

PIONEERS



**FUNDING THE FRONTLINES
OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

PUBLISHED BY LEVI STRAUSS FOUNDATION





Pioneers 2020 leaders. Top row: Vanessa Moses, Kris Hayashi, Miya Yoshitani.
Bottom row: Terry Valen, Mike McBride, Aparna Shah, Zach Norris. (Eurydice Photo)
Cover photo: Transgender Law Center protest in Albuquerque, NM. (Eurydice Photo)

PIONEERS

2020

FUNDING THE FRONTLINES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

PUBLISHED BY **LEVI STRAUSS FOUNDATION**

Pioneer Profiles

Pastor Mike McBride, Live Free Campaign	15
Vanessa Moses, Causa Justa Just Cause	25
Zach Norris, Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.....	33
Terry Valen, Filipino Community Center.....	43
Aparnah Shah, Power California.....	47
Kris Hayashi, Transgender Law Center	61
Miya Yoshitani, Asian Pacific Environmental Network.....	67

LET MY
PEOPLE
VOTE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY DANIEL LEE	4
INTRODUCTION	6
Pioneers in Justice	8
From Grasstops to Grassroots	10
What's Inside	12
CHAPTER 1 <i>STRESS</i>	19
A Rocky Start	21
The 2016 Election	28
Building Trust and Relationship	29
CHAPTER 2 <i>STRETCH</i>	37
Pivoting the Program Design	38
Giving Pioneers More Control	40
Providing Messaging Training	42
Shifting the Grantmaking Strategy	46
CHAPTER 3 <i>SUCCESS</i>	55
Corporate Influence	56
Progressive Progress	60
ONWARD	70
Lessons for Funders	73
APPENDIX	77



FOREWORD

BY DANIEL LEE

Levi Strauss & Co. has a proud history of taking stands when it matters—sometimes well before it is popular.

We integrated our factories in the 1940s, long before the legal mandate. We responded to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, even before it had a name. We were the first Fortune 500 company to offer domestic partner benefits for same-sex couples. Our values-driven investment in social justice has become a trademark of both our company and our foundation. Whenever the moment calls for it, we stand up, speak out, and leap.

I think we'll look back at Pioneers 2020 as another such moment—one where we took a risk by funding local grassroots leaders driving critical place-based change. In recent years we've seen more and more philanthropy driven by a focus on issues, with less and less connection and commitment to *place*. One consequence is that leaders and organizations deeply rooted in local communities continue to be severely underfunded, flying under the radar of a field that gravitates toward nationally branded “grasstops” organizations.

The Pioneers in Justice program is our signature hometown initiative. It bucks this national trend by supporting progressive local leaders in the San Francisco Bay Area. When we launched a new cohort of Pioneers in 2016, we did not go for the grasstops—instead, we chose seven local grassroots activists who are bulwarks against injustices and inequality in our own backyard. These leaders have a track record of generating wins and forging models that ripple widely across the state and nation. They are the guardians of the most vulnerable, with deep ties to those disproportionately affected by the events of our day. They work tirelessly to ignite systems change from the ground up—and their success could transform our nation.

As we've learned, partnering with grassroots leaders is not top-down but side-by-side work—with the learning and influence flowing both ways. We feel proud to have helped these grassroots leaders strengthen their voices and reach new audiences, and to support their ability to lead today's most consequential movements. In return, these Pioneers have improved our ability to deliver on our values as a foundation and as a company. They have shown us the importance of local work at the deepest level and have inspired us to take new risks at a time when power and privilege are being widely reexamined. In this new era, they have made us better at being who we are. That's the value proposition the Pioneers embody.

We believe this side-by-side work also reflects the new reality that business and politics are intertwined—and that companies have an important role to play in our democracy. In this era of government inaction and pernicious policies, we've seen many companies stepping up and speaking out. Hundreds went to court to oppose the Muslim ban. Hundreds more demanded the reinstatement of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Time and again in the last four years, we've seen businesses take bolder stands on issues that matter.

But very few companies are pairing these actions with strategic investments in social justice movements—and this moment demands that investment. We need more corporate foundations funding at the grassroots level and helping to ensure that these local leaders succeed. As we've learned, this work requires uncomfortable honesty, radical empathy, and a kind of flexibility not often practiced in philanthropy. But what makes this work hard is also what makes it necessary. It's what we must do to live our values and make the difference we seek—to move from being grantmakers to changemakers.

As this report went to press, the coronavirus was racing across the world, starkly exposing how broken our systems have become and how unprotected our most vulnerable communities truly are. At the same time, the tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade among countless others sparked national outrage and widespread protests, casting light on the systemic racism and injustice that have been directed at Black people throughout our country's history. These deep injustices will not fix themselves—and we all have a role to play in ensuring that they do not endure. We fiercely believe that every institution in society must align toward social justice no matter how messy or uncomfortable. In this “movement moment,” it is time for all of us, as funders and as human beings, to ask ourselves hard questions about who we align with, who we stick our necks out for, who we give money to, who we bring into our fold, and who we are willing to be changed by. What we stand for matters—but who we stand alongside matters even more.

Daniel Lee

Executive Director

Levi Strauss Foundation

INTRODUCTION

On a sunny morning in May 2017, nearly a thousand Levi Strauss & Co. employees in identical red T-shirts streamed into Levi's Plaza, a large outdoor square in front of the glass-and-brick corporate headquarters.

It was Community Day, a longstanding annual event where LS&Co. employees in San Francisco and around the world fan out across their cities to volunteer—at shelters, in schools, at clinics, in local parks—in a massive act of giving back to the places where they live and work.

The San Francisco event always kicks off with a speaker, but the speaker that morning was unlike any they'd heard before. A Black man wearing a shirt emblazoned with the words "Hope Dealer" stood on a makeshift stage, clutching a microphone and delivering what sounded almost like a sermon. His name was Pastor Michael McBride, and he was the leader of Faith in Action's Live Free Campaign, a movement of interfaith organizations addressing the causes of

pervasive violence and crime in communities of color. He was also a Levi Strauss Foundation grantee—one of seven grassroots activists taking part in a brand-new phase of the foundation's signature social justice initiative, *Pioneers in Justice*.

