revealed in the research.

many non-profit organizations within poor and isolated regions are willing to expand, shift direction, and redirect staff time to the few foundation initiatives presented to them.

In this paper I argue that self described 'progressive' program officers attempt to overcome the authority and conservative ideology of their board members yet operate within a professional, hierarchical culture that sets a limited terrain of negotiation. The articulation of funding frameworks that simultaneously speak to the interests of foundation boards, staff, and grantees often dilutes and redirects efforts that aim to address social and economic inequity. In subsequent chapters I illustrate the processes by which these articulations are shaped: Program officers are revered and 'pitched to' by grassroots immigrant organizers at one end and made to pitch their own proposals to conservative boards on the other. They construct programs based on partial truths, or myths, of individualistic self-help while cognizant that global industrial agriculture is at the root of many of the problems they seek to address. Capacity building efforts professionalize grassroots organizations making them more likely to receive funds yet less likely to organize their original constituents. Collaborative funding structures pull unlikely partners together creating new alliances, which are sometimes effective coalitions and at other times illogical 'beasts' that drain time and resources from on-the-ground organizing.

While this study is primarily concerned with constraints and political dynamics not commonly addressed in literature on philanthropy, I do not view the sector as a closed system or monolithic power but rather as a field of diverse possibilities and alternatives where people and groups compete to establish their interpretation of positive social change. In this paper I reveal how seemingly monolithic institutions are full of tentative alliances, always changing with the political and economic shifts of the time. This preliminary study of the practice of philanthropy engages the emerging and oftentimes contradictory ideologies, agendas, and professional

practices struggled over in civil society. I first review the limited critical literature that exists on philanthropy and society in order to contextualize this study within broader conversations in the field. Next, a section on the Central Valley and the non-profit sector provides a context for the program officer's work. A brief discussion of methods is followed by the main findings from this project; the findings are based on an analysis of data from interviews with program officers, consultants, and grantees.

## Theorizing Philanthropy and the Program Officer

While no academic study has focused specifically on the role of the foundation program officer, a few educational and political theorists have argued that philanthropic programming is nothing short of liberal foundations playing out their hegemonic function in maintaining the American capitalist status quo. Post-Marxist theorists claim that foundation programming maintains the status quo by crafting a neutral and benevolent image while appearing detached from their corporate capitalist origins (Arnove 1980, Roelofs 2003). Conservative scholars in some ways agree with this Marxist-Gramscian analysis, claiming that conservative foundations are effective because they are outwardly "devoted to strengthening democratic capitalism and the institutions, principles, and values that sustain it, with clarity of vision and political strategy" (Schambra 2004), while liberal foundations take a slow, social science 'tinkering' approach, catering to multiple interests and intellectual ideas, ultimately accomplishing nothing (Schambra 2004, Allen Smith 1991). Others, from both post-Marxist and free-market perspectives, defend philanthropic foundations as 'balancing' institutions that will either save humanity or save capitalism from its ultimate destruction. Evoking Carl Polanyi (1944), Van Til (2000) argues that

philanthropy serves as a counterweight to the destructive forces of capital by funding and guiding social programs in the third sector.

The broader question of whether the power of private philanthropy has helped or corrupted poor people's social movements has been debated by scholars of social movements (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Haines 1984, Jenkins 1986) and by journalists concerned with the controlling nature of elite patronage (Coon 1938, Stormer 1964). In response to social control theory (Piven and Cloward 1977), which argues that professionalization and patronage control social movements, Jenkins and Eckert's (1986) study of the black power movement argues that private funding only weakens but does not transform movement goals or tactics. Since the early 1990's, in the context of increasing privatization and shrinking public welfare systems, political scientists have argued that the multitude of organizations supported by private philanthropy function as a "shadow state" (Wolch 1990) or a powerful "state apparatus" (Roelofs 2003) that co-opts or manages movements through ideological frames that promote individual improvement and participation over structural analysis of inequity (Joseph 2001, Cruickshank 1999, Hyatt 2001, O'Connor 2001).

While each perspective brings valuable insights to the role of philanthropy in society, the post-Marxist Gramscian theory is most useful for understanding the role of the program officer. This is primarily because a Gramscian approach pays specific attention to intellectual 'managers' and the ideas they promote in civil society. Inspired by the groundbreaking collection of essays, *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism* (Arnove 1980), Joan Roelofs' *Foundations and Public Policy: The Mask of Pluralism* (2003) outlines a general Gramscian framework for understanding the mainstream 'liberal' foundation as a key power broker in preventing radical or structural change by manufacturing consent in civil society. Gramsci's theory of hegemony

posits that any dominant political system is maintained through both the state and a supportive, complex web of organizations and institutions in civil society (MacLeod and Goodwin 1999, Gramsci in Forgacs 2000). These organizations and the various 'public intellectuals' that work within and across them produce consent through the production and communication of ideas that appear to make common sense. Ideas once conceived of as dissenting, such as 'empowerment' or 'community action' are neutralized and incorporated into new non-threatening ideologies and programs that take the place of more radical or confrontational approaches to social change.

In Roelofs' analysis of philanthropy in the United States, 'liberal' private grant making foundations, such as Rockefeller, Ford, or Carnegie, are distinguished as more effective at generating consent because they are more convincingly 'neutral' or palatable than conservative or radical grant making foundations, and because they are more likely to engage with and neutralize the work of radical social change groups from the 'left.' Employing ideologically progressive staffs that advocate for more radical program funding, liberal or mainstream foundations contain the work of a wide array of 'non-conforming' groups, but are in reality unable to stray too far from their ideologically conservative free market oriented boards. From this perspective the multiple and oftentimes contradictory positions within liberal foundations help to generate a web of ideologies and programmatic funding priorities that ultimately generate consent.

These critiques provide a useful framework for understanding the ways in which private philanthropy waters down and redirects more radical community organizing and is complicit in reproducing subjectivities and conditions that support the free market economy. However, much of the discourse remains on the 'hegemonic' or ideological level, with no analysis of the actual processes and relationships involved in private grant making. Most critics fail to explain the

specific contradictions, debates, practices and strategies taking shape within philanthropy and the non-profit sector. Arnove and Roelofs in particular present foundations as all-powerful institutions that unfailingly convince professionals and publics to follow their seemingly benign plans of capitalist reproduction. By theorizing cultural domination without investigating the specific practices, battles over frames and ideas, and the potential political opportunities, as a more fluid reading of Gramsci might suggest, their work only answers a limited range of questions.

