

Civic Leadership

Highlights from the Good Neighborhood Initiative

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1. Purpose of the Essay

Launched in 2006, the Good Neighborhoods Initiative (GNI) was a 10-year commitment by the Skillman Foundation to improve conditions for children in six Detroit neighborhoods. GNI represented a new way of working for the Foundation, which recognized from the outset that it would need to utilize its full range of assets—knowledge, networks, credibility, civic capital and its financial resources—in order to address the urgent challenges facing Detroit’s children. Moving from traditional “grantmaking” to “changemaking” would require new relationships, new forms of leverage, and new efforts to influence policy on behalf of children.

This essay examines some of the key ways in which the Foundation adopted new civic leadership roles and practices and highlights the successes, missteps and challenges in doing so. By analyzing specific examples of civic leadership across GNI, the essay explores five basic questions:

- What are the factors that facilitate playing a civic leadership role, and how can a foundation build its own civic leadership “muscle”?
- In what ways can a foundation use its relationships to leverage change?
- In what situations should a foundation exert its leadership while building the capacity of others to lead?
- How did the civic leadership work reinforce or enhance the Foundation’s neighborhood -focused work and vice versa?
- What are the risks and challenges of exercising a civic leadership role?

This essay begins by describing the Detroit context in which GNI operated, discusses the rationale for the Skillman Foundation’s transition to changemaking and how it was implemented in selected areas of GNI, and provides an analysis that addresses the five questions above. Information was drawn from multiple sources: selected Skillman Foundation grantee materials and board documents; published articles on the Foundation’s transition to changemaking; the 2016 Stakeholder Assessment Report prepared by The Center for Effective Philanthropy; and interviews with the Foundation’s leadership and former and current staff and board members. This essay is one component of a larger analytic review to synthesize what has been accomplished during the decade of GNI work, inform decisions about the Foundation’s efforts going forward, and build and share knowledge locally and nationally.¹

The essay’s focus on the Skillman Foundation does not imply that it was the only or the most important civic player in Detroit during this decade. Indeed, many other civic leaders from foundations, government, and the business and nonprofit communities have worked for years to address Detroit’s challenges. What we are examining in this essay is the emerging role of civic leadership in the context of the Skillman Foundation’s implementation of GNI and the lessons it generated for the Foundation’s future work.

¹ For more details about each line of work of the Analytic Review, see (provide link to website and AR products)

2. The Detroit Context

Over the 10-year history of GNI, few American cities have experienced greater challenges than Detroit. While many of these challenges have their roots in demographic, economic and social shifts that have been in motion for decades, Detroit has disproportionately suffered from the negative impacts of outmigration, poverty, poor education and job losses associated with a declining manufacturing sector. By 2005—just one year before the launch of GNI—Detroit had become the poorest city in the United States with the second largest percentage of children living in poverty. The global financial crisis of 2008 only further worsened Detroit’s already-existing woes eventually leading the City of Detroit to declare bankruptcy in 2013. During this same decade, Detroit also suffered from dysfunctions within local government and inconsistent elected and appointed leadership. Since the time the Kilpatrick administration ended in a corruption scandal in 2008, the city has had three mayors and an emergency financial manager.²

Detroit’s educational landscape has been similarly in flux: The legislative removal of the cap on charter schools without setting standards for the work has led to many new charter schools of varying quality; frequent changes in educational leadership at the school, district, city and state levels have created major challenges for system stability; and growing debt hobbled Detroit Public Schools until the state Legislature passed a \$617-million package to try and stabilize the collapsing district, which itself had five emergency financial managers since the state took control of the system in 2009.

Against the backdrop of Detroit’s significant challenges, but steeped in the knowledge of Detroit’s strengths, the Skillman Foundation knew that in order to have a significant impact on the lives of the 65,000 young people living in the six GNI neighborhoods, it would need to build on and leverage the ingenuity, dedication, and perseverance of its residents and community organizations, as well as the commitment and resources of major corporate and philanthropic institutions.

3. The Rationale for Changemaking at the Skillman Foundation

The roadmap for the Foundation’s initial foray into changemaking work was first described in “Mapping The Road To Good,” co-authored in 2007 by the Skillman Foundation’s then-President & CEO, Carol Goss, and current President & CEO, Tonya Allen. Goss explained, “The mandate of the Board of Trustees of the Skillman Foundation to me and to the staff of the Foundation has been consistent: Results matter—think broadly and figure out a way to change the equation for Detroit’s children.”

Goss believed that the Foundation needed to be “a change agent, not a banker.” The path that Goss desired for the Skillman Foundation was to become more deeply rooted in the

² Since Duggan became mayor in 2014, City functioning has improved and opportunities for partnerships with the City have increased.

community, while at the same time become more opportunistic—bring new partners to the table, leverage funding from other sources, and influence policies and systems in a way that was new for the Foundation, as well as for philanthropy in general.

The Skillman Foundation would change its grantmaking from a traditional, responsive and hands-off approach to one that was more strategic and engaged. Rather than buying services, the Skillman Foundation sought to build capacity, using a community engagement process to identify goals, act as a convener, broker knowledge and resources, and become a true partner with the community and its stakeholders.

The Foundation also acknowledged that grantmaking alone—no matter how innovative or effective—was insufficient to create the scale of change necessary to meaningfully improve the lives of Detroit’s youth. It was evident to the Foundation’s leadership that catalyzing large-scale systems change would require significant changes to its own structure, operations, staffing and organizational culture (Brown, 2012). A Sustainability Planning Process was undertaken by the Foundation’s Senior Management Team in 2006 to realign the Foundation’s structure, practices, and policies, and to determine what work should be continued that best aligned with the Foundation’s core mission.

The essence of the Skillman Foundation’s new changemaking role was that it needed to influence the people and organizations that had power to change and impact systems in support of children and families. Changemaking is defined as the “roles and practices beyond grantmaking through which a foundation advances its goals” (Brown, 2012). The four broad strategies for engaging those with power and influence proposed in “Mapping The Road To Good” included: influence, champions, leverage and scale.

The Skillman Foundation focused very explicitly on generating and documenting the dollars that flowed into the six neighborhoods from other sources as a result of its efforts. The Skillman Foundation developed “A Guide to Documenting Leverage in Good Neighborhoods and Good Schools Communities,” and tracked funds leveraged primarily through the Foundation’s grants and those leveraged through its changemaking influence. By the end of 2016, the Foundation invested more than \$122 million in GNI neighborhoods and leveraged \$1.25 billion through grants and influence. Almost one-half of the total funds leveraged were through grants; the rest resulted from the changemaking efforts of the Foundation’s staff and board.