McBride spoke about the inequalities plaguing the Bay Area, the toll they were taking on local communities, and the perils that Black and Brown kids were facing on the streets. He praised LS&Co.'s long history of taking stands on critical issues. Then he elevated the community volunteering that the employees were about to begin into a higher frame. "Maybe you were brought to Levi's not only to use your genius to help build and sustain a powerful company," McBride boomed, each word propelling energy through his

audience, “but you were also brought here to exercise your moral muscles, to figure out how can you unleash your genius to transform broken communities and build a more just society.”

Many employees in the crowd were still reeling from the 2016 election and its aftermath. They were searching for ways to connect their day-to-day work to a bigger purpose and to their emerging activism. And now, in this moment, McBride was building that bridge, encouraging them to see their company as a platform for social change—and inspiring them individually and collectively as nobody else had. “His ability to move us, to evoke our inner good and our compassion, was really powerful,” said Seth Jaffe, executive vice president and general counsel of LS&Co. and Levi Strauss Foundation board member. Added Daniel Lee, the foundation’s executive director: “Mike reminded us who we are as a company and called us to action.”

Remarkably, McBride was not the only Pioneers in Justice grantee who would have a strong impact on the company, the foundation, and their employees. When the Levi Strauss Foundation invited McBride and six other grassroots activists to take part in this new phase of the Pioneers program—called Pioneers 2020—they had expected that these leaders would be changed by the experience: that the program would give them time and space to build out their leadership and enhance their capacity to reach even broader audiences. But the big revelation of this new Pioneers phase was how profoundly the Levi Strauss Foundation, and

the larger Levi Strauss & Co., would be changed as well—how entering into unlikely partnership with these leaders would inspire them to do more, to change how and who they fund, and to take moral stands in ways they had not imagined. Said Lee: “These Pioneers have changed the way we bring our voice, our influence, and our values to bear on fueling social justice.”



Top: Mike McBride speaking at Community Day. Bottom: McBride and Bob Haas, chairman emeritus of Levi Strauss & Co. (Eurydice Photo)

PIONEERS IN JUSTICE

In the mid-2000s, the Levi Strauss Foundation began experimenting with new ways to partner with social justice leaders in their hometown of San Francisco.¹ In 2009, unexpected circumstances led to an opportunity to launch a new program. Five of San Francisco's bedrock civil rights organizations—the ACLU of Northern California, Asian Law Caucus, Chinese for Affirmative Action, Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, and Equal Rights Advocates—were all experiencing a dramatic shift in leadership. Their long-standing executive directors (many of them founders and baby boomers) were retiring, and a new generation of mostly Generation X leaders of color was taking their place. What if the Levi Strauss Foundation could design a program for these next-gen leaders, helping them and their organizations shift from old ways of working to new strategies for expanding their audiences?

The original Pioneers in Justice initiative, launched in 2010, wasn't a traditional grants or leadership development program. Rather, it sought to develop both individual and organizational capacity, while building in peer-to-peer time for these social justice

leaders to learn together, grow, and share best practices. It was also not quick; the program spanned five years. In that time, individually and as a cohort, these next-gen leaders expanded their technology capabilities to build out their base; experimented with new forms of collaboration and more networked ways of working; and strengthened their own voices as new leaders of legacy civil rights nonprofits, telling their own stories as a way to inspire movement building and catalyze systemic change.

At the outset, the foundation's board considered Pioneers in Justice a high-risk, high-reward experiment. But the results were impressive. In the space of five years, the leaders delivered on each key focus area, and they and their organizations grew both their bases and their impact by leveraging new capacities. The Levi Strauss Foundation, for its part, found its hometown strategy—one that showed the power of making multiyear investments in social justice leaders and that quickly became an exemplar for the field.

In 2015, the Levi Strauss Foundation board unanimously approved a second round of the Pioneers initiative. This time there would be seven leaders instead of five, in a program that would span from 2016 to 2020. The budget for Pioneers 2020 was set at approximately \$900,000 per year, for a total of \$3.6 million,² accounting for roughly 12 percent of the foundation's overall strategic grantmaking annually. In other words, it was another major investment.

1 To read more about the first round of the Pioneers in Justice program, see *Pioneers in Justice: Building Networks and Movements for Social Change*, Levi Strauss Foundation, 2014.

2 This figure does not include the rapid-response grants or other related funding that several Pioneer organizations received during the course of the program.

“THESE PIONEERS HAVE
CHANGED THE WAY WE BRING
OUR VOICE, OUR INFLUENCE,
AND OUR VALUES TO BEAR ON
FUELING SOCIAL JUSTICE.

DANIEL LEE, LSF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

”

Pioneer Characteristics

WHAT MAKES A PIONEER

- They represent a **range of experiences and tenures** as executive directors
- They are **problem solvers** wielding multiple strategies
- They have **vibrant ties** to broader networks and movements for greater impact
- Some have received **recognition at the local or regional level** but remain **rooted and humble**
- They see the bigger picture beyond their own organization and have a **compelling vision** for the social justice field
- They engage in **advocacy and systems-change strategies** beyond service delivery
- They are keen to be **collaborators and bridge builders** across issues and sectors
- They are **courageous in the face of controversy** and seek to build fundamentally new bases of support

But in searching for a new cluster of social justice leaders, the foundation hit a snag. The deep recession that was still present when the first Pioneers entered the program had been replaced by rapid growth in San Francisco's tech sector, along with soaring rents and home prices. Very few nonprofits could afford to stay in San Francisco anymore, and many had left for other locations around the Bay Area and beyond. Undeterred, the foundation cast a wider geographical net, extending its search across the bay to Oakland, another hotbed of social justice activism. After failing to find a groundswell of next-gen social leaders all tackling one issue, like affordable housing or HIV/AIDS advocacy, the foundation gathered input from prior Pioneers and other stakeholders, and decided to seek out a cohort that was cross-issue in focus.

