Paving a Road of Hope

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Paving a Road of Hope
Reflections on the First 10 Years of Marguerite Casey Foundation

change is possible.™
Traveler, there is no road. Traveler, you make the road by walking.

– Antonio Machado
When the creators of Marguerite Casey Foundation envisioned a society in which all families could prosper and provide a secure future for their children, they knew they were embarking on a journey without maps. They took to heart, however, Spanish poet Antonio Machado’s words: “Traveler, there is no road. Traveler, you make the road by walking.”

Convinced that families knew best what they needed to succeed, the foundation went to the families themselves for direction, asking how a grantmaking foundation could best help them in their efforts to create an equitable future for their children.

The next step was to listen. Only then did the foundation act.

The Ask, Listen, Act approach has served Marguerite Casey Foundation well during its first decade. As the foundation moves into its second decade, it is an opportune time to tell the story of families making a road by walking it. From the charitable legacy of American entrepreneur Jim Casey and his siblings, to the creation of a family-centered foundation with an innovative grantmaking approach, to a nationwide family-led movement, the story of Marguerite Casey Foundation is proof that change is possible.

Since its inception in 2001, Marguerite Casey Foundation has strategically focused its grantmaking – and non-grantmaking work – to nurture a movement of families advocating on their own behalf for change.
A Passion From
the Beginning

“The destiny of us all is, to a large extent, in the keeping of each of us.”

Jim Casey
Founder
United Parcel Service
Born near the turn of the 20th century, Jim Casey knew the hard work necessary to keep a family fed, clothed and healthy. When his father became ill, Casey left school at age 11 and went to work as a messenger boy in Seattle to help his family. His father died four years later, leaving his widow, Annie E. Casey, and Jim and his three siblings to make their way together.

At age 19, Jim and his brother started their own messenger business, which would eventually become UPS (United Parcel Service), headquartered in Seattle’s Pioneer Square.

As the business grew, Casey noticed that the best and most motivated workers came from tight-knit families like his own. If you have strong families, he believed, you would have a strong and prosperous America.

In 1948, Jim Casey and his siblings founded the Annie E. Casey Foundation, named in honor of their mother. Today, five Casey organizations focus on family and child welfare: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Casey Family Services, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, and Marguerite Casey Foundation, which was founded in 2001.

A complete picture of Marguerite Casey Foundation would not be possible without knowing the groundwork laid for the organization by Casey Family Programs. Founded in 1966 by Jim Casey, Casey Family Programs is the nation’s largest operating foundation devoted to improving the child welfare system. Its work has affected the lives of tens of thousands of families and foster children and carried on the Casey family’s passion for improving the lives of vulnerable children and families.

Thanks to the gifts of the estates of Jim Casey’s siblings Marguerite and Harry, Casey Family Programs was a financially independent program, but, in 1999, when UPS went public, Casey Family Programs’ assets exploded overnight. Ruth Massinga, then president and CEO, believed the organization should use the financial opportunity to create a grantmaking foundation that would complement Casey Family Programs, which, as an operating foundation, did not make cash grants. The new foundation would focus on strategies to preserve at-risk families, with the goal of preventing the need for child welfare services.

Nov. 10, 1999. UPS sells 10 percent of its stock in an initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange. Stock prices opened at $64.51 a share.

“A Passion From the Beginning

Marguerite Casey was like a ‘godmother’ to foster kids. She attended ceremonies, made contact with kids and acted as a benefactor.”

Gary Severson
Casey Family Programs Board of Trustees
Strategic Listening: A Confluence of Voices

“The idea of listening to what people are doing and then supporting it is still incredibly innovative.”
Patricia Schroeder
Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors
In January 2000, Casey Family Programs commissioned a paper on the potential form, function and impact of the proposed grant-making foundation. The consultant’s findings were unequivocal: To effectively support at-risk families, the new foundation should strategically target entrenched poverty and its interrelated issues.

In August 2000, Casey Family Programs assembled a task force of experts and innovators from the public and private sectors, encouraging them to think creatively and work collaboratively in setting the course for the new foundation. Summary notes from its meetings reveal a group excited about the process and the goal of “creating something entirely new” in the field of philanthropy.

The task force believed collaboration should drive the work of the foundation and that community participation was an essential part of that collaboration. The group also suggested that the foundation enable rather than supervise grantees and that it experiment with different approaches in grantmaking.

As the discussion evolved, the task force advocated a bold entrepreneurial foundation that would use a venture capital–style philanthropic model. Instead of accepting unsolicited proposals, the foundation would seek out grassroots organizations that were effective in their communities and work collaboratively with them over an extended period. The task force believed families knew best what they needed to succeed and that if grassroots organizations and their family constituents were given support and capacity-building tools, they would become their own change agents. The key, the advisers felt, was to leverage the foundation’s funds by making investments in organizations whose family-centered advocacy and activism would reap far-reaching social dividends: a change in public attitudes, policies and practices that would benefit vulnerable families.

To do this, the foundation would need a creative, dynamic and diverse board of directors and staff. One member of the task force – Dr. William Foege – agreed to serve on the board. Ruth Massinga, president and CEO of Casey Family Programs and two members of the Casey Family Programs board of trustees joined the new foundation’s board, as did two highly regarded higher education executives and a former U.S. congresswoman.

“Marguerite Casey Foundation was a product of much deliberation. The board of trustees spent time in conceiving this grantmaking foundation.”