As the Foundation’s work evolved over the decade, the language of changemaking evolved with it. Changemaking and civic leadership are used synonymously in this essay to describe the non-grantmaking practices utilized by the Skillman Foundation to improve conditions for children.³ Civic leadership emphasizes the role that the Skillman Foundation plays in the civic sphere as a leader that is firmly rooted in—and working on behalf of—community.

³ The Skillman Foundation’s work in social innovation (catalyzing innovative sources of funding social ventures) is a key component of changemaking that is being addressed more specifically in another product of the analytic review.

4. Civic Leadership in the Good Neighborhoods Initiative

This section of the essay describes the use of changemaking strategies in five of the Skillman Foundation's key areas of work in GNI: My Brother's Keeper (MBK), blight, safety, youth employment and education reform. While changemaking was used in all of the Foundation's GNI strategies, these five were chosen to highlight the range and variety of approach. The intent of this section is not to describe these areas in detail, but rather to illustrate how the Foundation exercised civic leadership within them and how these changemaking strategies evolved over time as the work matured. Each area begins with a brief summary of the rationale for the programming and the three primary changemaking strategies utilized. Within each area is a brief description of one grant to illustrate how grantmaking and changemaking should be mutually supporting.

Hosting "My Brother's Keeper" in Detroit

Rationale: The Foundation's staff heard frequently from residents about the urgent challenges facing boys and young men of color in Detroit. Experiencing many obstacles and without appropriate supports, young men of color are more likely to fail to graduate from high school, to become involved in the criminal justice system, to fall victims in the foster care and health care systems, and to lag in virtually every category of child well-being.

Changemaking Strategies:

- Playing a lead convening role.
- Building public and political will for action.
- Serving as a "landing spot" for the local work of a national initiative.

The Foundation's concern about the struggles of African-American and Hispanic boys emerged as a cross-cutting strategy in GNI in 2008. It began by producing a report highlighting these struggles, "Why We Can't Wait," which led to a convening of local funders, a landscape analysis and several community summits that brought the issues to the attention of many funders, nonprofits, civic leaders and government. Pilot activities were also developed, including a small grants program to help organizations develop or enhance programs related to black and brown boys.

In 2010 the Skillman Foundation began a partnership with the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA) as a provider of content expertise and technical assistance, expanding the partnership in 2014 to roll out a more comprehensive local strategy agenda. One major outgrowth of this partnership was the Skillman Foundation's playing a role in hosting President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative in Detroit to help young people connect to and thrive in the city's new economy.

The Skillman Foundation exercised civic leadership in a number of ways through MBK. The Foundation played an active media role in encouraging Detroit Mayor Michael Duggan to focus

on making Detroit a better place to support children. The mayor publicly shared that the 2013 op-ed in the Detroit Free Press by the Foundation's President and CEO, Tonya Allen, inspired his interest in making children a focal point of his administration. Together, Allen and Mayor Duggan co-authored a subsequent op-ed regarding the need to support boys of color in Detroit's turnaround that was picked up by USA Today.

Over time, the mayor and the Skillman Foundation agreed to work together on several critical initiatives, including MBK. For example, the Foundation's senior leadership team met with the Duggan administration to devise a citywide strategy for MBK and corresponding advocacy in Washington, D.C. Mayor Duggan also agreed to provide leadership to prioritize the impact on boys of color in municipal practices and advocate with the state and federal government on behalf of the work. Also in 2013, Tonya Allen joined the board of the newly emerging Executives' Alliance, a national philanthropic organization that evaluates promising approaches and advocates for effective public policy and systems change.

In February 2014, the Skillman Foundation assumed a convening role for MBK Detroit and committed \$2 million in grants to support a shared framework and build local leadership to advance the work. At the request of the White House, the Foundation hosted a series of MBK listening sessions in Detroit that began with a civic, business and philanthropic leadership meeting, and ended with a public hearing that included youth, adults and nonprofits. At the national level, the Skillman Foundation led a community listening session during which young African-American and Latino males had the opportunity to speak directly with key administration officials. The White House subsequently published a report highlighting key issues identified by its interagency taskforce, and issued a challenge to mayors across the country to take a leadership role in implementing the report's recommendations at a local level.

Mayor Duggan's response to the president's challenge took place in December 2014 at a citywide MBK summit co-hosted by the Skillman Foundation that mobilized stakeholders from government, business, nonprofit and philanthropic sectors to develop an action plan designed to improve outcomes for the city's young men of color. This was followed by a report with recommendations for action and several events hosted by the Foundation that addressed particular issues like reintegrating returning citizens into Southeast Michigan. In this and in other areas, the Foundation served a useful convening role locally and intermediary role nationally in connecting national and local actors with shared interests.

MBK Grantmaking Example: My Brother's Keeper Challenge

The MBK Detroit Innovation Challenge was launched in the spring 2016 by the Skillman Foundation and Campaign for Black Male Achievement, calling upon community members to put forth their ideas to increase opportunities for black and brown boys. Nearly 500 submissions were received; 100 were selected to move on to a more robust application round. From here, 20 teams were selected to receive training, support and \$5,000 each to prototype their ideas over the summer. Six were ultimately awarded with \$50,000 each to bring their vision to life. Young men of color from Detroit have been part of every step of the Challenge, consulting on the initiative's design, contributing to teams and serving as judges.

Most recently, in November 2016, Detroit hosted a My Brother's Keeper Alliance event, "Pathways to Success: Boys and Young Men of Color Opportunity Summit," that focused on connecting young people to supportive employment services. Nearly 1,100 young males of color, 600 volunteers, and more than 40 companies participated in the summit that offered resume-building assistance, practice interviews, haircuts, ties, job application stations, and on-the-spot interviews, resulting in 350 job offers. Among the lead partners, in addition to the Foundation, were the City of Detroit, Campaign for Black Male Achievement, SER Metro Detroit, Kellogg Foundation, 100K Opportunities Coalition and the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Eliminating Blight

Rationale: Within the Skillman Foundation's safety strategy, blight emerged as a major focus when neighborhood leaders told the Foundation that abandoned homes and trash-strewn, overgrown lots made the neighborhoods unsafe to live in and difficult for children and their families to thrive and achieve the outcomes that are central to the Foundation's mission.