Roelofs' and Arnove's models do not provide methodological suggestions or tools by which to look more closely at how this creative process of consent and contestation is played out in civil society. By excavating the internal workings of private philanthropy I propose to reveal how seemingly monolithic institutions are in practice full of ideological contradictions and tentative alliances, always changing with the political, economic, and ideological shifts of the time. Hall's notion of 'articulation' (Hall 1985, Li 2000) helps us to examine how ideological and strategic articulations and alliances are never quite fixed and are always open to constant re-appropriation, and how power and actions to confront that power can constitute one another. Building on Gramsci's work, Hall argues that certain positions, identities or interests are never fixed or complete but rather grow contingently in the course of struggle. In this sense, programs framed by foundations may control grantees at one moment, yet they may also contain elements of alternatives to the dominant framework they represent, and they may be understood and used differently across the organizations and networks at different moments in time.

Today, when it is no longer acceptable to frame projects in terms of social welfare, and when post-9/11 anti-immigrant sentiments run high, program officers find themselves searching for new ways to fund migrant organizing that will make it past their boards to funding.

Organizers and non-profit staff have also become keenly aware of the challenges associated with finding foundations that will support work that confronts the root problems fueling the growing economic and political inequities of our time. In the interest of attaining resources for poor communities and opening up spaces for new political alliances and opportunities, many foundation and non-profit professionals learn to negotiate the current conservative political paradigm as they work with foundations. Engaging in this political game presents both opportunities and risks. Funding often increases opportunities to gather resources and skills necessary to build strategic alliances and affect political change. Yet non-profit leaders are also aware of the risks associated with professionalization and institutionalization of organizing strategies. Many foundation and non-profit staff also recognize that short term funding cycles, competition for limited funds, and granting requirements that restrict what people can or cannot say and do often short-change the potential for building long-term organizing agendas. Illuminating how foundation program officers negotiate these risks, opportunities, and tensions is a central task of this paper.

## Researcher Subjectivity and Methods

The research questions and methods chosen for this project were greatly informed by my experiences as a consultant to the James Irvine Foundation's Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship (CVP) from 1999 to 2003. The CVP is a loose network of community organizing, legal aid, and social service organizations serving immigrant communities in California's Central Valley. In creating the CVP, the Irvine Foundation was primarily interested in building civic and political participation among immigrants across the Central Valley through the collaborative work of the partnership. One aspect of my job with the CVP was to work in partnership with

foundation staff, consultants, and non-profit leaders to create colorful brochures, websites, mailers, and even Valley bus tours designed to direct the attention of statewide and national funders to the CVP's farmworker and refugee organizations. Recognizing that Irvine would not support the partnership forever, the CVP-Irvine program officer was concerned with attracting new funders to sustain the work that he founded. This was not an easy task as many funders prefer to support their own creations and are often reluctant to adopt another foundation's creation. Aware of these challenges, we had to make a convincing pitch that emphasized both the needs of Central Valley immigrant and farmworker communities and the unique ability of the CVP to address these needs.

The materials we produced often pictured hard-working immigrants coming together to solve community problems but avoided direct critiques of the agricultural industry that created the circumstances of migrant poverty that we claimed to address. Some of us involved in 'marketing' the CVP were conscious of the political rationale for what we chose to represent and what we chose to leave out, what we thought other funders would find compelling and what they might find off-putting. Most of us knew that for any real changes to occur in the Valley the industry would need to be held accountable for the historic and enduring labor, health, safety, housing, legal, and cultural abuses experienced by the immigrants that make agricultural wealth possible. Some believed that confrontational 'old school' direct action organizing strategies would never work and that a more neutral relationship-building, civic engagement approach would be the only way to improve conditions for the Valley's poor. And some embraced structural and pluralist, individualist and collectivist views all at once.

While working with the CVP, I began to see how the more radical agendas of partnering organizations were ultimately hidden by the foundation's civic participation and pluralist

framings. The framework of proud migrant farmworkers taking control of their own lives through education and civic participation was powerful and partially true but ignored the obvious structural barriers most partners hoped to take on. Many of the organizational leaders continued to organize around the same labor, human and civil rights battles that began with the early farmworker movement and simply learned how to use the foundation's vague civic participation framings in their grant proposals and reports. Others observed that by joining the partnership their organizations were required to shift direction. Often this entailed increasing budgets, program management, and direct service obligations while decreasing on-the-ground organizing. And yet others took advantage of the civic participation framings, program strategies, and partnerships to increase their political reach and 'fundability.'

My relationship with foundation staff and community organizers taught me how complex and political the grantmaking process really is and how actors from both the foundation and the communities that receive funding are not simply 'controlling' or 'conforming,' respectively, but are instead constantly repositioning themselves to create as much space for organizational development or sustained social change as they perceive possible.

For this project I used three primary methods of research: semi-structured interviews, analysis of secondary professional communications, and participant observation. My use of individual interviews and participant observation offered insight into the practices and theories of foundation program officers. In the Winter of 2005 and Spring of 2006 I interviewed ten program officers for 1-2 hours each. They all work at mainstream family or general-purpose foundations[2]. I used a snowball method to identify program officers, starting with the program officer I worked with in the Central Valley and two additional program officers identified as active leaders in immigrant and farmworker grantmaking. These two informants identified the

[2] Foundation definitions will be explained later in the paper.

remaining program officers in Northern California who focus on immigrant communities. Of the ten program officers interviewed five were immigrant rights community organizers or advocates prior to working in philanthropy, three worked with non-profit children and families advocacy organizations that focused on educational rights and access for immigrant families, one was a school teacher, and one worked in academia.

In order to interrogate how grantees view the program officer, I interviewed five leaders of non-profit organizations that have received foundation funds from the program area researched, namely farmworker and immigrant organizing. Five consultants and foundation network professionals were also interviewed. The consultants and grantees were both identified by their work on a large Central Valley farmworker initiative that is a part of my larger study. The perspectives of grantees and consultants are important for understanding how the program officer is perceived and how funder-grantee relationships contribute to the negotiations of the program officer in the field. I also attended foundation network gatherings and a speaker series with presentations from foundation professionals and influential public intellectuals. In order to understand the dominant funding frameworks employed by foundation professionals I reviewed a variety of foundation reports, program materials, and web communications.

## Research Context:
## Understanding California's Central Valley and Grantmaking

California's Central Valley is at once the richest agricultural region in the world and home to the poorest people living in the United States (Great Valley Center 1999, Brookings Institute 2005). The historic predominance of agriculture in the region has relied on large

populations of migrant farmworkers ever since the large land-holding wheat and grain farmers shifted to more labor-intensive fruit and vegetable crops towards the end of the nineteenth century (Walker 2004). Throughout the twentieth century racialized immigration, land ownership and labor policies and practices have frustrated immigrant and migrant efforts to own land, marry, educate children, and participate in political life. These practices and patterns fostered the present circumstance of poverty in the midst of wealth.