Joan Poliak
Casey Family Programs
Board of Trustees;
Marguerite Casey
Foundation Board of Directors

Marguerite Casey was the youngest of the four siblings.
Marguerite Casey Foundation Board Members

Lynn Huntley (2008 – 2010)
Former president, Southern Education Foundation

Member and former chair, Casey Family Programs Board of Trustees; former chair, First Interstate Bank of Washington (now Wells Fargo) Board of Directors

Douglas X. Patiño (2001* – present),
Current secretary
Vice chancellor emeritus, The California State University System

David Villa (2008 – present)
Current treasurer
Chief investment officer, State of Wisconsin Investment Board

Member, Casey Family Programs Board of Trustees; executive director, Latino Health Access

Founding chair
Former president and CEO, Casey Family Programs

Vice chair, Casey Family Programs Board of Trustees; member, Child Welfare League of America Board of Directors

Freeman A. Hrabowski III (2001* – present)
Current chair
President, The University of Maryland, Baltimore County

William C. Bell (2006 – 2010)
President and CEO, Casey Family Programs

Former member, Casey Family Programs Board of Trustees; vice chancellor, Diocese of Olympia

William H. Foege (2001* – present)
Senior Fellow, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; professor emeritus, Emory University; former director, U.S. Centers for Disease Control

Patricia Schroeder (2001* – present)
Current vice-chair
Former member of the U.S. House of Representatives; retired president and CEO, Association of American Publishers

Underlined names are current board members
* Founding board members
To grow the new organization, the board of directors needed a visionary and experienced CEO, which they found in Luz Vega-Marquis. Vega-Marquis had direct experience as a community organizer and, as a result, a visceral understanding of the tenacity and determination necessary on the ground to effect change. Her experience in the nonprofit sector included serving as a program officer, senior program officer and director of grant programs for James Irvine Foundation; vice president and chief operating officer of the National Economic Development and Law Center; and executive director of Community Technology Foundation of California. She believed families knew what was best for themselves and their communities and would be their own best change agents – she had seen and lived it.

In December 2001, the board welcomed Vega-Marquis as the foundation’s president and CEO, and in January, Vega-Marquis outlined the relationship of Casey Family Programs and its new grantmaking sister organization: The two, she said, have “shared values and shared vision” but would “travel different paths to common goals.” The distinction was that Casey Family Programs worked directly with children and families, whereas the new foundation would effect change more broadly by connecting organizations with each other and by acting as an incubator for new ideas and efforts.

Later in 2002, the foundation selected its new name, Marguerite Casey Foundation, to honor Jim Casey’s sister, who had left the bulk of her fortune to Casey Family Programs.

With an endowment of $600 million, Marguerite Casey Foundation had the means to distribute around $30 million a year in grants. In preparation for its first year of grantmaking, the foundation began an exhaustive fact-finding mission – including commissioning papers from stakeholders and conducting interviews with experts on child and family welfare – to identify the most effective strategies to keep families intact and to identify the type of support that would most help grassroots organizations.

Next, Marguerite Casey Foundation went to the families themselves.

“Strategic Listening: A Confluence of Voices

2002. The foundation selects its new name, Marguerite Casey Foundation.
The foundation convened “listening circles,” meeting with more than 600 people in communities across the country and asking the same questions that had been posed to the child-welfare experts and other stakeholders:

If you had $30 million a year to ensure the well-being of children, families and communities, what do you think would be the best way to spend and leverage that money?

What creates healthy families and healthy communities?

What would it take to change the child welfare system and other systems that impact families?

The findings from the listening circles, the interviews with child-welfare experts, and the commissioned papers were remarkably consistent:

First, the respondents agreed that the family is the basic and most vital building block of American society, the principal identity of “family” being those who had primary responsibility to care for and raise its children.

Second, they suggested that rather than providing support for children directly, which potentially usurps the role of the family unit, the foundation should support empowering families so that they could support their own children.

Third, consistent with suggestions from the original task force, the foundation should focus on strategies to prevent the dissolution of families: providing grantees and their constituents with the tools and support to advocate policy and system change themselves.

Out of this confluence of voices came the foundation’s mission and vision statements:

Marguerite Casey Foundation exists to help low-income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities in order to achieve a more just and equitable society for all.

We imagine a just and equitable society for all, where all children are nurtured to become compassionate, responsible and self-reliant adults; where families are engaged in the life of their communities, the nation and the world; and where people take responsibility for meeting today’s needs as well as those of future generations.
Marguerite Casey Foundation exists to help low-income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities in order to achieve a more just and equitable society for all.
The findings were also used to set the foundation’s programmatic direction and grantmaking guidelines:

- Target funding where needs and opportunities are the greatest.
- Fund networking and capacity building to help grantees interact, share ideas and knowledge, and work together on common issues.
- Leverage support by partnering with other funders and the public and private sectors.

Following the task force’s suggestion, the foundation decided it would not accept unsolicited proposals; instead, its program officers would build around existing community networks when possible. The foundation also committed to convening its grantees on a regular basis to foster collaboration and movement building.

Internally, the foundation categorized organizations by the primary strategy they used in their work:

**Education**: Organizations providing families with practical knowledge and tools they need to succeed – from financial management and nutrition to citizenship and English as a second language classes – as well as direct human and social services.

**Advocacy**: Organizations actively working to improve policies and systems that affect families’ well-being.

**Activism**: Organizations actively engaging a family constituent base to shape policies, laws and systems that directly affect the families’ lives.
The foundation committed to convening its grantees on a regular basis to foster collaboration and movement building.
Initial public offering of shares in United Parcel Service, founded by Jim Casey, results in $1 billion windfall for Casey Family Programs.

1999

2000
New foundation incorporated as Casey Family Grants Program with an endowment of $600 million.

2001
Inaugural board of directors instated. Luz Vega-Marquis begins as president and CEO.

2002
Grantmaking guidelines are set and first grants awarded. Name changed to Marguerite Casey Foundation to honor Jim Casey’s sister.

2003

2004
Subregions Mississippi Delta and Rio Grande Valley created and network weavers hired to strengthen relationships between African-American and Latino communities. First regional convenings of grantees held.

2005
Following Hurricane Katrina, foundation creates an emergency relief fund to assist Gulf Coast residents and organizations with immediate needs and rebuilding efforts.
2006
Foundation establishes regional convenings as one of its core non-grantmaking strategies to build relationships and networks among grantees.

2007
Foundation and its grantees launch the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign, the goal of which is to mobilize and engage families in the development of a national family platform informed by the families themselves.

2008
Equal Voice campaign holds 65 town hall meetings across 12 states. Equal Voice for America’s Families National Family Platform is created by the engagement of 15,000 families and ratified in Chicago by 100 family delegates. Equal Voice campaign culminates in a three-city convention (Birmingham, Chicago and Los Angeles) with more than 20,000 participants – approximately 15,000 in person and 5,000 online.