Changemaking Strategies:

- Forging nontraditional public/private partnerships.
- Leveraging private and public resources.
- Developing innovative technology, including the use of resident-generated data, to map the scope of the problem.

The Skillman Foundation's blight work began with a pilot project in the Brightmoor neighborhood where residents helped the Detroit Blight Authority identify and clear all nonstructural blight such as trash and vegetation in a 14-block area. While successful, this pilot project revealed just how little was known about the scope of blight in this neighborhood and across Detroit, and that better data was needed in order to address the problem.

In 2013, the Skillman Foundation made a grant to forge a partnership between two organizations: Data Driven Detroit (D3), a data intermediary providing data to drive decision-making, and Loveland Technologies, a Detroit-based firm that gathers and presents information about property parcels through interactive mapping.⁴ The purpose was to collaborate on a parcel survey of the Brightmoor neighborhood that could serve as a model for mapping the extent of blight. A subsequent \$1.3 million contract from the Blight Task Force, funded by the Skillman Foundation, the Kresge Foundation and Rock Ventures allowed Data Driven Detroit and Loveland

Blight Grantmaking Example: Detroit Blight Authority

Following the success of the Brightmoor pilot project to remove nonstructural blight, this grant to the Detroit Economic Growth Association supported the Detroit Blight Authority with funding to tear down 71 blighted houses in Brightmoor and serve as a demonstration zone for the Detroit Blight Task Force to model targeted total blight elimination.

⁴ Data Drive Detroit was created in 2008 with joint funding from the Skillman Foundation and the Kresge Foundation.

Technologies to perform a complete parcel survey in Detroit. Working together, the two companies created a technology that uses smartphones to upload pictures and data that is captured in a dashboard and mapping tool that can then be used to develop a blight elimination plan. This collaboration represented the most comprehensive, quickest and most efficient land survey ever done in Detroit.

The Skillman Foundation helped to form and then served on the steering committee of the Detroit Blight Task Force⁵ whose purpose was to address every blighted structure in the city and clear every neglected vacant lot. The Foundation was actively involved in the development of task force recommendations for a citywide strategy to remove blight. Among the work done by the task force was the development of a tool that identifies “tipping point” neighborhoods where efforts on property rehabilitation or demolition should be focused. At the Skillman Foundation’s urging, a key driver of the tool is the number of children in the neighborhood, which meant that many of the Foundation’s neighborhoods would be prioritized for blight removal.

At the same time that blight was being removed, the foreclosure crisis that had begun to subside nationally was continuing to plague Detroit. By the end of 2014, there were approximately 62,000 properties at risk of foreclosure with as many as 10,000 young people potentially impacted in the Skillman Foundation’s six GNI target neighborhoods. The Detroit foreclosure crisis prompted the Foundation to mobilize its community leadership network to work with the Wayne County Treasurer’s Office and United Way for Southeastern Michigan to get the word out to their constituents regarding the availability of counseling and financial assistance to prevent the loss of their homes. Additionally, Loveland Technologies identified which occupied homes within one mile of neighborhood schools were at risk of foreclosure, and neighborhood leaders used this information to make a special effort to reach these owners so their properties were less likely to be foreclosed and become blighted.

As was the case with so much of the Foundation’s work during GNI, its many partners on the Blight Task Force helped to leverage private and public resources, including \$100 million in federal funding for blight removal. By 2015 the City had torn down more than 7,000 vacant homes, which was the largest scale of demolitions in the country. The Foundation-supported research to better understand the economic impact of blight elimination found that each demolition in the Detroit Hardest Hit Fund areas increased surrounding occupied home values by an estimated 4.2% or an average of \$3600 for \$209 million in total. The report provided financial proof that blight elimination has direct financial benefits, which helped to leverage an additional \$21.2 million in federal funding for blight removal.

⁵ The task force was formed by the White House as part of the federal investment package to Detroit and co-led by Dan Gilbert, Chairman of Rock Ventures and Quicken Loans; Glenda Price, then President of Marygrove College; and Linda Smith, Executive Director of U-Snap-Bac. The effort engaged many public and private sector partners including the Detroit Fire Department, DTE Energy, Rock Ventures, Loveland Technologies, Data Driven Detroit, PNC Bank, the Kresge Foundation and the Brightmoor Alliance, among others.

Members of the Blight Task Force continued to work on developing a vehicle for integrating regularly updated parcel level data with a variety of other information in order to expedite planning and community services. As a result, the City now has an Open Data Portal that both provides consistently reliable information and, as importantly, sets a standard for data transparency in the City.

Enhancing Safety

Rationale: As escalating levels of violence in the target neighborhoods were eroding what little sense of security neighborhood residents felt, neighborhood residents were becoming more focused on safety in their own organizing efforts. The Foundation then determined that safety needed to be elevated because children cannot thrive if they do not feel safe in their own neighborhoods.

Changemaking Strategies:

- Playing a coordinating role with various public/private/community partnerships.
- Strengthening the capacity of the Detroit Police Department to fulfill its mission.
- Creating the timely availability and encouraging the use and sharing of crime data.

Before the Foundation instituted a formal safety strategy within GNI, the Skillman Foundation was a key supporter of Detroit's Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (YVPI) in several neighborhoods which, working with the City and the U.S. Department of Justice, leveraged nearly \$5 million in public and private investment for two of GNI's neighborhoods. This was followed by a DOJ grant of \$1.5 million for YVPI's Operation Ceasefire. The Foundation also worked to link Operation Ceasefire with its youth employment and boys of color work and invested early on in restorative practice.

The Skillman Foundation's formal safety strategy, launched in 2012, built on previous work with the aim to increase the actual and perceived safety of children through the engagement and alignment of efforts of the broad cross-section of stakeholders, including residents, community leaders, neighborhood associations, the Detroit Police Department, Detroit Public Schools and other critical civic institutions.

With the assistance of federal resources, the Foundation was instrumental in strengthening the organizational capacity of the Detroit Police Department by providing the training, tools and resources necessary to become more effective at Community Embedded Policing. The Neighborhood Police Officer (NPO) program enables each police precinct throughout the city to

Safety Grantmaking Example: Detroit Crime Commission

Skillman funded the Detroit Crime Commission to expand the Threat Assessment and Intelligence Project, a comprehensive crime prevention strategy that uses community intelligence and threat assessment, gang intervention, nuisance abatement, landlord training and criminal investigations and analytical support. The intelligence collected is used to guide neighborhood leaders and citizen patrols in their individual assignments in Brightmoor, Cody Rouge, Osborn and Southwest Detroit. The project also provided case management services for youth who wanted to retire from the gang lifestyle.

create a different form of police presence with police officers assigned to specific portions of the precinct's boundaries. The Skillman Foundation's grantmaking to the Detroit Public Safety Foundation equipped NPOs with reliable technology such as cellphones and laptops that provided data to drive action in response to incidents and facilitated communication between NPOs and residents. The increased presence of NPOs fostered growing trust among residents and business owners in their ability to address community needs. The NPOs also became active participants in community events and lead youth programs such as CITI Camp, creating more positive experiences for individuals who may have otherwise had negative associations with police officers.