Over the past decade the Central Valley has gained increasing political relevance in the state and nation. Rich in land, water, and untapped real estate markets and positioned between two of the largest economic centers in the country, Southern California and the San Francisco Bay Area, the Valley is a primary target for future development. Since the economic and real estate booms of the late 1990's, Valley farmers have begun to face multiple insecurities with economic restructuring and suburban encroachment. Commuters and displaced low-wage workers are leaving wealthier regions with skyrocketing rental prices for the poorer towns strung along the interior Valley highways. The Valley is also the poorest rural region in the country, with more families living below the federal poverty line than anywhere in the United States (Brookings Institute 2006). Off the main highways and paved roads in the Valley's southern San Joaquin County, growing settlements of migrant farmworkers live in over-crowded, sub-standard housing without running water or with unsafe water systems.

During the mid-1990's economic boom, with increased budgets and corresponding output requirements, California foundations began to search for new regions to fund. Many turned to the Central Valley, a region with existing non-profit organizations and obvious needs. The David and Lucille Packard Foundation, The California Wellness Foundation, The California Endowment, and The James Irvine Foundation were the major funders in total amount of grants

disbursed within the Central Valley in the late 1990's (Great Valley Center 2002). Throughout the 1990's to the present, the Packard Foundation has concentrated its spending on education, the Wellness Foundation and the California Endowment on health and human services, and the James Irvine Foundation on regional community development and civic participation. During the 1990's boom The James Irvine Foundation made significant grants to two regional collaboratives: the Central Valley Partnership for Citizenship (CVP) and the Great Valley Center (GVC).

In order to understand how the program officer negotiates the politics of philanthropy within philanthropic institutions and across the region, I conclude this section with a brief discussion on the institutional context in which the progressive program officer works. I begin by describing the growth of the sector and end with a discussion of the specific politics engaged by the progressive program officer. Specific attention is paid to the difference between self-described 'mainstream' and 'conservative' foundations and the implications for the program officer's role.

In 1976 60 percent of funding for the non-profit sector in the United States came from local and federal government. Alongside the rapid elimination and privatization of government programs and services, governmental funding to the non-profit sector fell to only 30 percent in 2005. As governmental agencies scaled back, growth in the nonprofit sector boomed. Concurrently the number of non-profit organizations in the U.S. has more than doubled every decade since the 1970's. Private foundations give roughly $300 billion to the sector each year. If the non-profit sector were considered an economy, it would be the world's largest, employing 10 percent of the U.S. workforce (Klein 2006).

The simultaneous rise in private foundation grantmaking in the nonprofit sector and the scaling back of the welfare state does not bode well for resource poor and industrially dependent regions like the Central Valley. Recognizing the great need in the region, almost all of the program officers interviewed attempt to fund smaller immigrant and farmworker organizations in the Central Valley[3]. All but one of the program officers interviewed work at family foundations that employ large staffs that espouse mainstream liberal ideas about social justice, equity, and human and civil rights.[4] They also often speak of supporting ‘organizing,’ activism, and social change. All described their board members as ‘conservative’ or as having ‘business interests.’ As I found in my research and others have also documented (NCRP 2003, Whitaker 1977, O’Connor 2007), there is often a huge gap between the interests, ideologies, and perspectives of trustees and presidents of mainstream foundations[5] and the oftentimes more progressive program staff. This makes the translating and negotiating roles of the progressive program officer particularly important in mainstream foundations.

In contrast to mainstream foundations, conservative (Heritage and Hume, for example) and radical (The Vanguard Public Trust and the Four Freedoms Fund, for example) foundations are more commonly composed of smaller staffs and boards that are ideologically and politically aligned (NCRP 2004). Due to the political and ideological alignment of the small staff of conservative and radical foundations, the work of the program officer is often more clearly defined and directed at specific policy change. For example, the Heritage Foundation funds politically charged issues such as ‘right to life,’ anti-gay marriage, anti-immigrant legislation,

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[3] Two of the officers’ programs fund immigrant organizations but do not have a specific focus on the Central Valley.
[4] One program officer was the only staff person at a small family foundation.
[5] The terms “liberal” and “mainstream” are used inter-changeably here to represent the large family and general-purpose foundations that fund programs to ameliorate social problems in education, health, family, and community yet do not embrace specific ideological or political agendas. This broad definition is created *against* the much more explicit approach of conservative foundations as defined by NCRP (2004) as foundations that taking on, “conservative policy that shrinks the federal government’s powers and increases state autonomy; strengthens the hands of business and free enterprise, by promoting a deregulatory ethos; or fighting for individual property rights. Also included . . . are policies that seek to advance so-called “traditional values,” by promoting, for example, an anti-choice or anti-gay rights agenda” (p. 7).

and free market development. While staff and boards of 'radical' foundations may also be politically aligned, and they are more likely to fund immigrant rights and labor issues, they are somewhat constrained by smaller endowments and the constant need to secure funds from other funders and donors.

A senior 'conservative' foundation executive at a foundation network meeting in San Francisco in September 2005 described the difference between the politics of conservative and mainstream foundations. In response to a program officer who questioned why "liberal" foundations can't seem to "get their acts together" and make strategic policy change on behalf of poor and marginalized Californians, the conservative foundation director responded,

> Unlike you liberals, our bottom line is a shared conservative ideology that drives our coordination. And it goes back to Friedrich Hayek's 1944 passionate response to the nation's fear of the socialist fascism being exercised by Hitler, Mao, and Stalin – his "Road to Serfdom" solidified our hard-core belief in freedom and the individual. Shortly after the signing of Bretton Woods, and after he released this publication, a group of intellectuals, Milt Friedman included, fearful of the state gaining more and more power gathered in Mont Pelerin, Switzerland and committed to working together to promote doctrine and policy to guarantee both freedom against the state and freedom of the market economy [. . .] Adam Smith's invisible hand was and still is our motivating ideology.

Somewhat envious of the unity described by the director, the program officer replied, "And perhaps the left, at least our board members, don't really want to challenge free market capital. The left refuses to put any political or ideological identity to the work they do. The left is more comfortable leaving things fuzzy." Moving back and forth from ideology to philanthropic practices, the conservative foundation director responded by deepening her analysis of the difference between the two ways of grant making:

> What conservative foundations do is recognize that it is not us that do the work – it is the people on the ground that we fund. It's a whole network in civil society that we are connecting up. Touting their own leadership and innovation and restraining from full trust and ownership of grantees is the left's mistake, [. . .] ideologically driven conservatives are much more progressive and Marxist than you social program liberals. We want to change what grows from conflictual praxis in civil society, out of the fears of state control and the emerging financial revolution in markets. We don't sit in our offices designing programs. We're out there with the people, listening to them and discussing what we believe.