2009
150 families present national family platform at National Press Club in Washington, D.C., and meet with 42 senators and representatives in a “Day of Action on the Hill.” Mini-grant program created to support grantee networks that emerged from or were strengthened by Equal Voice campaign. Launch of Equal Voice, an online newspaper that elevates the voices of low-income families and brings attention to issues and policies affecting their lives through original reporting.

2010
Marguerite Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs formally terminate their legal ties. Equal Voice becomes the framework for foundation’s grantmaking, communications and advocacy work in support of movement building.
From What to How: Structuring Grantmaking

HISTORY IN THE MAKING
The strategic decision not to accept unsolicited grant applications shaped Marguerite Casey Foundation’s grantmaking. Most philanthropic organizations focus their giving in a specific area or areas – health care or education, for example – and often have specific programs within those areas; grants are often short-term, ranging from one to five years. An organization’s programmatic focus may change, with the hiring of a new CEO or because of a new initiative the board of directors recommends.

Most grassroots organizations don’t count on long-term support from foundations, especially large national foundations – they are usually given a grant that includes a scope of work and a timeline. Most, indeed, have an arm’s-length relationship with their funders.

The foundation thought the way to effect long-term change was to give general operating support to community-based organizations over the long haul – a radical departure from most grantmaking foundations. The board and staff knew that leadership development and capacity building among families living in poverty could take years. If the grassroots organizations and the families and communities they worked with were to succeed, they needed a long-term partner to stand with them, and such long-term relationships would require mutual respect, trust and transparency.

If the foundation did not accept unsolicited proposals, how would it find the organizations it would support? Identifying potential areas of need was possible, in part, because of input from other Casey foundations. Since 1989, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has published an annual Kids Count Data Book that provides information on the well-being of children and families, nationally and by state, using indicators such as the percentage of children living in poverty and the percentage of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment.

The Kids Count data gave Marguerite Casey Foundation a snapshot of the regions and communities where families were in the most need. In some cases, other Casey foundations had existing relationships in those communities. The foundation identified four regions in which it would make grants – West (California), Southwest (Arizona, New Mexico and Texas), South (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Florida)

In its first 10 years, Marguerite Casey Foundation awarded $253,057,098 in 1,047 grants.

“...controversial issues when we started, but that discussion has turned out to be useful. Not accepting applications for grants, for example, probably felt difficult at first. But, by setting our own criteria, we were able to set up a different process of grantmaking. Looking at our results, we have come a long way quickly because we were focused – we weren’t trying to meet other people’s expectations of the right thing to do.”

Ruth Massinga
Former president and CEO, Casey Family Programs; founding chair, Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors
and Midwest (Chicago) – and awarded its first grants in those areas in November 2002, barely 18 months after it was formed.

By providing general operating support, the foundation could support advocacy efforts without directly advocating (the Internal Revenue Service dictates the percentage of funds foundations may use to influence public policy) and – as the task force had originally suggested – would enable organizations, not supervise them. The grantees, not the foundation, determined their priorities and public policy issues.

The grantmaking structure also shaped the dynamics of staff-grantee relationships. Unlike traditional program officers, Marguerite Casey Foundation program officers do not have budgets and, therefore, don’t “compete” with each other for larger budgets; nor do community organizations have to worry about “their” program officer being replaced by someone who may not have the same views. The relationship is with the foundation, not an individual.

To emphasize the foundation-grantee relationship, the board of directors holds its quarterly meetings in grantee communities. The board members arrive on a Saturday night and spend the following day meeting with constituents and partner organizations in the community, essentially conducting site visits with the organizations’ staff and leadership. The board meeting is then held on Monday. In this way, the board members learn about the grantees and their work and constituents firsthand, not from a report.
Marguerite Casey Foundation’s on-the-ground board meetings remove “living in poverty” from the sterility of statistics. Families experience poverty as an ensnaring web of interrelated issues that radiate from a center of financial insecurity. Yes, poverty is about money, but it is also about education, child care, health care, housing, community safety, transportation, jobs and justice, or the lack thereof.

**Poverty** is picking raspberries in the baking sun yet not having enough money to buy fresh produce for your own children.

**Poverty** is living in a neighborhood that has convenience stores and payday loan businesses but no grocery store.

**Poverty** is traveling hours each day on public transportation to get to and from a low-paying job.

**Poverty** is working two or more jobs to keep the family together, yet not having time to be with your family.

**Poverty** is taking your child to a hospital emergency room during an asthma attack because you can’t afford private care.

But in the face of poverty, where does one start? The foundation believed that the starting point was to strengthen grassroots organizations working in low-income and poor communities and then connect those organizations and their constituencies so that they could make enough collective “noise” to push the issues confronting poor families and communities to the national stage.

**Strategies for Building a Way Out of Poverty**

**Poverty** is having to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table.

**Poverty** can trap families for generations, grinding down hope and replacing it with fatalism.

Marguerite Casey Foundation’s alternative vision is of a nation in which all families have the opportunity to prosper – where all families have access to living-wage work; quality, affordable health care and child care; education opportunities; an equitable justice system; and safe, affordable housing and communities – and a nation in which public perception, policy and practice promote every family’s ability to reach its potential and advance the common good.
To that end, the foundation would look for certain characteristics in choosing which organizations to fund, characteristics that might also be key to creating a larger movement. The organizations would:

› Be established “cornerstone” groups working in low-income communities.

› Have a base of low-income families and a desire to expand that base.

› Train parents to be community leaders, advocates and/or organizers.

› Have a record of success in achieving policy change at the local level.

The foundation was especially interested in organizations that devoted resources to leadership development, capacity building, long-term strategic planning, community mapping, action-research and risk investment.

Drilling down further, the foundation wanted community partners that would:

› Keep families whole and children safe by support of advocacy initiatives to change public policy and public perceptions.

› Promote civic engagement, giving voice to those who have historically had none.

› Support strong activism that allows families and youth to build greater knowledge, advocate in their own interest and contribute to a new generation of leaders.

› Enhance every family’s ability to understand and navigate the systems that impact their lives and the lives of their children.

› Examine and inform the advancement of social and economic policies that promote strong family and community development.