In 2013, the Skillman Foundation joined forces with other funding partners including Kresge Foundation to help bring the AmeriCorps Urban Safety Project to more neighborhoods across Detroit after its initial success in Midtown. Managed by the Wayne State Center for Urban Studies, the purpose of the project is to encourage the timely availability, use and sharing of CompStat⁶ crime data among a coalition of neighborhood stakeholders working to improve safety. Monthly neighborhood CompStat meetings are attended by WSU's Center for Urban Studies, the local Detroit Police Department precinct, public safety agencies, resident safety patrol organizations and block clubs, and representatives from schools and community organizations working on safety efforts. These meetings helped diverse partners share data to identify crime trends and, together, generate alternative legal and social solutions to address crime, and influence accountability among the multiple entities at the table. Since 2009, the reduction in crime in the Foundation's target neighborhoods has outpaced that of the city.

As with nearly all of the Skillman Foundation's work in GNI, playing a coordinating role with various public/private/community partnerships has been critical to the success of the Foundation's efforts to transform the community culture related to safety. Often this involved acting as a behind-the-scene broker between key partners, such as the Detroit Police Department, Detroit Public Schools Police Department, City of Detroit, U.S. Attorney's Office and CeaseFire Detroit.

To make sure that GNI's six neighborhoods were a priority and had the capacity to align the efforts, the Skillman Foundation identified key neighborhood partners and funded safety coordinators in each of the neighborhoods. Participants have credited this coordination with reduced competition for resources and less duplication of services.

Advancing Youth Employment

Rationale: In 2008, the Foundation began youth employment work in the six target neighborhoods to respond to youth who expressed a need for exposure to employment. The Skillman Foundation also pointed to research showing that young people with early exposure to careers are more likely to persist in their education and are more likely to earn more and avoid substance abuse and incarceration.

Changemaking Strategies:

- Creating the multi-sector Youth Employment Consortium, thus constructing the infrastructure for receiving federal funds.
- Partnering with the City of Detroit to expand the citywide youth employment system.
- Supporting the development of technology to improve the experience for youth and employers.

Recognizing that there were few public or private dollars supporting summer youth employment in the city, in 2008 the Skillman Foundation worked with the Youth Development Commission and its partner organizations to create a pilot project that funded 300 jobs in the six target neighborhoods. The Foundation also convened the partners to share experiences and best practices, which led to the formation of a learning community. Collectively, the learning community was able to persuade the City of Detroit and Michigan's Department of Labor and Economic Growth to participate and commit resources, craft a mission, generate recommendations and establish itself as the Youth Employment Consortium (YEC).

Chaired by the staff of the Skillman Foundation, the YEC was a public-private partnership that was committed to expanding summer and year round employment opportunities for Detroit youth ages 14-18. When \$11 million in federal funding became available in 2009 through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, YEC members served as chief strategists and guides for the implementation of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEI). The Skillman Foundation provided an additional \$500,000 for implementation of the program. This groundwork ultimately led to a new way of doing business: Strong City/intermediary collaboration with philanthropic leadership and corporate involvement.

While the SYEI was successful in placing several thousand young people in meaningful summer jobs, the Skillman Foundation believed that the program needed greater coordination and funding to achieve large-scale impact, including stronger corporate involvement. The Foundation worked in partnership with Mayor Duggan and the City of Detroit to launch the Grow Detroit's Young Talent initiative (GDYT) and committed public funding to develop a coordinated youth employment program with both quality and scale in order to link the next generation of workers to the future economy. GDYT is supported by a coalition nearly 30 funders beside the Skillman Foundation, including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Knight Foundation, Detroit Pistons, JP Morgan Chase, Lear Corporation, and Bank of America Charitable Foundation.

In 2015, Mayor Duggan committed public dollars to expand the program and challenged Detroit employers to match him dollar for dollar to ensure 5,000 young people not only had jobs, but also had experiences that built work readiness skills and provided insights into the world of work. Corporations and others got involved, such as Bank of America, DTE, Chase, Wayne County and Wayne County Mental Health.

The Skillman Foundation played a critical role in the planning, design and outreach for GDYT. The

**Youth Employment Grantmaking
Example:
Employment Solutions Corporation**

The Skillman Foundation provided grant funding to the Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation (DESC), the 2016 lead implementation agency for Grow Detroit's Young Talent work readiness and summer youth employment initiative. Through this funding, DESC expanded opportunities for young Detroiters aged 14-24, helping them gain work experiences, build relationships and enhance their education. The project is a collaborative effort among Mayor Mike Duggan, the Skillman Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Detroit Employment Solutions Corp. to create jobs for Detroit teens during the summer through an eight-week summer work program designed to create career pathways.

Foundation’s \$500,000 grant initially covered most of the costs of GYDT, including the wages of participants. As capacity was built over time, the Skillman Foundation was able to refocus its investment on the development of an integrated technology system, infrastructure to increase the efficiency, impact, quality, coordination and sustainability of the initiative, and recruitment of corporate donors and hosts for employment sites. By co-hosting a “Breakfast of Champions” event with Mayor Duggan and the Detroit Regional Chamber, the Foundation also helped garner cross-sector support for GDYT and bring visibility to the launch of its online portal.⁷ In 2016, GYDT served more than 8,000 youth with the number expected to grow annually.

Catalyzing Education Reform

Rationale: The Skillman Foundation found that the instability and lack of engagement of educational leadership, a shifting political landscape, distressed neighborhoods, and the sheer magnitude of school challenges meant that while high school graduation rates in target neighborhoods consistently increased during GNI, the Foundation’s school improvement initiatives did not achieve the citywide, system-wide transformation of education in Detroit that the Skillman Foundation desired.

Changemaking Strategies:

- Creation and co-chairing of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren.
- Convening of the Citywide Education Leadership Cabinet.
- Supporting efforts to reach legislative action to resolve Detroit Public Schools debt and governance challenges.