I use this conversation to show how the work of the ‘progressive’ program officer, working in ‘liberal’ mainstream foundations with ‘conservative’ boards of directors is intensely constrained. Conservative foundations appear comfortable weaving free market ideology into funding relationships and organizing networks on the ground towards specific policy outcomes, while ‘progressive’ program officers working in mainstream foundations often negotiate murky and multiple theories of change and are not comfortable expressing their own analysis of inequity or directly addressing the socio-economic exclusions poor people experience.

These constraints become complicated and ‘muddled’ by the fluid and undefined decision-making structure common to foundations. No ‘rules’ or even explicit management relationships directly prevent grantmaking that ideologically or practically confronts structural consequences of industrial agriculture. The process of developing funding initiatives, soliciting proposals from specific organizations, managing grants, and measuring outcomes is oftentimes left ambiguous for program officers to experiment with, playing a guessing game with what will excite or what will aggravate the unaccountable and oftentimes unavailable business-interested leadership. Of course, the memories of program officers who ‘went too far’ and were made to resign linger in the minds of many.

The program officers interviewed agreed that a common practice of foundation decision makers is to work in isolation not only from the people affected by the grants and policy-making but also from the staff who do the grantmaking work. According to one interviewee, even though the grantmaking process appears open and fluid their board of trustees acts as “a closed system of power that is rarely confronted because they see themselves as ‘doing good’ and are accountable to no one.” Some viewed this closed and isolated characteristic as a product of foundation leaders’ primary interest in generating recognition for themselves as innovators who

do not want communities or other funders to step into their spotlight. Others faulted the limits created by executive staff who are more comfortable listening to professional 'experts' and business colleagues than to potential 'grantees.' And all of the program officers talked about an unspoken code of what kinds of proposals boards will not even recognize if presented to them: namely anything that has to do with workers rights or holding business accountable. Thus, although technically given a great deal of freedom, program officers often work with limited resources and under potentially volatile conditions. They spend a great deal of time attempting to figure out the hot buttons of their leadership and boards in order to frame issues of social and economic inequity in ways that won't unsettle decision makers and will secure funding.

Another characteristic of mainstream foundations is that they seldom commit to long-term funding for particular projects, organizations, ideas, or program staff (National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy 2004). One program officer explains,

> [. . .] it is very difficult to get people to think in terms of a long term process instead of quick outcomes. For our work to make a difference we need to take the time to ask communities first what they think, and build relationships and commitments along the way. It seems obvious but foundations really don't work that way – asking communities first. If we took the time to build trust, encouraging different perspectives to come together to come up with different solutions then maybe we could build something for the long term. And then incorporate new 'sound bites' that bring a broader array of people in. [. . .] what I am describing is serious and long term work.

Conservative foundations on the other hand, make fewer grants but commit large amounts of money to a handful of organizations, public intellectuals, and particular ideas over several years and in many cases decades. For example the Heritage Foundation made a ten-year, $5 million commitment to Samuel Huntington to develop and promote conservative ideologies around immigration and global political economics.[6] Investments from conservative foundations reach nearly $80 million a year to support media outlets, think tanks, publications, and public intellectuals like Huntington (The National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy 2004).

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[6] Information available at www.mediatransparency.org. See Huntington's most recent book, *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity,* 2004.

The self-described 'radical' or 'progressive' program officers and the consultants interviewed for this project all find it very difficult to navigate their own mainstream foundations as they attempt to design initiatives in service to social and economic justice. The specific challenge they most frequently referred to is how to frame funding proposals to address inequitable conditions for immigrants in California in ways that resonate with their primarily corporate boards in the current economically conservative and post-9/11 political climate. The following section describes the process foundation program officers engage in and the multiple identities and organizing frameworks that they navigate.

## The Program Officer: Negotiating the Paradox of Philanthropy

In my interviews with foundation program officers and community organizers three roles emerged as central to the work of the program officer as she or he navigates the politics of philanthropy: Myth Maker, Capacity Builder, and Talent Scout/Collaborator. Before describing these roles I first discuss the professional power relationships and the often-conflicted identities involved in the work of the program officer.

### Conflicted Identities: The shaping of professional subjectivities

> The program officer is the one who opens the door. Our challenge is that we never know if program ideas are presenting the real interests of a community or just shaped around money and speaking to the foundation. We also never really know what the trustees will think about programs we propose to the board and so we never know if we can keep the promises made to community groups. Community groups don't realize this. They think we have more power than we really do.
> (Program Officer Interview, Spring 2006)

Foundation program officers are often seen by community organizational leaders as powerful decision makers with deep pockets directly connected to their monolithic foundations. The program officers interviewed in this study emphasized how far this is from the truth and

shared how the perception of power often poisons egos and inspires in themselves false visions of grandeur. One program officer put it this way, "When I went into foundation work my IQ immediately increased. People all of a sudden seemed to always agree with me. This felt good and I thought I was really coming up with some good ideas. Then I realized what was going on and became frustrated, because I need a reality check when I am way off. But people don't want to tell you that." Others talked about entering foundation work with the desire to 'sit on the other side of the table,' that is, to be involved in giving funds rather than begging for them. Admitting that they may never choose to go back to the 'begging' side, they talk about the continual need to keep their 'egos in check.'

With an inflated ego in relationship to the grantee communities, the program officer experiences quite a different power position within the foundation. Built up and constantly 'pitched' to by people seeking funding, the program officer is simultaneously deflated in relation to the executive staff and board. Program officers are themselves several steps removed from the decision making conducted by trustees and must find ways to make themselves heard and believed by those who make the decisions – members of the board, who are usually under the leadership of one or two board members who assume the role of the 'chief financial officer' or 'board president.' These decision-making members, according to my interviews, usually have the most connections in the business community and with industry – sometimes from a banking background, sometimes from major media networks, and in some cases through long-time connections in the broader philanthropic community.

One step below the board of trustees is the foundation President or CEO. The job of the President is to keep the pulse of the board and make sure that all proposals brought to the board members' attention are in keeping with what they will accept. Presidents were described by

program officers as gatekeepers who make sure never to let a board member 'alight' on a particularly 'radical' or 'questionable' idea proposed by program staff. Between the President and the program staff is the Vice President. The VP keeps the President up to date on the ideas and plans of program staff as far in advance as possible so that the President can swiftly communicate between the board and the VP what program staff should or should not be talking about. Below the VP is the Program Officer, who may never even meet her or his board of trustees more than once, depending on the foundation. The soaring ego of the program officer within the 'community' is brought back to earth due to the fact that the program officer works in relative isolation from the decision-making process within the foundation.