› Develop and broadly disseminate a knowledge base and validation of effective parenting practices.

› Work collaboratively with partners across all sectors to bring about true and lasting change.

The foundation sought organizations that were action-oriented and result-driven, whose leadership reflected their constituents, and that had the capacity or were willing to develop the capacity to help the maximum number of low-income families exercise their rights.

Grantees would come from many sectors: faith-based, community-based, labor-based and education-based. To help the maximum number of families, grantees would have to be willing to build long-term relationships with a variety of organizations dealing with different issues and based in different geographic, racial, ethnic and religious communities; develop cross-sector strategies, such as housing and health care; and, while working on short-term goals, keep in mind a long-term strategy that would benefit all families.

“We encourage robust dialogue that is sometimes uncomfortable, but necessary.”
Freeman Hrabowski III
Chair, Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors
The foundation was especially interested in organizations that devoted resources to leadership development, capacity building, long-term strategic planning, community mapping, action-research and risk investment.
A Brand Promise and Core Values
In 2003, Marguerite Casey Foundation adopted the brand promise Ask, Listen, Act, a learning approach the original task force had used to lay the groundwork for the foundation. Ask, Listen, Act reflected not only the foundation’s external learning philosophy but also its promise to continually question itself, reflect and improve. The foundation would ask meaningful questions, listen thoughtfully, and act appropriately on its findings and expect the same from its grantees.

To underscore what Marguerite Casey Foundation stood for and what framework it worked within, the foundation also adopted the following core values and guiding principles:

› **Diversity and Anti-racism**
We courageously confront racism and discrimination. We reflect the voices, experiences and interests of diverse cultural and social groups.

› **Equity**
We believe in a bottom-up approach to social change, one that treats everyone fairly and equitably. We strive to share information and best practices broadly with all grantees and with the field as a whole.

› **Learning and Growing**
We foster a driven learning community, where we learn from experience, each other, and the communities we serve. We believe that knowledge is powerful and that learning never ends.

› **Mutual Respect and Trust**
We create an environment of teamwork and trust where acceptance and dignity are experienced by all. We are responsible for our actions, words and attitudes and are accountable to always follow through.

› **Stewardship**
We are thoughtful and strategic in our grantmaking decisions. We make sound business decisions regarding the use of resources, and we are committed to good results.

› **Sustained Connections**
We seek to develop and strive to preserve permanent community connections for families. We believe in the power of strong relationships to effect community change.

› **Transparency**
We are open and honest in all we do. We strive to conduct our business with the utmost clarity and directness, so that others will always know where we stand.

*“Our motto ‘Ask, Listen, Act’ is built on the idea that the people who live in the communities have the answers.”*

Douglas Patiño
Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors
In 2003, the foundation built on its mission and vision in three ways: by creating a grantmaking fund for Washington state, by convening with Native American community and organization representatives, and by bringing leaders together for a movement-building strategy summit.

The Home State Fund was established in honor of the Casey family’s long philanthropic history in Washington state. The $1 million annual grantmaking fund was smaller than those for the other regions – where the need was greater – and the grants were smaller as well, ranging from $25,000 to $50,000 annually.

In contrast to the Home State Fund, the foundation’s desire to work with Native American organizations and communities – the most financially impoverished communities in the country – would mean covering a wide geography and a diverse cultural landscape. To explore strategies, the foundation convened elders, activists and scholars at the Gila River Indian Community in Phoenix, Ariz. Again, the foundation asked for advice and then listened: The participants urged the foundation to support Native Americans’ efforts to maintain “tribal knowledge” – traditions, religions, language and cultures – as well as to provide support for leadership development, technical assistance and interdisciplinary efforts so that they could build strong organizations.

The movement-building strategy summit in Seattle reinforced the importance of Marguerite Casey Foundation’s role as convener and connector of individuals and organizations interested in effecting social change.
Ask, Listen, Act reflected not only the foundation’s external learning philosophy but also its promise to continually question itself, reflect and improve.
Testing the Vision in the Field: Assessment and Networks
2003 also marked the foundation’s acknowledgment of the inherent challenges in designing a process to evaluate the impact of the foundation’s general operating support grants. At the end of a grant term, how would the board and staff be able to measure, as one board member put it, whether there was “a stronger, more secure set of families who really know how to go out there and hustle for themselves”?

Initially, the foundation decided to focus on evaluation efforts at four levels: individual grants; clusters of grants; cross-cutting metrics; and the performance of the foundation itself. At the individual grant level, the foundation instituted the use of closeout reports to document each grant. The closeout reports provide an overview of grantee activities and a discussion of how the organization met the movement-building objectives that it set for the grant period. The closeout reports do not drive decision-making regarding future funding, but serve as a record of each grant. The foundation also surveyed grantees to solicit their thoughts on evaluation, action research and communications – as well as their opinions on how the foundation could support efforts in those areas.

Although the foundation’s board and staff realized that – even with a clear mission – the path of a new organization is never a straight line, they nonetheless wanted to assess the foundation’s early direction to see if it was on course or needed some adjustments.

Marguerite Casey Foundation’s mission, vision, grantmaking, and relationship with its grantees were novel in the philanthropic sector. There was debate within the organization, for example, about whether, by not accepting unsolicited proposals, the foundation was ignoring its stated values of transparency and inclusiveness.

The foundation’s bold strategies were also of concern to some board members, who worried that the foundation’s course of action could put it on the fringe of the philanthropic community. The board, staff and grantees all agreed that despite its extensive resources, to accomplish the goal of creating a movement of low-income families would require resources beyond those of the foundation. If the philanthropic community viewed Marguerite Casey Foundation as an outlier, how would other funders be attracted to support the foundation’s grantees and vision?

Each year, the foundation surveys its grantees to determine how to better support them.
The grantees, on their part, were used to short-term programmatic support from foundations. Now they were dealing with a foundation that not only wished to support their goals and missions, but also had expectations of them in terms of leadership development and capacity building. Many grantees thought the foundation’s general operating support was too good to be true and were not yet ready to trust the foundation as a partner.

Despite those challenges, the board and staff remained resolute in their commitment to help low-income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities with the goal of achieving a more just and equitable society.