The Levi Strauss Foundation was fairly clear on the type of leader they wanted to support. Some criteria were easy to measure: leaders who planned to stay in their jobs for at least three years; who were leading local nonprofits that had built a baseline of stability and had budgets of at least \$500,000; and who were still emergent, meaning they had not yet risen to the national limelight. Other criteria were harder to assess. The foundation wanted leaders who were “bridge builders” able to work across sectors, coalitions, and movements. They also sought “big picture” thinkers who aspired to translate their message to audiences beyond their base. “We wanted to partner with leaders who could catalyze change by evangelizing across sectors, creating and leveraging shared power,” explained Daniel Lee. “We thought, these are the people who can shape narratives and values. They can help create leaps that our society sorely needs.”

After interviewing more than 50 leaders, the foundation eventually selected seven. In addition to Michael McBride of Faith in Action's Live Free Campaign, there was Kris Hayashi, executive director of the Transgender Law Center; Zach Norris, who headed

the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights; Maria Poblet, executive director of Causa Justa Just Cause (who would be succeeded by Vanessa Moses early in the program); Miya Yoshitani, leader of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network; Terry Valen, executive director of the Filipino Community Center; and Aparna Shah, who headed Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (which would soon merge with another organization to form Power California). “These were,” said Lee, “the right leaders for our times.”

FROM GRASSTOPS TO GRASSROOTS

The original Pioneers were leaders of established “grasstops” civil rights organizations in the Bay Area, many representing affiliates of national brands. Their work focused primarily on legal and policy advocacy, their organizations were larger in size, and they had experience working with corporations and professional foundations. By contrast, the new Pioneers were seasoned community organizers who operated on the frontlines of dynamic social change. They were grassroots leaders in the truest sense—working deep inside their communities, building bases, growing movements, and tackling issues at their roots in order to drive systemic change. As such, they had a far different mindset than leaders trying to build out legacy nonprofits, and limited track records of working with corporations or mainstream foundations.

And yet, in these leaders the Levi Strauss Foundation saw an opportunity to take the Pioneers in Justice program farther and deeper. First, partnering with grassroots leaders would move the foundation's work into the very heart of marginalized communities facing deep injustice and fighting for transformative change from the ground up. Second, this particular set of leaders seemed poised to break through onto a bigger stage, enabling their communities and their movements to gain the broader attention they

deserved, and serving as a model for activism in other communities. “They stand on the frontier representing groups and issues that are often dismissed, overlooked, or discredited,” said Lee. “They are shaping a new era of activism.”

Finally, supporting grassroots leaders of social movements was largely uncharted territory for a corporate foundation. Just as the new Pioneers had little experience with corporations, the Levi Strauss Foundation had little experience working with leaders like these. While recent years have seen a surge in conversations in philanthropy about how to build and sustain social movements, the funding remains extremely anemic—and almost none of it comes from corporate foundations. Between 2003 and 2016, the median corporate foundation directed just 3.2 percent of its grantmaking to social justice. In scrutinizing the giving patterns of the largest U.S. corporate foundations over that time period, the National Center for Responsive Philanthropy found that the majority of these organizations (178 out of 296) gave zero to 5 percent of their dollars to social justice issues.³ Moreover, most of that funding was funneled to nationally branded nonprofits with established profiles—in other words, “safe bets.”

With Pioneers 2020, the Levi Strauss Foundation aimed to buck this trend and go where no corporate foundation had yet gone. Executive director Daniel Lee, in particular, felt drawn to the notion of funding the frontlines of social justice. He had observed the ability of these leaders to organize and build power from the ground up—and felt confident that access to resources could help them build capacity to scale their impact. He also recognized that in their stance and structure, grassroots leaders have an underappreciated advantage over larger and more traditional nonprofits: They operate far more nimbly than entrenched, hierarchical organizations and are capable of innovations that a grassroots nonprofit—or a corporate foundation—would be unlikely to discover on its own.

When the foundation launched Pioneers 2020, they knew it would be challenging but felt equally that it needed to be done. “It was a leap of faith,” explained Jennifer Haas, president of the Levi Strauss Foundation board, who sat on the committee exploring the next phase of Pioneers. “These leaders were approaching social justice from different access points, and we didn’t know exactly what would unfold.” While the foundation had taken a hard look at

3 Based on new National Center for Responsive Philanthropy analysis of Candid data on corporate foundation giving from 2003 to 2016.

PARTNERING WITH GRASSROOTS LEADERS
WOULD MOVE THE FOUNDATION'S WORK INTO
**THE VERY HEART OF MARGINALIZED
COMMUNITIES FACING DEEP INJUSTICE.**

“

THESE LEADERS WERE DOING
IMPORTANT WORK AND THEY
NEEDED SUPPORT. SO I DIDN'T
SEE IT AS RISKY. I SAW IT AS
THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

JENNIFER HAAS, LSF BOARD PRESIDENT

”

the risks that might come with partnering with grassroots leaders, Haas embraced a different calculus. “These leaders were doing important work that falls well within our mission, and they needed support,” she said. “So I didn’t see it as risky. I saw it as the right thing to do.”

And by modeling social justice philanthropy and cross-sector engagement for other corporate foundations and companies to follow, the foundation saw Pioneers 2020 as having the potential to drive a far broader impact. “Right now, the corporate sector, philanthropy, and anyone with influence needs to be asking: What are we putting on the line? How can we be a moral compass in these times?” said Daniel Lee. “The Pioneers initiative was an operating model for going all in.”

WHAT’S INSIDE

As Pioneers 2020 completes its final year, as the critical 2020 election approaches—and as the world only begins to grapple with implications of the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on marginalized communities—it seemed timely to share the story of this unlikely partnership between social justice

movement leaders and a corporate foundation. To be clear, this work was not linear. It was messy and complicated, marked by moments when the foundation’s and the leaders’ goals weren’t aligned, compelling both to pivot. In some ways, this is the nature of pioneering work—it isn’t tied up with a bow. There was no rulebook, no one right way of meeting the moment.