As they attempt to frame funding initiatives to address issues of socio-economic inequity that will resonate with their conservative boards yet meet the expectations and needs of community groups, many program officers experience a great deal of anxiety:

> My personal belief is so different from the board that I always need to be reading everyone at all levels to figure out how to reframe things [. . .] It's like walking on a tightrope, always misstepping and falling into landmines [. . .] No other time in my life have I had to dichotomize myself in two – me and the foundation's beliefs. I need to understand both, know where I stand, and find ways to work between the two [. . .] I am really not very good at understanding and reading what is going on in here (the foundation). It's just such a different perspective and environment that I find my own values being pushed and challenged. It started to really wear me down, to get to me, and I didn't even realize what was going on. It was in my subconscious.

Images of being 'split in two' and 'walking on tight ropes' were commonly evoked as program officers explained the internal negotiations of foundation work. How one deals with the dual identities between community and foundation, and the isolation of not knowing how a board might respond to work they invest in varies greatly. The program officer quoted above eventually decided that she was becoming a different and not as productive person in the process of splitting her self into so many pieces and resigned. Another decided not to speak to multiple audiences and just to continue to advocate for immigrant and farmworker organizing. He was eventually fired. A third program officer mastered the language of pluralism, inclusion, and civic

participation and found this to be a powerful tool in speaking across different audiences. A young, new program officer still struggles between maintaining her vision and learning how to work within the context of her foundation. One past-activist program officer claims to have 'blinders' on to the work of the executive leadership and the board, finding colleagues in other networks to help frame and pitch the work.

## Program Officer Role #1: The Myth Maker

Within the context of the institutional decision-making hierarchy the program officer also negotiates the local political climate, regional policy trends, community initiatives, citizen groups, academic ideas and institutions, and other regional foundations as they shape funding priorities. Given their unique role straddling foundations and the messy world of non-profit organizations and local and regional 'politics,' we could describe the program officer as a translator, negotiator, or as one foundation consultant interviewed suggests, a 'myth maker' – creating compelling myths out of community realities that wow foundation staff and boards and resonate with broader American ideologies of self-help, hard-work, and triumph over adversity – oftentimes obscuring structural analysis of inequity. While these powerful stories of local heroes and community organizers contain partial truths, they become mythologized when retold by the program officer as emergent models for solving enormous problems beyond community actors' current reach. I assign the role of 'Myth Maker' to the program officer because some use these stories of change to evoke a unified, pluralist future or past while leaving out the current realities that most program officers acknowledge need to be addressed.

Interviews revealed how mobility, civic participation, and an array of 'non-threatening' funding strategies, and other 'myths' are increasingly invoked by foundation staff fearful of boards of trustees which are made up of predominantly businessmen who will not touch

strategies that imply holding ‘business’ accountable. Initiatives framed around educational achievement and civic participation speak to the enduring American ideals of individual mobility, hard work, and merit. Framing initiatives in this way provides useful ‘myths’ for those aiming to address deeper questions of structural inequity. This is not to say that any of these strategies are false or unimportant in their own right. Instead, what the program officers revealed is that embedded within these framings is a shared perception of the untouchable and unstoppable nature of corporate capitalism in this current political climate, and the incumbent dance around the edges of how to address increasing economic inequity and poverty without unsettling those at the top who provide the resources and political legitimacy to move forward.

Professional myths, or in their terms, ‘theories of change,’ are developed and spread through relationships with other foundation professionals, national funder networks and public intellectuals. Several program officers interviewed refer to the work of popular social theorists as key in crafting new frameworks to fund immigrant communities that ‘speak to broader audiences.’ Of particular significance are Michael Fix and Jeff Passel’s reports (such as “We the People”), which during the conservative late 1990’s marked a significant shift away from rights and ‘angry advocacy’ framings to “Immigrant Integration” ideas that promote civic engagement, leadership and skills development. Another popular theory focuses on social capital. For example, in *Bowling Alone* (2000) Robert Putnam defines the social and economic strengths of a community by the depth and breadth of social relationships and civic institutions. Cornelia Flora Butler’s use of social capital theory as an argument for organizing social relationships and John McKnight’s conception of ‘asset-based community development’ (1993) also figure prominently in the shift from rights-based to ‘civic relationship’ funding strategies.

One program officer suggested, "The integration and relationship building model became the road map for funding immigrant and refugee work, and that was able to get support from (foundation) boards." Another program officer explained how, when shaping a new immigrant funding area, she first found it difficult to find language outside of the immigration and worker rights framework she was familiar with from her past life as an advocate. Eventually, she consulted a Michael Fix and Jeff Passel Urban Institute report to help her frame a program,

> . . . in terms of the American Way – that the immigrants that come to this country are, throughout the history of this country, the most industrious, hard-working, risk takers and dreamers. These are the people who made it here. It is not an easy thing to do and takes much struggle and sacrifice. These are the American immigrants. They are not lazy, future welfare recipients. So I frame things in terms of the values people on the board hold most dear: family, hard work, individuals helping each other and helping themselves. So our programming is around that kind of American civic support and empowerment.

While this story illustrates an important re-framing of immigrant contributions to American society and it enabled the program officer to get a new funding area for immigrant groups approved by her board, it does not address the pressing problems that she identified as most in need of attention. Following up on this program officer's framing of American civic virtues, I asked what she would *not* be able to talk about in her proposal to the board; what she would have to leave out in order to get it approved. In keeping with the other program officers interviewed she replied, " I would never attempt to bring a grant proposal to my board that speaks of challenging economic inequity through direct action organizing, labor or welfare rights, or holding businesses or major industries accountable. Such proposals have been known to cost many a program officer their jobs."

While this program officer stated that what immigrant communities in California need most is a full scale worker rights campaign directed at industry and legislators, she was sure that this is an area that no private foundation will touch. The other program officers and consultants interviewed confirmed that over the past ten years private foundations have been increasingly

less likely to fund community organizing, immigrant rights, and social and economic justice projects. While never popular, the advocacy and 'rights' based grant making of the 1970's-1980's has been replaced by civic participation and most recently immigrant integration pluralistic theories that draw on the American myth of equitable integration and civic culture that gained popularity in the 1990's. Again, I use 'myth' because these frameworks evoke a unified imagined model that excludes the actual socio-economic dynamics that the program officers assert if left unaddressed will prevent any real sustained change.