But how do you create a movement framework that is flexible enough to accommodate the various issues and the regional, cultural and political differences among the grantees and their constituents? Movements depend on collaboration and the ability of the adherents to find a common link that is stronger than their differences. To that end, the foundation began to strengthen ties among its grantee organizations, many of which were not aware of each other, even those working within the same region.

In 2004, the foundation began hosting regional meetings, or convenings, where grantees came together to reflect on their work; share their ideas, insights and experiences; and begin to build bonds that would foster collaboration and momentum. The first convenings were held in Birmingham, Ala., Chicago, Los Angeles and Phoenix. Through sharing lessons learned, regional communities began to form.

The convenings were not without their challenges, however. Some grantees had difficulty finding commonalities with other grantees. How could a group working on juvenile justice reform collaborate with a housing organization or a group working for immigrant rights? If they took time to build relationships with other organizations that had goals different from their own, how were they going to get their own work done? None of the grantees would say no to the effort, but they were not uniformly certain this networking was worth their concerted time and effort. The questions promoted more communication between the foundation and the grantees, and, using those conversations, the foundation continued to refine its language, thinking and actions on movement building.

The foundation’s commitment to low-income families served as a guidepost in this unmapped territory, and most of the grantees came to recognize that the common link among the groups was the linked futures of the families and communities they worked with.

In 2004, the foundation introduced a subregional strategy to foster active networking within and between specific geographic regions. The Mississippi Delta and the lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas were selected not only because of the dire poverty there, but also because communities in the Delta and Rio Grande Valley were charged up for change. It was also an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between African-American and Latino communities, which often viewed each other as competitors.

To facilitate cohesion among the organizations, the foundation hired a “network weaver” for each subregion. These facilitators obviated the need for grantee organizations to use their own staff to develop networks and ensured that the organizations were kept connected and informed.
“Movement building is cathedral building because it’s going to take some time. The most important thing we can do with the people we are working with is to get them to believe in themselves – that they can do it.”

Luz Vega-Marquis
President and CEO
Marguerite Casey Foundation
“For Marguerite Casey Foundation, which set out to achieve an incredibly ambitious goal of building a movement of low-income families, there was no road. We have made the road as we traveled. We set forth our vision, we stated the values that would frame our work, and we forged our path. It is in the pursuit of this path that we try things, we make progress, we learn about what works, we try more things and we move along the road toward a moment in time when all children and families are thriving. How will we know what we do not know? By continuing on our road, by evaluating our progress, by soliciting input, by making changes, by being open to new ideas and strategies and by pursuing our mission, vision and values with relentless consistency.”

Luz Vega-Marquis
President and CEO
Marguerite Casey Foundation

The convenings and regional networking fostered a better understanding among grantees and between the foundation and the grantees; excitement and a sense of possibility grew out of the shared experiences as well. The foundation’s definition of movement building – *Diverse communities linked together by shared values and goals who foster change by challenging public policy and entrenched attitudes that create barriers to prosperity and equality* – was being embraced by the grantees.

The foundation believed change was possible by working with cornerstone organizations which had highly engaged constituents. By creating networks of such organizations the foundation could foster a larger movement by promoting cross-system efforts. And thus it defined its change theory.

Also by working with organizations across ethnic lines, they would come to understand and respect the differences and commonalities among races and cultures.

Finally, to be effective, the foundation believed the larger network and its participating partners would have to constantly train, develop and promote new leaders.

If these organizations were connected across geographic regions, ethnicities and policy interests, they would benefit from shared overarching communication strategies.
Building a movement of low-income families

**Key drivers of change will facilitate…**

Greater organized self-advocacy and activism by working poor families with the skills, knowledge, access and support networks to be effective in reforming public policy

- **Cornerstone Organizations**
  - Well-established in target communities
  - Effective in training parents/youth as leaders, advocates and/or organizers
  - Successful in helping families achieve policy change

- **Highly Engaged Base of Constituents**
  - Skilled leaders - parents & youth - from low income neighbourhoods communities of color
  - Self-interest and education in community issues

- **Network of Networks**
  - Sustained connections between constituencies and organizations across regions and issue areas
  - Collective capacity for regional and national movement-building

- **Cross-Systems Change Efforts**
  - Successful policy reforms driven by working poor families using:
    - Facts based on action research
    - Strategic framing of issues
    - Institutional relationships

**…Movement-building**

- A substantial, growing, engaged constituent base comprised of working poor families and natural allies who share their interests
- Supported by strong, sustainable community-based organizations which are linked with each other regionally and cross-regionally and across disciplinary, ethnic, and ideological boundaries
- Benefiting from a sophisticated communications effort that utilizes strategic framing to shape media images of their issues and to ensure consistency of message across all participants
- Informed by excellent data and analysis as well as candid feedback from evaluation efforts
- Understand the needs and desires of different races and cultures while bringing a multicultural perspective to reform efforts
- Capable of responding quickly and decisively to opportunities as they arise via the collective capacity of a nimble, “21st Century” coordination structure that effectively uses technology
- Constantly renewing itself by identifying, training, and promoting new leaders within its ranks
Building a Movement: Convening, Collaboration and Communication
While investing in grassroots movements is a risk, it is also about trust and hope. The foundation, by supporting and convening cornerstone grassroots organizations across the country, saw that networks of groups could work together and expand their capacity to bring about change. The convenings became a critical strategy and would eventually lead to the foundation’s and its grantees’ first major campaign.

Collaborations among the grantee organizations were successful because the organizations were not competing against each other for resources. They were also successful because they made the organizations stronger. All the grantees faced challenges – whether in fundraising, leadership development, capacity building or community outreach – but if one was struggling, others might have faced and solved a similar problem and be able to help.

At first, it was difficult for many of the community-based organizations to look past their own agendas and goals, and many had different definitions of success depending on the nature and scale of their work. The convenings provided the opportunity for those organizations to put their work in context so that they could understand the systemic causes of poverty.

The foundation also turned its attention to creating vertical connections between its community-based grantees and its national grantees, both to connect local and regional work to national strategies, resources and policy, and to ground national work in local reality. The national organizations included such groups as American Friends Service Committee, American Indian Center, Inc., and Center for the Study of Social Policy, among others. National organizations also offered local and regional grantees the possibility of paving paths to policymakers.