Although the intent of the Skillman Foundation’s education programming has always been to strengthen the conditions that contribute to educational success for Detroit’s children, the Foundation’s education efforts varied over GNI’s 10 years but focused primarily on expanding high-quality educational opportunities for children in GNI neighborhoods through investments in selected schools, supporting technical assistance providers like the Good Schools Resource Center and disseminating information to parents and families. These efforts had limited success in the city’s chaotic educational environment. The Foundation’s changemaking attempts to improve the ecosystem included creating a cross-sector group of education leaders and foundations, Excellent Schools Detroit (ESD), to champion the cause of high-quality education; an ESD-led, failed petition drive to call on the city council to place the issue of mayor-controlled schools for DPS on the ballot in 2010; and promoting the creation of a recovery district, the Education Achievement Authority (EAA), with Carol Goss serving as chair.

Learning from these efforts, beginning in 2013, the Skillman Foundation became much more intentional regarding its use of civic leadership to catalyze significant education reform. The Skillman Foundation launched dialogues with the governor and the mayor about a potential redesign of the Detroit education landscape. At the core of the design was to be a newly established Detroit education office that would act as a “portfolio manager” for all Detroit

⁷ <http://gdyt.org>

schools and provide oversight over all school systems and charters in the city. The Skillman Foundation recognized that this effort would require convening significant political support, as well support from the philanthropic and corporate sectors, including financial capital, policy advocacy and specific expertise to complement aspects of the work.

The Skillman Foundation also understood the risks of working closely with two prominent politicians with their own agendas, unduly raising expectations and potential conflict in the community and the opportunity costs associated with pulling away staff and resources from valuable building-level work. But the Foundation believed the risks were worth the reward, which led to the Skillman Foundation’s call for the creation the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren in late 2014. Led by five co-chairs, including Tonya Allen, the Coalition was a cross-sector group of Detroit’s leaders working to rationalize the city’s system of schools.

Skillman provided supplemental funding for a largely volunteer-based project management team to staff the Coalition and to provide critical infrastructure to the 36-member steering committee and each of the six subcommittees. The three major priorities that emerged from the work were: 1) Detroit Public School (DPS) debt relief; 2) DPS governance; and 3) creation of the Detroit Education Commission (DEC) and its governance in order to create an even playing field for all schools and enable real school choice for students and their families

Throughout the process, the Skillman Foundation convened a Citywide Leadership Cabinet comprised of the leaders of DPS, EAA, Excellent Schools Detroit, and the city of Detroit. Meeting on a weekly basis, the purpose was to keep everyone abreast of the constantly changing landscape and to identify immediate, “shovel-ready” projects that the cabinet could work on collaboratively in alignment with the Coalition’s report and potential legislation.

At the same time, the Coalition was implementing its legislative strategy by exerting pressure and asking its allies to help compel the mayor and governor to align their recommendations early in order to have a singular voice in Lansing with the Coalition’s advocacy work and the drafting of proposed legislation arising from the Coalition’s recommendations. Legislative packages were ultimately introduced in 2016 in both the Michigan Senate and House of Representatives. Coalition members testified at hearings for both chambers related to the Detroit schools bills. At the same time, the Skillman Foundation monitored its behavior to ensure strict abidance by the IRS regulations that forbid private foundations from lobbying.

Education Grantmaking Example: 482Forward

The Skillman Foundation provided grant funding for 482Forward, a citywide education organizing network in Detroit comprised of neighborhood organizations, parents and youth committed to ensuring that all Detroit children have access to an excellent education. 482Forward works with existing neighborhood-based organizations such as social service agencies, youth development groups and neighborhood associations to help them build an education organizing program. 482Forward was extensively involved with organizing in support of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren.

In the end, the Michigan Legislature passed and Governor Snyder signed into law a package of legislation that achieved some variation of most of the Coalition’s major recommendations except for the Detroit Education Commission. Significant achievements included a six-bill package that retired \$467 million in debt and provided another \$150 million for the creation of a new, debt-free district; restored local control of DPS via the election of a new school board in November 2016; authorized the hiring of a new superintendent with financial oversight provided by the Financial Review Commission; mandated the absorption of the Education Achievement Authority back into Detroit Public Schools; and gave the School Reform Office the ability to close poor-performing public or charter schools.

Beyond the education significance of the legislative package, the Skillman Foundation was able to grow its political and policy capital, build and exercise “civic muscle” by running a strong campaign that involved a diverse cross-section of Detroiters, and effectively use advocacy, media, organizing, demonstration, and debate to activate and engage a broad array of civic and business stakeholders.

5. Analysis of The Skillman Foundation’s Changemaking Efforts

The scope and pace of change that occurred in Detroit over the 10-year period of GNI required the Skillman Foundation to continuously reexamine its work and quickly pivot to address new challenges, as well as to take advantage of new relationships and opportunities, some of which were made possible or at least revealed by the very crises facing the city. The Skillman Foundation learned many valuable lessons in the process. The analysis that follows documents the factors that contributed to the Foundation’s success as a civic leader, describes how the Foundation utilized its relationships, leadership, and community-connectedness to bring about change, and discusses the risks and challenges the Skillman Foundation encountered as it transitioned from being a traditional grantmaker to its role as a changemaker.

Building a Foundation for Civic Leadership

At the outset of GNI, the Foundation recognized that it needed to **strengthen its own culture and capacity** to be successful in the six target neighborhoods. A Skillman Foundation staff member remarked:

“When I started, the Skillman Foundation’s offices were still in the Renaissance Center. Visitors had to go past security, take the elevator and wear a badge. Our board wanted us to be less like that. That’s why they hired Carol Goss, and that’s why she hired the people she did.”

To help the Skillman Foundation **learn new strategies for more deeply engaging neighborhood residents**, the Foundation sought guidance from others in the field and partnered with technical assistance providers to roll out a series of community planning meetings that were often translated in both Arabic and Spanish, the first languages of many neighborhood

residents. These meetings always served food and provided daycare. The Skillman Foundation staff spent a lot of time in the neighborhoods in these and other meetings, listening and demonstrating that they wanted to hear from residents directly, not filtered through neighborhood nonprofits or stakeholders.

The time and energy it required to become more deeply rooted in the neighborhoods paid off for the Skillman Foundation. Interviews and external stakeholder data collected by The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP) revealed that there were two core characteristics of the Skillman Foundation that undergirded its changemaking work:

- Having a sharp mission focus on improving the lives of children.
- Being deeply rooted in community.