This report takes you on a journey through Pioneers 2020, offering an honest tale of what went right, what went wrong, and why this work matters. The first chapter, “Stress,” takes a closer look at Pioneers 2020’s rocky start, and how the foundation and these leaders worked together to move past a place of confusion to one of greater trust and shared purpose—at a time when all of them were reeling from the 2016 election. The second chapter, “Stretch,” highlights some of the remarkable adaptations that both the Pioneers and the foundation made in this tumultuous new landscape—including a dramatic shift in the foundation’s funding strategy and new efforts by the Pioneers to grow as leaders while also growing their organizations and movements. The next chapter, “Success,” shares some of the impacts experienced by both the Pioneers and the foundation, as well as reflections on the new relationships that formed among the Pioneers, the foundation, and the larger company. The report ends with a brief conclusion and a sidebar calling out some of the lessons of this work for funders.

In 2014, the Levi Strauss Foundation published a book about the inaugural Pioneers program. That story made a mark on the field, inspiring new investments by foundations and



corporations in social justice leadership. *Pioneers 2020: Funding the Frontlines of Social Justice* aspires to the same result—serving both as a powerful statement of the foundation’s commitment to supporting grassroots leaders and as an invitation to other corporations and funders to amplify their impact in the communities they serve by standing alongside these leaders as well. This is, at its heart, a story about how the Levi Strauss Foundation brought a group of social justice activists together during a raw and disruptive

time in our country’s history, found new pathways for supporting these frontier leaders, and allowed itself to be changed by them in ways that took everyone by surprise.



Clockwise from top: APEN at San Francisco’s 2018 Rise for Climate march. FCC youth activists. TLC supporters at 2018 march and rally in Albuquerque, NM. (Eurydice Photo, FCC staff, Eurydice Photo)

The Anatomy of a Grassroots Movement

FROM LOCAL CAMPAIGNS TO SYSTEMS CHANGE

As leaders of Bay Area organizations, much of the Pioneers' work is centered in their local neighborhoods—organizing communities to participate in critical campaigns, lead on local issues, and fight for civil and human rights. But place-based organizing is designed to have more than just local impact.

Ultimately, the Pioneers and grassroots leaders like them are fighting to bring about larger systems change at the state and national levels.

Big, structural change doesn't happen overnight—it takes years or even decades of activism, protest, and resistance that starts at the grassroots level and scales from there. Running campaigns, developing political candidates, and leading policy fights on a local scale helps activate communities and boost engagement. These efforts build infrastructure, as local campaigns connect to create regional, state-wide, or even national momentum.

Big national movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, for example, didn't pop up overnight. "They are an intensification of the

grassroots work that had already been done," explained Pioneer Vanessa Moses. The same is true of the Green New Deal. "Those ideas came from local fights to reduce pollution, transform local economies, and build power for local communities," said Pioneer Miya Yoshitani. "We've been fighting for them for decades."

Grassroots efforts that start in the Bay Area have a particularly strong track record of sparking broader systemic change. "What's happening here in the Bay frequently gives you a peek into the future for other urban centers," said Moses. "The interventions that we make have the potential to make a real difference, not just here, but elsewhere." It's no surprise, then, that the Pioneers have a vision that goes far beyond just leading their organizations; they are setting their sights on growing movements with outsized influence. "Part of our responsibility is to help figure out how to support and grow movements, not just our organizations," said Yoshitani. "That's how we'll win the transformation that's necessary."

PIONEER PROFILE

Pastor Mike McBride

Director, Live Free Campaign

ENGAGING THE FAITH COMMUNITY IN THE FIGHT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

Mike McBride grew up in the Bayview–Hunters Point neighborhood in San Francisco, a high-crime area, during the height of the crack epidemic. “I lost a lot of friends to drugs, violence, and prison,” recalled McBride. His father, a Vietnam veteran, worked as a public transit driver, and his mother taught school. He also had five siblings, and church was the family’s mainstay. Several times a week, they drove across the bay to attend the Pentecostal church in West Berkeley founded by McBride’s grandmother. Back at home, McBride’s father regularly had the family watch *Roots* and the civil rights documentary *Eyes on the Prize* together, instilling in them the value of protest and activism. Yet these two central themes in McBride’s early life—faith and racial justice—felt largely disconnected. “Our church didn’t mix politics and religion, and we didn’t associate activism with faith either,” McBride said.

In 1993, McBride headed to UC Davis to study engineering but left after two years. Having felt called to the ministry from an early age, he enrolled in a Bible college in Santa Cruz instead, which proved a better fit. But then, in 1999, while still at Bible college, McBride was beaten by police officers. The traumatic, formative incident shifted his trajectory. As a prominent youth leader in the local Black church networks, McBride had counseled many families who had experienced police brutality. Now, as a survivor himself, he felt compelled to help them find a way to turn their



Top: Pastor Mike McBride. Bottom: PICO Lifelines Day of Action, Tampa, FL, 2014. (Eurydice Photo, Live Free Facebook image)



outrage into pressure for larger systemic change. “I wanted my response to be more than just a message about resilience,” said McBride. “I thought, I can’t keep telling young people to pray about it and not try to change systems.”

Soon after, McBride participated alongside Van Jones, then executive director of the Ella Baker Center, and Michelle Alexander, a well-known civil rights lawyer, in a statewide campaign around racial profiling and ending police misconduct. It was prominent work—and McBride felt unprepared to be in the spotlight. “I didn’t have a framework for talking about injustice without having to cede moral language or my religious sensibilities,” he said. In other words, he wanted to find a way to run his activism *through* his faith, rather than continue to keep them separate. “I felt compelled to take a big leap around a big question: How does Christian ministry respond to social injustice?”

That question led him to Duke University’s Divinity School, where he earned a master’s in divinity with a focus on public policy. While at Duke, McBride met the Pentecostal minister and activist Eugene Rivers, and spent a summer working alongside Rivers doing gun violence prevention training for the Los Angeles Police Department. “That work gave me a vision of

how to change material conditions in neighborhoods and communities,” said McBride. Soon after, in 2005, McBride relaunched his family church, The Way Christian Center, in West Berkeley, which gave him a spiritual home base and a platform for his faith-based activism.