It is important to note that community organizers who were interviewed and observed for this study do not fully embrace the current framings of immigrant integration. During a feedback session at a foundation meeting to unveil a new "Immigrant Integration Framework" to California funders, one community organizer grantee commented,

> This integration model could do a lot more to recognize that the problems we are dealing with in our community basically have to do with racism, fear, and the free market system. [. . .] it could also focus on advocacy and immigrant rights a lot more. [. . .] integration also needs to be addressed in terms of integrating this country into the rest of the world – how we are transformed by what is going on around the world and the people that come here from all over. [. . .] when we talk about participation in these models it is often the common perception that we are not active or having any dialogue. This is a misperception. Or fabrication. We are constantly in dialogue around who we are as a people, how we analyze our own situation, and how we want to move forward.

In response to the organizer's concerns, the presenter, a staff person from a foundation network to support funders interested in immigrants and refugees, replied, ". . .the tougher stuff is implied between the lines in this framework. Organizing, advocacy, legislative reform is not stated but embedded within those categories you see in the model. [. . .] what we are doing now is shopping this model around to more mainstream and conservative funders across the country and they are sometimes reluctant. So that is why the framing sounds like it does."

The foundation staff person's response to the organizer is symbolic of the bind many program officers find themselves in – trying to figure out how to support communities in the work they need to do without scaring off their more reluctant boards, trustees, and colleagues in

the foundation world. One program officer talked about simply deleting any confrontational words, including 'organizing,' from his grantees' proposals before sending them to his board for approval. Program officers, who promote strategic myths that claim "building capital" or "integrating immigrants" will solve pressing problems of poverty and inequitable treatment without addressing the structural workforce and global economies, might succeed in getting funding through the door but they also risk limiting the nature of the work of granted organizations.

### Program Officer Role #2: The Capacity Builder

When asked what the main challenges are when attempting to build funding initiatives for poor communities in California's Central Valley, every program officer answered by pointing to the 'low organizational capacity' in the region. When asked to define capacity, most answered that Valley organizations and leaders lack various leadership and organizational skills including: hiring and training effective boards of directors, managing a multi-year budget, filing taxes, receiving audits, training and managing staff, managing client services, writing grant proposals, and evaluating program outcomes. Some saw it as their role to help 'build the capacity' of local groups to receive grants, and others out of frustration decided not to make grants to many organizations in the region.

The role of the program officer as a capacity builder is best illustrated in the example of a major foundation initiative to address the extreme poverty and poor health experienced in farmworker communities in California's Central Valley. For the purpose of this example, I will call the initiative the "Farmworker Project" (FWP) and the main funder "The Foundation" (TF). The Foundation is committing $50 million dollars over five years to this Central Valley

initiative.[7] In its fourth year, TF is adjusting program frameworks and managing multiple consultants and non-profit, private, public, and philanthropic partnerships. According to an evaluation consultant to the project, the program officer in charge was interested in framing the work in terms of 'building the social capital' and community organizing capacity of migrant communities and connecting them to services, health care, housing, and insurance providers.

Foundations are often concerned with how they can extend their grantmaking "down to the grassroots" to unincorporated or small organizations with minimal budgets without spending significant amounts of time "building the capacity" of local groups to receive larger grants. In California's Central Valley there are relatively few non-profit organizations compared to the Bay Area and Southern California, and foundations often find it difficult to launch large-scale initiatives with so few organizations to fund to implement the work. In response to this context, TF partnered up with another large funder and made a grant to a smaller foundation, which I will call Capacity Builder, to "build the capacity of smaller immigrant groups across the Valley." According to the program officer of the Capacity Builder foundation, "The ultimate goal is to develop more organizations that the TF can fund for their Valley initiatives. There are virtually none in some parts of the Valley – but lots of small groups of people doing good things. So now we need to help them become fundable organizations – from Bakersfield all the way up to Shasta."

While the program officer of TF developed the larger framework and brought on the main partners of the initiative, the Capacity Builder program officer spent time building the capacity of smaller groups so that they might apply for funding once they were 'ready.' She describes the main thrust of her work as,

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[7] Many large foundations, like TF, will not make grants under $50,000 because they consider less than this amount to be an investment unlikely to show measurable returns.

> [. . .] teaching people what kind of language to use in grant applications, how to put together a workplan, goals, objectives, activities. [. . .] how to do more large scale financial management, accounting, etc. so that they can handle larger grants. [. . .] for example, [TF] told us that if we spend the time building the capacity of [Indigenous Mexican organizing group] then they will be able to fund them. So I helped them learn larger scale management techniques, got them a few small grants, even nominated [local organizer] for a Ford Foundation award which he got, and now they are fundable.

The nature of the capacity building techniques used by program officers reveals a contradictory duality. While 'capacity building' does in fact provide greater access to resources and power for small organizing groups like the Indigenous Mexican group mentioned above, in the process it also changes the nature of the organization's work. A staff person of this organization expressed dismay with being "stuck doing desk work and not organizing anymore." She explained how she was grateful that her organization now has more funds and legitimacy but is fearful that it is no longer serving the direct and changing needs of the indigenous farmworker communities they claim to serve. A long time farmworker organizer expressed similar sentiments about the changes he has seen in his organization over time:

> After I left the UFW, I got a job working with the Office of Economic Opportunity. They paid farmworker organizers big salaries so most stayed on. But they kept us away from the strikes so I left after too much time sneaking out to do the real organizing [. . .] Later foundations came in and were equally rigid but in different ways. It became all literacy and services and no organizing. Now people are trapped on computers [. . .] planning programs and writing reports. We need to be accountable to communities, to people and their schedules and not to our meetings and foundation deadlines. We can only see the damage this kind of thing does when something dramatic happens. Like that year when there was a bad winter freeze and all of a sudden there was no farm work. We need to be flexible enough to say 'to hell with the English classes. These people need to eat!'

Another organizer put it this way,

> What is frustrating about our work with [collaborative partnership] right now is that nobody is really organizing. All this planning and trainings and no organizing. If new money comes to us through the new [TF] Farmworker project I want it to go to organizing. And you can't train an organizer over night or at a training like some people think you can. You have to walk in the muck, get contaminated with pesticides like everyone else. I'd like to get some of those grants but the new partners that are selected on the basis of who has the best verbiage. It's all about language, proposals, how you argue or present it, and also the connections you have, who you know.

The words of these organizers show their keen awareness of the double-sided nature of the program officer's and consultant's capacity building work. Knowledge of foundation

language, management skills, and organizational development better enables organizers to get grants to ideally fund more organizers who identify the problems farmworkers most want to confront. To do this effectively, however, they must spend more time engaged in organizational management which leaves less time and resources for the 'real work.' These choices are hard ones to make when, as the program officer explained, capacity building ultimately prevents local groups from getting ripped off by the many Bay Area groups and consultants paid to do work in the Valley who end up using the time, expertise, and even organizational resources of Valley groups without paying them. Many program officers and consultants believe that it is a "learn to play the game or get ripped off" set of choices. The 'Capacity Building' program officer quoted above is now starting an environmental justice network among Valley groups organizing around air quality, industrial pollution, and pesticides, so that these groups can work alongside, rather than beneath the Bay Area advocates and experts, and so that they can make alliances beyond the Valley with global environmental justice groups.