According to CEP, the words most often used to describe the Foundation were “committed,” “involved” and “leadership.” The Skillman Foundation’s most frequently mentioned strength was its long-term investment in the community. Stakeholders particularly underscored the Foundation’s commitment to young people in Detroit community, its “tenacious focus” on the future of education and its involvement in the life of the community.

Because of the accrual of trust and respect that was built over time, neighborhood residents knew that the Skillman Foundation’s “heart was in the right place” even when they did not agree with decisions or positions taken by the Foundation. By keeping children front and center to the Foundation’s work—and by honoring resident and youth voice—the Skillman Foundation was often given the benefit of the doubt because people trusted its underlying motives. A Foundation Trustee stated, “The Skillman Foundation earned the right to be heard” because its relationships in the community were strong and its customers knew and trusted it:

“It pollinated in the leadership that the Skillman Foundation showed in pulling together the broad-based community leadership for the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren. It was a very gutsy thing to do that didn’t accomplish everything they wanted, but they accomplished a lot. The Skillman Foundation’s brand was enhanced by that whole process.”

Internally, the Skillman Foundation **strengthened its communications/media capacity to build public and private will**. President & CEO Tonya Allen authored a number of guest columns in the Detroit Free Press, including the article “Stop fighting one another – fight for real school change” in support of a proposal by Excellent Schools Detroit that recommended centralizing some basic services such as enrollment and transportation, and calling on Mayor Duggan to play a role in helping to improve Detroit’s education landscape (Allen, 2014). Other staff from the Skillman Foundation directly addressed the Foundation’s civic leadership role, such as in a blog “Philanthropy as a Platform for Civic Leadership” (McGhee, 2016).

Over time, the Skillman Foundation also developed a very robust social media strategy that was most effectively used in the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren. According to a

former program officer, “It was way more dynamic and powerful than holding a press conference. You have to be able to turn on a dime and mobilize to get 400 people at a meeting on short notice or get them in front of legislators. The Foundation learned how to do that by working with leaders on the ground and a having a core set of policy making organizations that were well-respected with strong brand values in Lansing, working in concert with a communications strategy that was very nimble.” However, another staff member lamented, “We need to spend more time and energy on our use of new technology [to tell our story better]. I believe that by not doing this sooner we lost an opportunity to be able to fully show the field what we’ve done.”

Public policy was critical because of its potential to catalyze large-scale change, but it was also a relatively new tool for the Skillman Foundation. The Foundation began **building its public policy capacity** by hiring a program officer with public policy experience. The Skillman Foundation also maintained a public policy grant portfolio that funded advocacy and reform organizations such as Education Trust and Michigan’s Children. Through this portfolio, the Skillman Foundation built its capacity to frame issues, rally allies to the cause, and support public policy implementation while scrupulously remaining within federal rules prohibiting foundations from direct lobbying. The Skillman Foundation also provided many of its public policy grantees with general operating rather than project support to strengthen organizational capacity and provide greater latitude to make a public policy difference. At the same time, the Foundation staff members acknowledge that the Foundation does not yet have a strong enough policy focus for its work and has missed some opportunities to take on practical, tangible projects, as well as larger policy change efforts such as state rules regarding the application of TANF and its effect on low-income families, which is much “bigger than Detroit.”

Leveraging Change through Relationships⁸

Relationships—from the six target neighborhoods to the White House—were at the core of the Skillman Foundation’s civic leadership during the GNI, and the Foundation was very intentional and strategic about building and nurturing them at all levels. The Foundation began its work in the six target neighborhoods with the assumption that staff would need to get to know and be by residents and stakeholders. Like other foundations trying to work in partnership with low-income communities, the Skillman Foundation faced the challenge of **building trust across class and, sometimes, racial/ethnic lines**. A program officer from the Skillman Foundation noted of the Foundation’s relationship building at the neighborhood level:

“It’s not a consensus-building strategy, but a respect strategy. I am not trying to build community support for what we are doing; I am trying to build community understanding and maintain mutual respect and transparency. They may want to join us, but that’s not the primary goal.”

⁸ Much of the content regarding the Skillman Foundation’s use of relationships is drawn from Prudence Brown’s article “Changemaking: Building Strategic Competence” in the 2012 Volume 4:1 issue of the *Foundation Review*.

There were times during the GNI when the Skillman Foundation failed to heed its own advice and had—in the words of Tonya Allen—“civic leadership aspirations but used grantmaking tools.” Allen recalled the beginning of the safety strategy when young people were being murdered in Detroit, and the Skillman Foundation tried to use its convening power to find strategies for addressing the problem. Unlike the neighborhood residents in the room, the Skillman Foundation knew little about gang violence and youth crime but still tried “jumping to solutions before building relationships.” The Skillman Foundation learned from this experience and redoubled its efforts to place relationship building at the forefront of its work.

The Foundation’s **trustees were also involved in this process**. Board meetings and site visits began to incorporate more opportunities for trustees to learn about the conditions facing neighborhood residents. Many board meetings were held in the neighborhoods, in community centers and schools. Youth and resident leaders were frequently invited to speak at trustee meetings. During a roundtable discussion at a neighborhood school where girls talked about the daily harassment they faced, one trustee was so personally moved that she began to expose the issue to a broader audience through a magazine she publishes. Board concerns like hers was one factor that ultimately led the Foundation to adopt an official safety strategy. This is just one of several examples where the Skillman Foundation’s trustees used their own platforms for building relationships and addressing issues that the Foundation cared deeply about.

During the GNI, the Skillman Foundation also became **more intentional about finding community partners and supporting good work that touched the lives of neighborhood residents**. For example, the Foundation supported youth-serving organizations and community anchors that had strong working relationships with residents. The Foundation’s approach also strengthened the work of core partners that reached deep into neighborhoods. While these were traditional grants, they had an impact that resonated at the neighborhood level and provided a “halo effect” that protected the Skillman Foundation when its positions on issues were not necessarily shared by neighborhood residents.

The Foundation’s consistent investment in resident engagement also helped **build its own partnership skills**, which allowed the Foundation to develop connections to people and institutions outside of the neighborhoods that had knowledge, resources, influence and power. Management encouraged staff to participate in professional associations, affinity groups and task forces; join collaborations and cross-sector issue groups; serve on or even lead nonprofit boards; and think strategically about what other venues would provide opportunities for learning and relationship-building related to the Foundation’s goals.