He also started organizing. Soon after, McBride began working with Faith in Action (formerly the Pacific Institute for Community Organization, or PICO), a national organizing network and peacemaking movement led by people of faith. Soon he was leading their Berkeley chapter and actively building broader faith-based coalitions to help address issues related to youth violence, incarceration, and the school-to-prison pipeline. He was also fast becoming a recognized voice at the state level, taking a leadership role in advocating for a California bill aiming to curb racial profiling, as well as measures to increase the accountability of law enforcement agencies.

In March 2012, McBride became the director of Faith in Action’s **Live Free Campaign**, engaging interfaith organizations and congregations in ending gun violence and mass incarceration. Live Free gives religious congregations concrete ways to take action, offering a framework and tools for organizing around these issues, mobilizing voters, and investing

“

I THOUGHT, I CAN'T KEEP TELLING
YOUNG PEOPLE TO PRAY ABOUT IT
AND NOT TRY TO CHANGE SYSTEMS.

”

in initiatives that work. McBride's work with Live Free, along with his other organizing and bridge-building work, moved him increasingly onto the national stage. He was one of the faith leaders at the frontlines of the 2014 Ferguson protests. He also served on a number of national task forces on gun violence prevention and police–community relationships, and in 2016 he was appointed to President Barack Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

McBride continues to see the contribution of congregations and people of faith as vital to political discourse and the reshaping of policies around gun violence, incarceration, and other issues. "Much of my work has been and will continue to be committed to making sure the faith community shows up powerfully in the fight for racial justice," said McBride. "We are creating campaigns that reflect both the imminent danger and the hopeful future that is within our grasp. I have faith that our efforts can change society."



“
OUR CAMPAIGNS
REFLECT BOTH THE
IMMINENT DANGER
AND THE HOPEFUL
FUTURE THAT IS
WITHIN OUR GRASP.
”

McBride at *Let My People Vote*
film screening. (Eurydice Photo)



TLC-led march and rally
in Albuquerque, NM, 2018.
(Eurydice Photo)

CHAPTER 1

STRESS

It's hard to remember now that in the spring of 2016, when *Pioneers 2020* launched, the country was operating in a very different social and political context. President Barack Obama still held office. The economy was going strong, having largely recovered from the 2008 downturn.

And while there was ample unrest below the surface—rising income inequality, a growing division between urban and rural areas, and racial injustice being channeled into Black Lives Matter—these issues were still outside much of the country's awareness. Against that backdrop, *Pioneers 2020* felt like a bounded program for grassroots leaders operating in a hyper-local context. None of the leaders knew that within a year of the program's launch, all of them would be catapulted onto statewide and even national stages, at the forefront of the most pressing issues of the day.

In May 2016, the initiative kicked off with a two-day retreat near Oakland's Lake Merritt. As the chosen leaders gathered, many saw familiar faces. Kris Hayashi had met Miya Yoshitani through national student organizing work, and others, like Zach Norris and Mike McBride, already knew each other. But whereas the first cohort came into the program as a bonded group, and some had track records as Levi Strauss Foundation grantees, these new *Pioneers* were not as tightly connected, and only one had received prior Levi Strauss Foundation funding.⁴ Similarly, while the first *Pioneers* had been facing a

⁴ Transgender Law Center, the only legal advocacy organization in the *Pioneers 2020* cohort, had received prior funding from the Levi Strauss Foundation to support its HIV/AIDS work.

nearly identical leadership moment in their work—steering legacy civil rights organizations into a more technology-driven and networked era—the new Pioneers had different needs, and were on the cusp of different breakthroughs:

- » **KRIS HAYASHI** helped grow **Transgender Law Center** (TLC) into the largest transgender-led organization in the country. A spate of recently proposed anti-transgender rights policies had raised TLC’s visibility and Hayashi’s profile. He hoped to use that momentum to grow the movement’s reach and further elevate transgender rights as an issue on the local, state, and national stage.
- » **MIKE MCBRIDE**, director of the **Live Free Campaign**, was also experiencing increased visibility as a leading voice against gun violence and mass incarceration. McBride wanted to reach new audiences and more communities across the country, spotlighting promising methods to reduce gun violence in urban areas.
- » **VANESSA MOSES** was poised to take the helm from Maria Poblet,⁵ founding executive director of **Causa Justa Just Cause** (CJJC). As a first-time ED, Moses wanted to continue CJJC’s work to fight gentrification and displacement in San Francisco and Oakland, while also developing new strategies for engaging broader audiences and forging new alliances across both region and sector.
- » **ZACH NORRIS**, executive director of the **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights** (EBC), had plans to launch a new kind of community center in Oakland designed to address two broken systems negatively impacting low-income

communities of color: the disproportionate rate of incarceration and the lack of upward economic mobility in the job market. He also wanted EBC’s model for community safety to spread and scale nationally.

- » **APARNA SHAH** had led Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV), which had not yet merged to form **Power California**, through several big pivots, accelerating its work to increase voting rates and civic participation in marginalized communities. Shah now wanted to build a bigger strategic vision for how the changing electorate—and the rising influence of naturalized voters—could transform the landscape of inclusion locally and nationally.
- » **TERRY VALEN**, executive director of the **Filipino Community Center** (FCC), was exploring new ways to raise the visibility of the Filipino community as a force for change in the Bay Area and beyond. He also aimed to build a regional network of Filipino organizations that could serve this burgeoning community as it moved into new cities that lacked grassroots Filipino organizing and support services.
- » **MIYA YOSHITANI**, executive director of the **Asian Pacific Environmental Network** (APEN), sought to increase investments in community-based strategies to address climate change and stem the negative consequences of polluting industries located in marginalized communities. She also wanted to grow the movement’s reach and influence, making it more visible beyond the Bay Area.