Through the convenings in 2004 and 2005, the first unified theme emerged: “Voices of Working Families,” a series of conversations across the country about livable wages. At the roundtable discussions, working-poor families, grantee organizations, public policy officials and local opinion leaders brainstormed ways in which to address the fact that nearly 60 percent of all American workers earned little more than the minimum wage.
In the midst of those roundtable discussions, Hurricane Katrina slammed into the Gulf Coast. The resulting devastation, in particular in New Orleans, exposed the underbelly of poverty and race in America. The foundation gave $1 million in emergency relief to non-grantee groups and released more than $2 million early to local grantee organizations to accelerate their work. Over the next three years, the foundation would invest another $10 million in the Gulf Coast recovery.

In 2005 the foundation published its first white paper, *Different Incomes, Common Dreams*, a comprehensive look at public attitudes about poverty in America before and after Hurricane Katrina. The foundation also started the “Voices of Working Families” national policy initiative and convened groups in Los Angeles, Baton Rouge, La., and Jackson, Miss., to examine policy alternatives needed to improve the economic well-being of low-income workers and their families. That initiative resulted in the policy paper *Making It in America: Working Families, Low Wages and the American Dream*.

In 2005 and 2006, the foundation began developing a mass media communication strategy. The foundation worked with ColorsNW, a Pacific Northwest magazine directed at communities of color, to develop a voter registration magazine insert and supported Public Broadcasting Service’s *To the Contrary*, an all woman-owned and -managed news program that reaches more than 1 million viewers. It also reworked the website to include a grantee resource page and interactive map.

Five regional convenings in 2006 and early 2007 brought grantees together to explore network- and movement-building, the role of race in public policy, and the grantee evaluation process. A convening of children’s museum grantees was held in New Orleans in 2007. The foundation supported children’s museums in Chicago, New Orleans, Tucson and San Francisco to create museum programs to engage low-income families in activism and advocacy.
With an infrastructure of cornerstone organizations and a communication strategy in place, the foundation began asking its grantees: What would a nationwide movement to raise the voices of poor and low-income families look like? What would it take to launch such a movement? Their answer was: The movement would have to cut across regions, cultures and issues; it would showcase the families themselves as the best sources for solutions; and it would create enough noise that media and policymakers could not ignore it.

The foundation began the planning and the development of tools and materials to support such a campaign.
In October 2007, Marguerite Casey Foundation took a deep breath, strapped on its seat belt and launched the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign, with the following message to grantees and families: “We’re not going to prescribe what your needs are. We are going to use our capacity to elevate your power and authority to identify and drive the process to address those needs.” The first Equal Voice town hall meeting took place at a prison in Washington state.

Between October 2007 and September 2008, the foundation and its grantees planned and held 65 town hall meetings in 12 states to mobilize families and engage them in creating a national family platform. The foundation thought they might get 5,000 low-income families to participate in the town hall meetings. More than 15,000 showed up.

At the town hall meetings, participants met in small groups to identify the issues that were of interest to them and then created priorities within those issue areas. Those issues were then assembled into the platform, which included action recommendations at the local, state and national levels.

The foundation convened but did not control the meetings, the agendas or the final three-city convention. It funded the participants’ transportation, lodging, food, child care, posters and brochures, and it even hired nine regional coordinators, but no organization or individual received a grant specifically to participate. No one was paid to participate, and no one was penalized for not attending.

In the end, creating the platform mobilized around 30,000 families, with 15,000 participating in the three-city Equal Voice convention in September 2008. Communications technology enabled the grantees in different locations to participate simultaneously in a meeting and to express their opinions instantly from their chairs with voting clickers and see the results projected on a screen in front of them; it aided translation of proceedings into the languages of the attendees so that language was not a barrier to participation, and, of course, with social media, attendees could communicate with their offices and families back home.

The Equal Voice for America’s Families Campaign held 65 town hall meetings in 12 states, engaging more than 15,000 families.
The excitement over the campaign and the resulting family platform was overshadowed, however, by the economic collapse of 2008. Like Hurricane Katrina, the economic downturn hurt families, but it also hit the portfolios of funders of non-profit organizations. Nonprofits’ revenues from individual donors and foundations dropped overnight. At a time of increased need, the grantees had fewer resources. The foundation, for its part, instituted changes to hold operating costs in check while continuing to meet its commitments to grantees.

The foundation and its grantees persevered. On Feb. 11, 2009, family delegates from 12 states traveled to Washington, D.C., where they held a press conference at the National Press Club to call on the nation’s leaders to adopt the *Equal Voice for America’s Families National Family Platform*. They then met with 42 senators and representatives.
Lifting Family Voices: The Role of Media
If movements are to succeed, they need momentum and a consistent voice. To ensure family voices were heard during the Equal Voice for America’s Families campaign, Marguerite Casey Foundation’s communication team launched a nontraditional multitiered media campaign.

The key message of the campaign was the story of low-income families struggling to build a better life for themselves and finding their own voice in the process. Despite facing economic hardship and a harsh political environment, participants discovered their most valuable resource – each other.

The foundation partnered with several national groups – New America Media, American Forum, Virilion and Onda Films – to connect with ethnic media; support those on the ground in writing opinion pieces and letters to editors; blog; pitch the Equal Voice story to mainstream and community-based media; and produce a documentary about the campaign.

The foundation used Facebook, Twitter, a campaign blog and webcasts, with more than 500 people logging on to the webcast of the tri-city national convention. Stories about the campaign ran in 26 states and were covered in traditional media such as The Washington Post and MSNBC as well as in nearly 100 online news sources.

New America Media produced 18 multimedia packages (print, video, photographs) that ran in more than 100 outlets and gave about 70 families direct access to the media. Onda Films followed four families during the campaign, documenting how their advocacy skills and hope grew. The resulting documentary, Raising Hope: The Equal Voice Story, aired on PBS stations across the country in 2010. In 2011, the film was adapted for youth as part of a strategy to reach young community organizers.

The approach enabled the campaign to have a broad media imprint even in the middle of one of the most closely watched elections in U.S. history. The energy of the 2008 election, however, was also one reason for the campaign’s success.