Throughout the GNI, **staff visibility** as key speakers, panelists, and planning committee members at both local and national conferences and meetings, **grew in scale and prominence**. The Skillman Foundation’s staff increasingly conducted briefings for the mayor and city council members and met frequently with city and state officials to provide counsel regarding key issues on the Foundation’s agenda. Over time, staff played significant leadership roles in a range of local collaborative enterprises like the Detroit Youth Employment Consortium and the

boys of color/MBK Initiative. These collaborations drew upon and expanded the Foundation's networks and reputation, further strengthening the platforms from which it could advance its agenda for youth.

The Foundation's leadership was particularly intentional about **building relationships with various federal officials and agencies**: Attending conferences and special meetings, working with key supporters who could advance these relationships, following up on referrals, facilitating a visit to the White House for trustees, and serving as the local host for visits to Detroit by various federal officials. Its investment in educating federal officials and the foundation community about work under way in Detroit, alongside its efforts to coordinate and support local efforts to attract national resources to the city, increasingly positioned the Foundation as an effective broker for many efforts involving national partners, both public and private.

These relationships at the federal level leveraged an influx of resources to Detroit. As described earlier, it was at the request of the White House that the Foundation hosted a series of MBK listening sessions in Detroit that helped make the city a logical choice for hosting the November 2016 "Pathways to Success: Boys and Young Men of Color Opportunity Summit." Along with others, the Skillman Foundation was also instrumental in attracting \$100 million in federal funding for blight removal and \$11 million through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to support the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEI).

Filling a Leadership Vacuum while Building the Capacity of Others to Lead

Foundations face many difficult choices about when and how to move into civic leadership roles. Ferris argues that developing "elasticity of roles" is a critical element of success for foundations that desire to engage in changemaking (Ferris J. M., 2017):

"Philanthropy must be able to rise to the occasion when needed, bending conventional practices as necessary to do so, and then be willing to pull back and play a supporting role when government is able and willing to reassert itself. The real challenge is getting the timing right."

The Skillman Foundation had to decide when it was appropriate to shape a leadership role for itself when there was a vacuum, and when to step back when others were better positioned to lead or when sufficient capacity had been built. This was true in the neighborhoods as well as citywide. According to one program officer for the Skillman Foundation, civic leadership was about knowing "when to shout and when to whisper." Another commented, "You have to know when to be at the front of the parade and when, for reasons of history, board politics, expertise, or some other idiosyncratic factor, it's best for someone else to lead."

The Skillman Foundation worked with the City of Detroit throughout GNI's 10 years, but this varied in intensity depending on the interest of elected officials and the challenges facing the City. The Foundation provided funding when the needs of the City aligned with the priorities of

the Foundation. Carol Goss commented that even during the worst of times, the city had resources that dwarfed those of the Foundation: “We can’t turn on the lights or pick up the trash, but we were always willing to consider grants to the City that would support our work in the neighborhoods.” A program officer stated, “Helping the City make payroll would be a bad choice, but funding a new Director of Youth Services position within city government does make sense.” The Director of Youth Services was responsible for managing and expanding Grow Detroit’s Young Talent and serving as the mayor’s liaison to the White House for MBK.

The Skillman Foundation also **assisted the City in building the grant infrastructure** to seek, take delivery of, and manage federal and state funding. For example, the Skillman Foundation supported the development of a grant management system and office, which hired a consultant to help the City navigate the federal application process and apply for funding. This made possible the flow of federal funding to Detroit for blight removal, safety and youth development.

Leadership is also about knowing *whom* to include. Tonya Allen said that one of her biggest revelations came when she realized that people and groups were vigorously working against some of the Skillman Foundation’s projects. Allen stated that the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren was a restart of earlier education reform efforts that were announced with bold declarations but stalled in part because they failed to include people with different views. This was a major learning that informed much of the Skillman Foundation’s work that followed. Allen stated, “It’s better to include people who disagree with you so you can figure out what you do agree on and where you’re willing to compromise.”

Throughout GNI, the Foundation stayed attuned to the **importance of building a self-generating pipeline of neighborhood leaders**. GNI’s resident leadership academy focused on two avenues for exercising neighborhood leadership. One was on building the leadership-muscle of home grown leaders who lived and resided in a place so they were prepared to take active ownership in making their neighborhood better. The second focused on those who wanted to exercise their influence beyond the neighborhood level by serving on nonprofit boards and running for office. Both types of leadership were instrumental in all of the Foundation’s key areas of work in the GNI. A program officer stated:

“The amount of leadership and capacity that has been built in these communities has been phenomenal. There is a lot of new, young leadership—people between the ages of 18-30 who have never been engaged before. There is now an advocacy infrastructure at the neighborhood level.”

Other GNI neighborhood leadership strategies included the creation of community-led governance groups, youth councils, and a resident-centered small grants program that served as an “effective way to surface and strengthen large numbers of grassroots groups and leaders,” as it awarded 815 grants totaling nearly \$2.8 million to 481 different groups (David Scheie et al, 2016).

Deploying “Civic Tech”

The utilization of data and technology is a relatively common function of foundations and is not, in and of itself, a civic leadership activity. However, the Skillman Foundation was involved in several efforts during the GNI where **greater capacity in the generation and use of technology and data, especially data created and/or consumed by neighborhood residents, was a critical enabler to the success of related civic leadership efforts.** What the Skillman Foundation refers to as “civic tech” was instrumental in building the capacity of institutions such as the Detroit Police Department to better serve residents, attracting outside resources to the City, and helping residents come up with their own solutions to the problems they faced.

In 2008—at the beginning of both the GNI and the housing crisis—the Skillman Foundation invited the Kresge Foundation to be an initial co-investor in the creation of Data Driven Detroit (D3). Both foundations realized that difficult choices were going to be required in Detroit, and that the process needed to be driven by high quality data. The initial launch of D3 was a learning process for everyone involved. A D3 staff member commented, “We quickly discovered that simply providing spreadsheets wasn’t very helpful to anyone, least of all to neighborhood residents.”

After the Skillman Foundation forged the partnership between D3 and Loveland Technologies—itsself the recipient of a program-related investment from the Skillman Foundation—there was a desire by all three organizations to have more real-time, user-friendly data gathered by neighborhood residents. The smart phone “Blexting” app developed by Loveland allowed residents to collect information on blighted properties, but a number of challenges had to be overcome. The first use of Blexting in the Brightmoor neighborhood “failed miserably,” according to one interviewee, because people owned antiquated and unreliable phones. The quality of work improved significantly once better phones were provided.