5 As founding director, Maria Poblet led Causa Justa Just Cause in groundbreaking work building cross-racial solidarity against the displacement of immigrant and Black communities in the Bay Area. She left in 2018 to become executive director of Grassroots Policy Project, an effort to link movement building and strategy development on a larger scale.

While the specifics of their work differed, the synergies between the Pioneers' aspirations stood out. "We sit at the frontlines of a lot of different points of vulnerability—the working poor, our immigrant and undocumented community members, the continued struggle for Black folks to have full protection under the law, or LGBT queer folks who continue to find their personhood under consistent attack," said Mike McBride. Kris Hayashi looked around that room and saw great possibility: "We were all leaders of color working on racial and social justice issues, and we were all using multiple strategies." And Miya Yoshitani called out how unusual it was for a foundation to convene grassroots leaders in this way. "I think it was a huge strength of the foundation to bring in this particular cohort of leaders who represent a whole different aspect of the movement ecology that's out there," she said. "It was a brave decision to [focus on] these movement-driven base-building organizations."

Most of the Pioneers had signed onto the program for similar reasons—it offered steady funding, the chance to explore new leadership and strategies, and time and space to develop plans for elevating the visibility of their work. It also offered them the rare opportunity to be in a multiyear fellowship with other grassroots leaders and to participate in cross-movement learning and conversation. While working on fast-moving issues, they were constantly having to react to challenges facing their constituents or causes. But the Pioneers program offered them a chance to step back, learn, commune, and strategize together. "What I needed personally was a space to think bigger," said Vanessa Moses. "In order to move to a higher level, I needed to create distance to see it all."

Many were also intrigued by the Levi Strauss Foundation's determination to help them take their work to the next level. "Foundations don't

typically throw down the gauntlet," said Zach Norris. "But here was Levi Strauss saying, 'We think you're doing amazing work and we want you to dream bigger. We want you to challenge yourselves to think about how to have impact at scale.'"

A ROCKY START

For the Levi Strauss Foundation, Pioneers 2020 started out as a replication project. The first Pioneers initiative had been a resounding success—they now had a theory of change and an established model. From a funder's point of view, running a similar program with this new set of Pioneers made strategic sense. Their intention was to shape Pioneers 2020 around the same three central themes that guided the first Pioneers program: wielding technology as a tool for social change, driving new "networked" forms of collaboration, and building leadership voice. But even at that very first meeting at Lake Merritt, it became clear that sticking to the initial program model wouldn't work.

First, the Pioneers 2020 leaders—most of them Gen X or Y digital natives in their 30s and early 40s—had a stronger baseline of fluency with technology than the

“
FOUNDATIONS DON'T TYPICALLY
THROW DOWN THE GAUNTLET. BUT
HERE WAS LEVI STRAUSS SAYING, 'WE
THINK YOU'RE DOING AMAZING WORK
AND WE WANT YOU TO DREAM BIGGER.'

PIONEER ZACH NORRIS

”

first Pioneer cohort. While early technology assessments would find capacity gaps in their organizations, these leaders were already engaged in social media and other tech-savvy ways of expanding their base; technology wasn't an area where they had the strongest need. Nor were they that interested in building up their organizations per se—they were much more focused on mobilizing people and communities to have a voice and stand up for their rights.

Second, when the Pioneers sat together through a presentation on network theory shortly after the Lake Merritt retreat, they bristled. These were organizers and activists of color who had built coalitions and movements from the bottom up. They had different and more organic definitions of “networks” and “collaboration,” and didn't relate to the theory being presented, which struck them as coming from a Western, white, business-friendly frame. Their skepticism toward the private-sector consultants was palpable; they didn't hold back on giving the foundation frank feedback about the training sessions.

The program's third theme—building leadership voice—was also complicated. The new Pioneers were oriented around organizations and movements, not around individual leadership; anything that privileged the individual (“I”) over the group (“We”) was

anathema. Given that their perspectives on leadership were embedded in the collective, investing in their own personal capacity wasn't something that came naturally. “Grassroots leaders can be communal to the core, to the point that stepping out as an individual may feel like a betrayal,” said Daniel Lee. While most of the Pioneers saw promise in reaching new kinds of audiences—including the private sector—showing up in the world of capitalism while holding onto their values felt deeply unfamiliar. It would require an extreme version of “code switching.” This meant that the leadership voice piece of the program would need to be approached in ways that accounted for this different orientation—but that also called upon these leaders to push beyond their comfort zone.

The Levi Strauss Foundation had known that working with grassroots leaders would be different from working with other nonprofit leaders—but they hadn't anticipated a crash course on issues of power and perspective. As grassroots leaders used to fending for themselves, the new Pioneers came with a healthy critique of capitalism, philanthropy, and anything that seemed “top down.” Delivering a predetermined program focused on networks, communications, and technology might have provided focus, but to the Pioneers it felt

WHILE MOST PIONEERS SAW PROMISE IN REACHING NEW KINDS OF AUDIENCES,
SHOWING UP IN THE WORLD OF CAPITALISM
WHILE HOLDING ONTO THEIR VALUES FELT
DEEPLY UNFAMILIAR.





Clockwise from top: APEN member meeting, 2019. FCC activists demanding justice for ship-bound cruise ship workers during the Covid-19 pandemic, Port of San Francisco, April 2020. The next generation of FCC activists. EBC protest, Alameda, CA, 2018. (APEN staff, Brooke Anderson, FCC staff, Paula Miranda)

overly prescribed. “You can’t operate at that level with us,” said Aparna Shah. “We are a group that naturally questions, challenges, and even resists. It’s our nature. You have to be willing to engage with that dynamic if you want to co-create with grassroots leaders.”