With the success of the campaign, a new communication framework emerged that focused on two themes: Listen to us – we have the answers and Every issue is a family issue.

“We’re trying to change attitudes; change a culture. That doesn’t happen with quick feel-good promos.”

Kathleen Baca
Director of Communications,
Marguerite Casey Foundation

The film chronicles five families whose lives were changed when they participated in a campaign to lift families out of poverty.
Because traditional media tend to seek “recognized” experts on issues, it was not easy to position families as the experts on poverty and solutions to poverty and get the media to pay attention. If low-income families were to have a voice, it appeared they would need their own medium. That medium, the *Equal Voice* online newspaper, was launched at the end of 2009 to highlight grantee voices and draw attention to the challenges low-income families face. The objective was to produce original content about the grantees and their work and policy issues; to accomplish that, the foundation hired its first seasoned reporter.

The foundation developed guides for grantees on how to use Facebook and Twitter and other social media sites so that they could connect with each other and with their constituents, spark and advance ideas, and engage allies, including like-minded foundations, non-grantee organizations, academics, journalists and opinion leaders, to advance Equal Voice.

In 2009, the foundation hosted a convening on policy advocacy and media to help grantees use social media to mobilize their constituents, advance their policy work, tell their stories and raise funds. And, at the 2010 national convention of grantees, the foundation held a workshop on using social networking, new media and the *Equal Voice* website as tools for movement building.

The foundation’s goal is to create a rapid communication infrastructure for movement building that connects and advances grantee issues by means of an online Equal Voice community. Since expanding its use of social media, the foundation has seen a dramatic increase in the visibility of the *Equal Voice* newspaper and in interest in the work of the grantees and the foundation itself. The foundation’s use of social media is unique in philanthropy in that it is anchored in the philosophy of putting families first.
Equal Voice online newspaper was launched at the end of 2009 to highlight grantee voices and draw attention to the challenges low-income families face.

www.equalvoiceoffamilies.org
Measuring a Movement
Devising evaluation and impact models was more unmapped territory for the foundation. How can you evaluate general operating support, when it doesn’t have a specific programmatic outcome or goal? And, how do you measure a movement?

The first comprehensive report on the foundation’s impact was for calendar year 2009. The impact assessment report aggregated evaluation information collected through several vehicles to assess the impact of the foundation’s grantmaking. Those vehicles included grant reporting, an annual grantee survey and closeout reports. The report focused on three components critical to understanding the foundation’s work: grantmaking impact, grantmaking context, and financial operations. The assessment established benchmarks and will be conducted annually.

The results showed that even in the midst of the Great Recession, grantee organizations – sustained by the foundation’s flexible general operating support and their own efficient use of resources – provided issue education and leadership development to more than 1.5 million adult and youth community members and turned out almost three-quarters of a million adult and youth community members at public actions, events or meetings.

Grantees made it a priority to collaborate with other organizations in the nonprofit sectors to build partnerships with the private and public sectors as well. They conducted policy campaigns to bring about change – at the neighborhood and community levels to state, regional and national levels – achieving wins and building their capacity to improve the well-being of all of America’s families.
Equal Voice as a Framework for Action
The intangibles are what move the foundation forward: the passion and determination of the grantees and their belief that they can make a difference; that change is possible; that families can shape a better life for themselves and their communities.

The intangible is finding someone else who thinks like you do; someone else who has a story to tell that offers support and gives permission for others to tell their stories so that they can begin to speak with one voice. The intangible is finding others that are moving in the same direction. The intangible is building a road that was not there before.

Networking makes it possible to do what seemed impossible before because organizations are no longer working alone. The networks, like neural pathways in the brain, connect, stimulate and bring about thought and action.

Networks are hope in action, and networks are where the foundation is focusing its investments. In 2009, it created the Equal Voice strategic network mini-grants, one-year grants of $30,000 for current grantees to build or strengthen networks to achieve change on the issues addressed in the Equal Voice for America’s Families National Family Platform.

Equal Voice as a Framework for Action

Equal Voice and its reliance on networks is now the foundation’s framework for strategic future action.

What the tremendous success of the Equal Voice campaign demonstrated was the power of families coming together and of networks made up of energized constituents. The foundation had hoped to have 5,000 people involved in the campaign. The staff and board were staggered when more than 30,000 people participated. Relying once again on the Ask, Listen, Act approach, foundation staff went on an Equal Voice listening tour of grantees and advisers after the campaign.

During the listening tour, the grantees energetically supported adopting Equal Voice as the framework for their work. Using a network-driven collaborative approach to problem solving challenged competitive approaches, which grantees now knew from experience were counterproductive to creating a movement.

The testimonies of families at the 65 town hall meetings were synthesized into a cohesive national family platform, available at caseygrants.org.

“Collaboration is essential to the foundation’s mission of mobilizing communities to advocate for themselves.”

David Villa
Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors

Equal Voice as a Framework for Action

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The testimonies of families at the 65 town hall meetings were synthesized into a cohesive national family platform, available at caseygrants.org.
Grantees now viscerally understood the power of networks. They saw how collaboration could further each other’s agendas and mobilize constituents. They pointed out to the foundation that a movement is like a train weaving along the track through cities and towns. It stops periodically, but the purpose of the train, like the purpose of a movement, is to move people forward.

The past 10 years have been devoted to learning and practicing the most effective ways to move families into a position to move themselves out of poverty. A movement model based on networks was selected because that model’s success has been clearly demonstrated.

The foundation and its grantees are on a solid path together with families. The political environment has moved from harsh to brutal. The economic downturn and state and federal deficits have stripped public and private family-support programs at every level – local, state, regional and federal. The need for services is increasing when resources to support those services are decreasing.

An equal voice for poor and low-income families in these dismal economic and political times is embodied in the foundation’s and its grantees’ efforts, efforts that have demonstrated that collective problem-solving and collective action are key to effecting change.

What is also clear is that the foundation’s provision of long-term general support for grassroots organizations works. By building family engagement and organizational capacity, as well as leadership and network development, the foundation has helped its grantees and families create a movement of and for families.