Further, neighborhood residents hired to collect the data faced transportation problems, family issues related to school and childcare, and concerns about background checks. Volunteers who donated their time to drive the neighborhood residents around to collect data often came from very different socio-economic backgrounds, and the discomfoting intersection of race and class created its own challenges to work through for both groups. By learning these lessons in one neighborhood, the blight effort was much better positioned for citywide deployment.

Data and technology in support of civic leadership were also critical to the success of the Neighborhood Police Officer program and CompStat crime data in the safety arena, and to the successful management of Grow Detroit’s Young Talent in youth employment. In addition, the Skillman Foundation found some of its success with “data walks” to help staff, trustees, grantees, and neighborhood residents achieve a better understanding of local problems and potential solutions (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2015). For example, in 2014-2015 the Foundation organized data walks in four neighborhoods where as many as 400 people viewed data-rich but easy-to-understand posters about key issues affecting young people, and then engaged in roundtable conversations with their fellow residents regarding potential

solutions. While these data walks were intended to help participants analyze and interpret information about issues that impact their lives, they also have the potential to inspire collective action. **Like other investments in data and technology, their payoff comes from embedding them in robust program strategies with specific goals over time.**

The Interplay of Neighborhood and Systems Change

Many of the people interviewed for this essay believe that there is a **strong symbiotic relationship between the neighborhood/grassroots work and the broader, citywide systems change agenda** that the Skillman Foundation pursued. Tonya Allen emphasizes, “We elevate the neighborhoods, lift them up as places to collaborate. They became magnetic, attracting interest and resources from new directions. They have now become part of the narrative of the city.”

On the other side of the coin, blight, safety, youth employment, and challenges facing boys and young men of color were all issues that surfaced first as priorities of neighborhood residents, well before the Skillman Foundation formalized them as key areas of work in the GNI. Therefore, policy, partnership, and leverage wins such as federal funding for blight removal and public safety, MBK, and Grow Detroit’s Young Talent, have their origins in the neighborhoods.

Neighborhood residents also made significant contributions to the Skillman Foundation’s education reform work, especially the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren. The Foundation found that it was far more effective having neighborhood residents speak in real time about how policy affected them than it was to publish a brochure or place a blog about the issue on the Foundation website.

The Skillman Foundation’s stakeholders also point to the interplay between neighborhood-level capacity and system-change goals:

“Change is happening in Detroit so quickly that it is difficult to keep up. I think some of the work that Skillman has done has positioned some of the neighborhoods to even be a part of the current conversations. Skillman’s work developed some leadership that can be included in what are now much broader conversations about the city and neighborhoods.”

Another stakeholder commented, “I’d be interested to know what impact the neighborhood strategy has had to date and what plans exist to continue the progress thus far. What has the Foundation heard from its grantees related to the next role for the Foundation? My feeling is that these long-term relationships that have been developed can serve to inform the next opportunities for the Foundation.”

The Risks and Challenges of Exercising Civic Leadership

Civic leadership puts a foundation’s political and social capital—and its reputation—on the line, so missteps can be costly, both internally and externally. The Skillman Foundation was aware of

the risks involved and did everything in its power to mitigate them. Its experience during GNI points to the following observations:

Civic leadership is highly context-specific, and the context can often change rapidly, as was the case in Detroit. This requires the ability to rapidly assess the trajectory and scope of change, and the flexibility to be able to respond to it. A foundation that anticipates change, and thus devotes time and resources to reconnaissance, is better positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities that arise from it and to abandon other lines of action that will no longer bear fruit.

Civic leadership requires frequent communication about a foundation's goals and strategies and an ongoing invitation for critique and constructive input. Foundations need to continuously assess the clarity and quantity of information they provide to neighborhood residents, grantees, and other stakeholders in order to keep everyone on the same page and not overpromise. Because large-scale change takes time, there is always the challenge of making sure to put systems in place to be able to track and communicate progress and keep people engaged long enough to see that progress. The same is true for foundation boards. Trustees need to be totally on-board, and there should be no surprises when situations unfold in ways that were not expected. There must be frequent, honest communication between the foundation executive and trustees. Often, getting input from trustees cannot always wait until the next board meeting.

Civic leadership entails thoughtful choices about where to invest time and resources. This work is all about relationships, but building and sustaining relationships is time consuming. It is impossible to know when or if a particular relationship will pay off, so civic leaders need to be strategic about forming and preserving as many relationships as possible with a diverse range of public, private and nonprofit stakeholders. They also need to spread relationships out among staff, so that when staff leaves, not all of the foundation's relationships leave with them. The time demands of civic leadership mean that foundation leaders may not be able to devote as much attention to ongoing operations as would be optimal, or to be as responsive to other important issues, including ones that might attract the collaboration and investment of other funders. Therefore, opportunity costs need to be weighed against the potential benefits of any particular opportunity for civic leadership.

Because civic leadership raises the public profile of foundations, there is a much greater chance that people will hold them accountable when things go wrong, even for issues that are largely outside of their control. For example, Detroit now has a publicly-elected school board, which was a major desired outcome of the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, but there is no guarantee that this new school board will make decisions that are in alignment with the desires of the Foundation's stakeholders, including neighborhood residents.

6. Concluding Thoughts

Much has been written lately about philanthropy's contributions to reshaping Detroit. The Skillman Foundation was one of several foundations that played a civic leadership role in Detroit over the past 10 years. Some of them had much larger grantmaking budgets than the Foundation. But given its determination to change the trajectory for children in Detroit, the Foundation increasingly came to recognize and animate its critical role in civic leadership. As one program officer admitted, "We knew we couldn't 'grant-make' our way out of this."

Patience, persistence, and self-reflection were important to the Foundation's success and its increasing capacity to learn and reflect. When the Skillman Foundation lacked the skills and relationships necessary to be a changemaker, it worked hard to develop them. When a particular effort was not achieving the desired results, the Skillman Foundation recalibrated and tried new approaches. When conditions were not favorable or when allies were not readily apparent, the Skillman Foundation looked for more promising civic leadership opportunities to pursue. Despite a number of missteps and challenges along the way, the Skillman Foundation—as one program officer put it—"failed forward fast," with the support of an engaged board that was committed to improving the lives of young people in Detroit. Given its ambitions for Detroit's children, civic leadership will likely continue to be an increasingly important dimension of the Skillman Foundation's work going forward.

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