The foundation had talked from the start about co-design, hoping to work with the Pioneers to identify their unique needs in terms of technology, networks, and individual voice, and then adapt the program accordingly—within that given framework. “For us, it was co-design within those three areas,” explained Pioneers 2020 program manager Evelia Pérez, who has since left the foundation. But the Pioneers had a different definition of co-design that involved having more agency in setting the program’s trajectory. “There is a real tension between grassroots leadership and funders about making change through an expression of partnership, and who gets to dictate the strategy—we have different ‘hows,’” said Vanessa Moses. “To us, a partner funder is engaging their network and getting engaged with us in our work.” Added Mike McBride: “When funders say they want to ‘partner,’ it can mean different things. For some, that means dominance. For others, that means they understand we have a wisdom to be tested.”

What this amounted to, essentially, was a clash of perspectives and frames—and it wasn’t clear how the gap between these mismatched expectations might resolve. For months, the foundation rolled out different experiments, probing for common ground. “We tried to do leadership voice training, and sessions on networks, and workshops around technology, but nothing really stuck,” recalled Pérez. Consultants came in and out as the program struggled to find rhythm. Having balked at the foundation’s choice of consultants, the Pioneers recommended alternatives. “We wanted social justice sector consultants, moderators, and facilitators who really knew the body of work that we were doing and understood progressive

base building,” Mike McBride explained. The foundation agreed, although many of these consultants came in and out as well. “The first year was an adjustment for the foundation,” reflected Kris Hayashi. “These were different organizations with different challenges. There was lots of trial and error.”

One resource brought in was Taj James of the Movement Strategy Center (MSC), who has deep roots in building social justice movements. In October 2016, he led the first of several recalibration sessions with the foundation and the Pioneers. James was impressed by how much agency the Levi Strauss Foundation had given to the Pioneers—“the most I have seen from any funder program”—but observed that the pendulum had swung from being too structured to being too responsive. James urged the group to step back and start with the question of what change the Pioneers were aiming for, then figure out what broader constituencies were needed to get there, and only then pinpoint the skills and capacities needed to build those constituencies.

Those sessions did not solve everything. But they did highlight that even through frustration and flux, the foundation’s commitment to forging a close partnership with these movement leaders was unwavering. “Walking side by side with social justice leaders was the foundation’s value and intention, but it needed to be a skill, and getting there was not easy,” said Lisa Monzón, a nonprofit consultant and coach who advised the design of the program. “To say you want to fund grassroots leaders, and then work through all the ups and downs, requires resiliency. What about when it’s hard? What about when you’re getting pushback, when they’re misunderstood or you’re misunderstood? Because that’s the journey of working with people who are different from you.”

PIONEER PROFILE

Vanessa Moses

Executive Director, Causa Justa Just Cause

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES OF COLOR TO FIGHT GENTRIFICATION AND DISPLACEMENT

Vanessa Moses grew up in Mount Vernon, New York, a working-class town just north of the Bronx. Her father died when she was 13, and she and her sister were raised by their mother, who expected them to attend college. “That was not a message that most kids in Mount Vernon were hearing,” Moses said. She was a good student, and after graduating from vocational high school she headed to the University of Pennsylvania. But she felt unprepared for the shock of being around so much wealth—and so much whiteness. “I’d never been in a majority-white place because Mount Vernon was definitely not that,” said Moses, who is of mixed Black and white heritage.

Moses sought out friendships with other Black and mixed-race students on campus. But some of her deepest connections were formed off campus, at the restaurant down the street where she worked throughout college. “It was a loud, super working-class restaurant,” she said. “That place was crazy and lovely.” Most students on campus were disconnected from the city around them. But Moses loved being connected to her working-class West Philly neighborhood. She also noted the stark difference between the ivory tower university and other local schools in the area, which were falling apart. “The contrast was shocking,” said Moses.



Top: Vanessa Moses. Bottom: Moses with former CJC executive director Maria Poblet at rally. (Eurydice Photo, CJC archives)



Moses had an idea of what she wanted to do after college—train teachers to support the development and success of Black, Brown, and working-class children. “I was very aware of how ill-prepared most teachers and guidance counselors were to do that,” she said. But after graduation, the University of Pennsylvania hired her to support student groups on campus, and she found herself working directly with college students instead. Soon after, she joined the Greater Philadelphia High School Partnership, which brought together high-school students from diverse backgrounds to explore the challenges of segregation and racial/ethnic diversity affecting their schools and neighborhoods. Moses facilitated conversations among students on race and class. “It was an opportunity to question with them why is it that one school has metal detectors, and the other’s choir went to Italy last year,” she explained. “It was bringing these different worlds together.”

In 2003, when she was 26, Moses moved to the Bay Area, where she began connecting to local community work as a volunteer. She took a staff role with the Ella Baker Center on its Bay Area Police Watch campaign, which helped protect community members from police misconduct. All day long, she took calls from people reporting police abuses, ranging from getting pulled over for no reason to losing loved ones at the

hands of officers. “It was intense and powerful work and was deeply politicizing for me,” Moses explained.

In 2005, Moses entered a training program through the Labor Community Strategy Center in Los Angeles—where she was immediately immersed in frontline organizing. She spent six months riding public buses for four hours a day, organizing working-class people of color for the Bus Riders Union, a transit civil rights activism group. “My job was to talk with complete strangers on the bus about how the world worked and where it didn’t, and how they thought it could be different, and then inviting them to be a part of making things better,” she said. It was her first experience with organizing and base building, and she fell in love with it. “I thought, I cannot believe that people get paid to do this. I learned how to listen deeply to people, learn about them, draw them into a connection not just with me but with an organization. I learned how to engage people as political actors.”

In January 2006, Moses joined Just Cause Oakland as its fourth staff member. (In 2010, Just Cause would merge with St. Peter’s Housing Committee to become **Causa Justa Just Cause**.) Hired as an organizer, Moses spent her days knocking on doors, mobilizing local residents against discriminatory housing and

“

I LEARNED HOW TO LISTEN
DEEPLY TO PEOPLE. I LEARNED
HOW TO ENGAGE PEOPLE AS
POLITICAL ACTORS.

”

immigration policies that disproportionately impact Black and Brown neighborhoods. The work was about listening to people's stories, learning about their needs, and getting them engaged. "My heart is in organizing," said Moses. "What makes this work possible and successful is the grounding we have in our base and with our people. We're not 'serving' anybody. We are fighting alongside our own neighbors."