## Program Officer Role #3: The Talent Scout and Collaborator

Another double-sided strategy used by program officers while launching large scale initiatives is scouting out and connecting up multiple organizations into one large collaborative. Like capacity building efforts, this strategy enables the program officer to fund more groups and potentially increase the reach and impact of the initiative. Much like the double-sided nature of capacity building, this approach simultaneously enables more groups to attain resources, connect up with one another, and form strategic alliances while also significantly changing and sometimes limiting the nature of their work. One interviewee expressed these concerns when speaking about the regional collaborative model:

> As soon as we lost our funding from one foundation we all start running to the next. It's crazy that as a group [during our last collaborative] that is supposed to support immigrants we were too busy with collaborative meetings and could not together decide how to address all the abuses after 9/11, the Patriot Act and everything. And now we are all meeting to figure out how to get money from the next big thing, [TF]'s farmworker project. If we're really interested in important things we would be organizing and not going to the [TF] to change our work and focus [. . .] Our work with immigrants will end. No one in foundations *really* wants to change things for immigrants right now.

According to a consultant working on FWP, most of the smaller partners of TF's farmworker initiative are shifting direction (at least on paper) as new calls for proposals are issued. From this consultant's perspective, they are all trying to 'divine' what the program officer has in mind and are busy organizing themselves and each other around getting the funding but not organizing actual farmworkers. As the program officer scouts talent, recruiting partners and soliciting grant proposals, his idea of the goals of the potential collaborative also shifts according to the red flags and bumps in the road along the way. The consultant interviewed further complicates this partnership building process by describing the internal foundation decision-making process at TF as "similar to a dissertation committee" where "by the time you are through with an idea you don't know where you started." So joining a major initiative like this one is a gamble for community groups, with the program officer dancing between the board, the staff, advocacy organizations, the growers, the hired consultants, and the service agencies before landing on a solid plan of action.

With grants to several farmworker and advocacy organizations in the southern San Joaquin Valley, the purpose of TF's collaborative approach, from the main program officer's perspective, is to form locally driven farmworker alliances with the ability to confront enduring health and related community problems experienced by farmworkers and their families. Using a combination of community organizing and asset based development approaches, the ultimate goal is to mobilize farmworkers for 'self-directed organizing' and to build consensus on the issues with community stakeholders, service delivery providers and growers. With three years of

‘planning and development’ already under its belt, the lead agency working with the foundation claims that the collaborative process and farmworkers’ capacity to speak up in collaborative meetings is still too fragile to encourage farmworkers to address or even identify any issues to tackle. While the program officer initially envisioned collaborative committees that would include farmworkers, growers and other ‘powerful’ stakeholders who together tackle regional health issues facing farmworker families, it was quickly realized that the farmworker representatives were not positioned to voice their concerns as equals alongside the more powerful collaborative members. So in the third year of the initiative, resources were allocated to leadership training for local farmworker representatives identified by the lead agency of TF’s initiative.

This type of work obviously presents serious challenges to addressing the labor, environmental, and health problems farmworkers face on a daily basis, especially during the lifetime of a five-year funding commitment. The program officer of this project is already expressing concerns that members of the “outcomes oriented board of trustees” may say they believe in the community building process but will not reinvest in the project without proof of measurable health outcomes in the short term. How long will trustees invest in building the ‘capacity’ of farmworkers to sit at the table, as equals, with growers and local politicians? Is this consensus model even realistic? What issues will inevitably be left out of discussions with growers? Does shifting from the historic farmworker organizing model pioneered by the UFW and American Friends Service Committee to a collaborative consensus model seriously limit future organizing trajectories? Or are local advocacy and organizing groups simply paying lip service to the foundation’s model and using the new granted resources to build organizing

campaigns around the substandard water, pesticide, and labor conditions plaguing farmworker communities? And will growers and the industry advocates ever rally behind these causes?

From the perspective of the program officer, the negotiations involved in setting up multi-stakeholder collaboratives are necessary in establishing partnerships that can effect political change within shifting policy climates. One Bay Area program officer provides insight into what from her perspective an effective foundation organized partnership might look like:

> Change happens when authentic relationships are formed. We try to match-make and put people and organizations together that could have a greater impact if working together, but we can't always make the connections that will really work and last. So I take a lot of risks . . . do a lot of meeting with people, networking, researching and querying about who ought to be working together, shape collaborative funding strategies and then see if it sticks. Sometimes from within the work, which I know from the time spent as Director of [a large bay area non-profit that serves immigrant families and communities], we can't see where access and openings really are. Where organizations might want to position themselves politically. The program officer has a unique access and vantage point to see these natural linkages.

When asked for a practical example of how she forms 'authentic relationships' this program officer describes a case where she carefully researched a local policy issue and scouted out allies and organizations to act as 'watchdogs,' ensuring that the programs and policies implemented are at least not as punitive or damaging to immigrant communities and families as they otherwise would have been without funded partnerships of strategically paired groups:

> Here is an example: take family childcare. I think it is important in any family childcare policy that we make sure to have elements that maintain the immigrant's family culture and language programmatically before implementing the limited school readiness and outcomes stuff. So I need to think about how to spin a 'family based and family centered' approach over the more common day care center and early childhood schooling approach and bring community partners along while I simultaneously convince my board. [. . .] it helps when you have a background in the communities you work with. For example, I know many of the youth organizations, which really helps. I can have an open conversation with this group if I know them. [. . .] We look for waves. For example, I know another program officer at [another foundation] is all over this, so we have breakfast, discuss the issues, give ourselves a month to get the plan, open a call for people to come to us for funding support, insert a larger vision, and make sure that other foundations are doing it with me. Then we look for the CBO's, intermediaries, and public and private funding partners. I look to see where the values coalesce and where the shared interests are around the current policy opportunity. I act kind of as a coach, prepping CBO watchdogs. I tell them, 'you got to watch this initiative because it deals with language and culture, keep on them!'