In 2010, Marguerite Casey Foundation grantees directly engaged families and

“Now, 10 years after its founding, Marguerite Casey Foundation no longer needs to use a ‘what if’ theory of change: What if we had more community organizations functioning well? What if they were connecting? Today, they are connecting, embracing around the Equal Voice platform, and that is creating the center of a true movement.”

America Bracho
Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors
gave them the information, tools and training they needed to bring about change; The grantees educated more than 4 million community members about issues that affect them and mobilized almost 600,000 people at public actions, events or meetings.

Grantees made it a priority to collaborate with other organizations and to build partnerships to maximize their impact - holding public events, sharing analysis/research, and pursuing campaigns and funding opportunities with other groups. That approach extended to the business and public sector as well.

Grantees led policy change in 2010 at all levels of decision-making, from small business to the federal government, and across a variety of issues, including education, housing, transit, health care, immigration reform, criminal justice, predatory lending practices, jobs and environmental justice.

“We were talking about advocacy and activism and cultivating leadership on the local level, and people literally laughed at us. Well, they’re not laughing now.”

Douglas Patiño
Marguerite Casey
Foundation Board of Directors

“It has been said that foundations have two assets – money and knowledge,” wrote Joanne Edgar, commissioned by Casey Family Programs in 2000 to consult on the potential form, function and impact of what would become Marguerite Casey Foundation. Edgar added, however, the advice of Peter Goldmark, former president of the Rockefeller Foundation: “You do not need to have the answers to be an effective grantmaker. You just need the questions – and faith in the possibility of solutions.”

And a willingness to make your own road.
Marguerite Casey Foundation

EMPOWERED FAMILIES!

Grantees
Communication
Grantmaking
Organizing
Public Discourse
Policy Influence
Leadership Infrastructure
Networks
Policy
Impact on Families

Direct Contact
newspaper

Equal Voice

Finance and Human Resources

President & Board

2001
ACROSS ISSUES
ACROSS GEOGRAPHY
ACROSS RACES
ACROSS GENDERS

Equality

Equal Voice

2016
Membership of Families Organization
Local Chapters

Curve Ahead!

Paula Hansen www.chart-magic.com
2010: A Transition
2010 marked a major transition for Marguerite Casey Foundation as Casey Family Programs and the foundation formally terminated their long-term relationship. Marguerite Casey Foundation shared operational, governing and legal ties with Casey Family Programs. First, two members of the board of trustees and the president and CEO of Casey Family Programs served on the board of Marguerite Casey Foundation. Second, the two foundations made collaborative grants in communities served by Casey Family Programs. Finally, the two organizations shared physical space in a building owned by Casey Family Programs.

The board of trustees of Casey Family Programs, in discussion with the board of directors for Marguerite Casey Foundation, believed that the time had come to legally separate the two organizations. Marguerite Casey Foundation had become a stable, thriving entity with a growing focus on poverty, not as it related to foster care, but as a more generalized predictor of family well-being. The board of trustees of Casey Family Programs approved a separation agreement in September 2010 and permanently changed the membership governance agreement that had been established in 2000. The two organizations remained committed to mutual goals in behalf of families and a phasing out of the collaborative grantmaking.

In 2010, Marguerite Casey Foundation and its 20 staff members moved to new offices in downtown Seattle.

“The early board was a good board to get the foundation up and going. In 2010, the foundation became independent, and that is what it should be. This allows the foundation to work in a different way, but still care for young people.”

Richard Ford
Former president, Casey Family Programs
Board of Trustees
The Road Ahead: Lessons Learned

“We started on this track, and we are staying on it.”
Patricia Schroeder
Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors
One of the most important lessons learned during Marguerite Casey Foundation’s first decade has been the validation of its vision. Families are the experts when it comes to solving problems in their communities. Given the resources, tools and support, they can and do impact the systems that affect their communities. Joining with other families and organizations not only provides moral support for the hard work of community change, but also creates a learning community that allows for more extensive problem solving.

Not only is it possible to effect change from the bottom up, that is probably the only way to effect lasting change because the change belongs to the community that created it.

To Marguerite Casey Foundation, funding is not a programmatic effort but rather an investment in people and communities, an investment the board and staff hope will result in systemwide social dividends. That may be an important finding for other philanthropic groups.

General operating support may be part of a more sustainable funding model for foundations and nonprofits, offering organizations a stability that allows them to focus on organizing and advocacy and offering the founda-

Commitment is essential. Success on this scale would not have been possible without the committed and passionate board of directors, staff members and grantees. The risks the foundation took would not have been possible with a large, remote board of directors that met infrequently and relied on committees. A hands-on board enabled the foundation to keep its focus. The foundation’s policies, frameworks and criteria were set early on and remain largely in place today. The CEO’s passion and vision kept the organization on track, and she established a real learning relationship with the board.

“We succeeded because our board is well versed; they walk their talk, meet in the community, and are real, open and candid about the strategies. The board created the vision and mission, believe in Ask, Listen, Act and have the brain power along with the support and encouragement to make our risk-taking work.”

Luz Vega-Marquis
President and CEO, Marguerite Casey Foundation
There has also been little turnover on the board of directors, with four of the five current board members having been on the board since 2001. A challenge that will face the foundation in the future is finding board members and staff who will carry forward the visionary risk-taking of the founding board and CEO.

The accomplishments of the foundation would not have been possible without the powerful connection between the board of directors and the CEO. The board is tasked with ensuring the responsible use of foundation funds. How do you measure fiduciary responsibility when you are on a journey without maps? What is risk? What is a good investment?

The board measured risk against the foundation’s mission to help low-income families strengthen their voice and mobilize their communities in order to achieve a more just and equitable society. The board and staff created frameworks for action, established core values that remain constant, tried new approaches and learned by asking, listening and acting. They learned by being led by others. They trusted the families to know what was best for their communities.

Leadership and teamwork matter, and — together — the foundation’s board and staff, its grantees and families and communities will continue to pave the road ahead.

“The strength of the board is in its members’ different experiences.”
Freeman Hrabowski III
Chair, Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors
“We should be clear in understanding that we are in the process of writing our 20th year report.”

William Foege, Marguerite Casey Foundation Board of Directors
change is possible.