Keeping on top of local policy issues, the organizations that can play 'watchdog,' and the potential funding allies, the program officer acts as a 'silent' catalyst, scouting out and forming new political partnerships as issues emerge. Describing themselves as 'staying fluid' or 'following waves,' the program officers follow shifting political climates, opportunities to organize, and the direction of public and private spending. Describing how she negotiates the current climate around immigrant families and education the above program officer explains,

> We are in a shifty political climate right now. I am now trying to ride the 'school readiness wave.' What I need to figure out is what to hang my hat on in order to ride this wave. For example, the effort to institute universal pre-school in San Francisco through Prop H makes me ask myself whether I will jump on this band wagon and make it happen the way I want to see it done or will I let others define it . [. . .] so when I commit, what I do is pull people and organizations together to make sure that it is family based, implemented in low income neighborhoods, and done in ways that low income communities want. [. . .] I natter around in my colleagues' ears. Work between the public and the funder on the language stuff. This language stuff is really important. For example, we need to investigate how the 227 law is written in a way to show people how it applies to early childhood on monolingual issues. Then we leverage with our allies, make sure the right people are in the right places. I need to be confident with the non-profit ED's [executive directors] and people starting up the initiative. Then I can talk to people and say 'If I were you I'd make sure to deal with the race issues first, etc.' Get our own plan in order and out the door.

This program officer believes that the key goal of spending so much time on partnership building is getting immediate policy results in the best interests of immigrant families – in this case, everyone gets preschool in an equitable and culturally relevant manner. Her example shows the potential for program officers to facilitate the convergence of third sector organizing, political will and public and private money. It also reveals how constant, dogged and politically attuned a foundation program officer must be in order to effectively address issues as they emerge. In her words, "You have to be opportunistic and make it how you want it to be rather than pulling away."

Her work also reveals how reliant any funding partnership is on the political climate of the time. For example, a program officer from another foundation was able to support broad-based immigration reform campaigns (SB 245i, AB 540) across the Central Valley for several

years in the 1990's, but after 9/11, the re-election of President George W. Bush and a change in leadership in the program officer's own foundation, he lost support for the collaborative and eventually his job. Every program officer interviewed agreed that the federal and state policy shifts away from immigrants were very severe after 9/11.

## Conclusion

The examples presented above demonstrate how the roles adopted by program officers can limit or leverage significant change. This dynamic is also reflected in the words of my first program officer informant. He explains his role in negotiating philanthropic power through the tale of Frodo and the Ring. In Tolkein's classic, *Lord of the Rings*, Frodo, the noble Hobbit, inherits the 'Ring' from his Uncle Bilbo. Quick to recognize the corrupting powers of the 'Ring,' Frodo must keep it away from the Forces of Darkness in order to protect the Hobbits and the Forces of Light. The Forces of Darkness are temporarily shaken by Frodo's possession of the Ring, but he knows he must somehow get rid of it before it corrupts and destroys him. Foundations, this veteran foundation staff member explains, have the unique opportunity to confront the societal problems that extreme wealth generates by granting portions of that very wealth to under-represented and marginalized communities. However, once the 'granted' organization or funded initiative ceases to address the problems it originally set out to confront, once it has tasted power itself, gained a new political position, or solidified into a rigid institution unable to move with the needs of its constituents, it risks "becoming the master, distancing itself from the roots from which it sprang."

In this paper I have presented preliminary research from a larger project on the relationship between private philanthropy and farmworker organizing across California's Central

Valley. My research sheds light on role of the ‘progressive’ foundation program officer in negotiating funding frameworks and relationships from above and below. In keeping with a view of civil society as both containing and promoting class struggle, the work of the program officer is both liberating and limiting as it opens up spaces for immigrants and farmworkers to confront inequitable conditions in their communities. Viewing the program officer as ‘doubly’ identified – as a mythmaker, a capacity builder, a talent scout and collaborator – contributes to a Gramscian theory of philanthropy and society by moving beyond theory and looking at how power is negotiated in practice.

The program officer is a mythmaker, the communicator of ‘concrete fantasies’ (see Gramsci in Forgacs 2000) that shape individual identities and organizing alliances that might maintain or contest the dominant power system. She is also a scout and collaborator, who connects struggles over framing an issue to broader social and economic structures in what Gramsci calls the War of Position in civil society – the terrain on which class struggle is contained and promoted. In the current post-9/11, anti-immigrant environment, ‘progressive’ foundation professionals are seeking to frame immigrant and farmworker issues in ways that will not be dismissed by foundation boards at the outset and have the potential to invigorate grassroots immigrant organizing. At the same time, they adopt these new frames at the risk of limiting what is possible to achieve on the ground.

Finally, the program officer is also engaged in the education, professionalization or ‘capacity building’ of grassroots immigrant organizations and leaders. In Gramsci’s theory of struggle in civil society it is the training and education of working class people and organizations that either generates consent or the capacity to resist. The development of educational programs, where “working class people can become intellectually autonomous so that they could lead their

own movements without having to delegate decision making to career intellectuals," as opposed to "technical schools that become incubators of little monsters aridly trained for a job, with no general ideas, no general culture, no intellectual stimulation" of their own, will determine the extent to which consent or resistance is generated. As the examples above illustrate, the educative processes promoted by the program officer can limit or strengthen the position of grassroots organizations.

While this paper set out to complicate rather than wholly reject a Gramscian theory of philanthropy and society, there are serious questions that a Gramscian framework cannot address. What do particular organizing frames, such as social capital or immigrant integration actually accomplish or allow? What do they exclude? How do and don't they mobilize people?

Nikolas Rose's (2004) use of Foucault's (1986) 'governmentality' theory may help guide future research on the power of ideological and technical framings to govern human and organizational conduct. Governmentality theory posits that power is maintained by 'getting people to act how we want them to act, freely and of their own will' and suggests that research should be expanded beyond the study of restrictions and limits placed upon people to include common 'scientific' or popular truths, professional management systems, or even accepted conceptions and practices of health, for example, that people govern themselves. Instead of looking at the 'outcome' or temporary consequence of a specific funding initiative, methods might include tracking ideas and how they are spread through relationships between trustees, program staff, grantees, and associated partners as they work together through trainings, evaluations, partnerships, and reports. Such a lens will help us see "circuits of power at the molecular level" often hidden by explanatory modes concerned primarily with larger historical and ideological trends.

Additionally, a Gramscian frame cannot adequately address the race, gender, and class subjectivities that support or confront philanthropic frameworks. What kind of professional and client identities are promoted by or resisted in foundation programs and frames? Feminist theory (Fraser 1994, Naples 1997) demonstrates how to engage multiple race, class, and gender subjectivities in ways that support or change the dominant development framework. Nancy Fraser (1990), for example, suggests that by looking closely at the official language used within certain professional or policy circles and the ways language is used to position people within these spheres we gain a better understanding of the patterns of domination and subordination involved.

This is not to say that an initiative, institution, or policy sector is "a coherent, monolithic web," but rather that it is "a heterogeneous field of diverse possibilities and alternatives [. . .] where groups compete to establish their respective interpretations" (Fraser 1990). These are all questions under investigation in my current research on private philanthropy and farmworker social movements across California's Central Valley.

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