That fight has grown more intense in the last few years, as the housing crisis in the Bay Area has escalated. "The power and speed with which gentrification and Black displacement are transforming our neighborhoods is astonishing," said Moses, who became CJJC's executive director in 2017. Tenant and immigrant rights are still the centerpiece of the organization's work, and their wins have been significant. But Moses and CJJC are increasingly playing a leading role in creating grassroots alliances locally and statewide, with these new coalitions tackling other issues together, such as youth empowerment, living wages, and voter mobilization. Said Moses: "My work now is about building muscle in communities of color to stand together and fight."



“

**WE'RE NOT 'SERVING'
ANYBODY. WE ARE
FIGHTING ALONGSIDE
OUR OWN NEIGHBORS.**

”

CJJC members at "Homes for All"
convention, Inglewood, CA, 2019.
(Mike Dennis)

THE 2016 ELECTION

As the foundation worked to redesign and stabilize the program, the Pioneers were busily leading their organizations and movements through increasingly challenging times. The year had brought an unrelenting cascade of traumatic events—from police killings of civilians, to the Pulse nightclub massacre, to dangerous swells of anti-immigrant sentiment. The national political campaign had exposed deep divisions on issues of equality, inclusion, and basic human rights, making election outcomes even more consequential. In the run-up to Election Day, all the Pioneers were rallying their communities to get out and vote.

The November 2016 election of Donald Trump was unexpected—and it thrust every social justice organizer in the country into a new context. They feared that the new administration's policy orientation would undermine the work of whole generations of activists to address systemic inequities and bias. Indeed, the worry and outcry were immediate: Black and Brown communities, women, immigrants, and transgender and gender nonconforming individuals braced for a new wave of discrimination,

and environmental activists scrambled to mobilize against an administration intent on rolling back protections that had become standard. In short, everything the Pioneers and their communities had fought for now felt threatened. As Pioneer Aparna Shah put it: “This moment in time represents devastation for our communities.”

For the Pioneers, the already high stakes of their work climbed even higher. What was coming, predicted Pioneer Terry Valen, was nothing short of an “open fight” for the future of the country—one where social justice leaders would need to simultaneously “fight for the things we want and fend off attacks against the work that we are doing.” In other words, these leaders would need to figure out how to continue advancing social justice even as the ground beneath their feet was eroding. They felt clear, though, that this challenge necessitated a new kind of response. “Social justice is back at the forefront, but this time it’s different,” Zach Norris said. “Before there were singular strands of issues; now we are seeing them all at once. We are in a moment where a new game is required—one that is bold and that makes social justice possible.” Added Shah: “It’s in these moments of chaos and fear that the biggest leaps happen.”

The Pioneers were not the only ones readying for a fight. In the days following the election, the Levi Strauss Foundation and its board experienced a similar combination of shellshock and determination. They rapidly began looking across their portfolios, reassessing their bets and trying to understand what kinds of support were needed in this moment. “It was clear to us that we were entering one of the most disruptive periods in modern U.S. history, and that philanthropy would be called upon to respond in new ways,” said Daniel Lee. But it wasn’t just the foundation considering new responses—it was the company as well.

“

**WE ARE IN A MOMENT WHERE
A NEW GAME IS REQUIRED—
ONE THAT IS BOLD AND THAT
MAKES SOCIAL JUSTICE POSSIBLE.**

PIONEER ZACH NORRIS

”

Shortly after the election, Levi Strauss & Co. CEO Chip Bergh sent an internal note to all employees vowing to defend the company's values—courage, empathy, integrity, and originality—and to ensure they continued to serve as LS&Co.'s guiding light. He also pledged to continue using the platform of the company—including the Levi Strauss Foundation—as a force for positive change in this country and the world. “We will not falter on the things we stand for,” Bergh wrote. “We will continue to stand proud and strong for what we believe in as a company, even if it might be unpopular in this new era—and even if it challenges our business.” This powerful call to action set the course for many decisions to come.

BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP

In December 2016, three weeks after the election, the Pioneers and foundation leaders and staff gathered for what proved to be a pivotal conversation. It had been clear that Pioneers 2020 needed a reset, and that its core strategies had to be more tightly aligned with the unique needs of these new Pioneers—needs that were now rapidly evolving. The focus of the December meeting was to begin identifying the Pioneers' emerging needs in this new landscape and how the initiative could help address them.

Two notable things happened at that December meeting that would help shift the program in important ways. First, the conversation, facilitated by MSC's Taj James, was more personal than those that had come before. The Pioneers were organizers by nature, predisposed to question and challenge, and they approached even programmatic conversations through that lens. But in the rawness of the moment, most spoke in more emotional terms about what might happen to their communities and movements under the new administration. Critically, Levi Strauss Foundation executive director Daniel Lee, a gay Asian

“
WE WILL NOT FALTER ON THE THINGS
WE STAND FOR. WE WILL CONTINUE
TO STAND PROUD AND STRONG FOR
WHAT WE BELIEVE IN AS A COMPANY.
”

CHIP BÉRGH, LS&CO. PRESIDENT AND CEO

man, and then Pioneers program manager Evelia Pérez, a Mexican immigrant, spoke from the heart about what was at stake for them as well. “It was the first meeting with no tension,” recalled Pérez. “I think it was the first time that we really came together as a group and started finding alignment.”

Second, one of the Pioneers made a keen observation. “I remember someone saying, ‘Everything under attack right now’”—immigrants, gender, Black and Brown communities, sexual orientation, climate, voting rights—“is represented by the leaders here in this room,” said Pérez. “We were really struck that these were the leaders defending people caught in the crosshairs.” That realization helped the foundation and the Pioneers appreciate that they were in the same struggle together. The Pioneers also saw new value in being part of a cohort of likeminded leaders experiencing similar struggles during a challenging time. Said Miya Yoshitani: “We were vulnerable by ourselves. We needed each other. We all felt that urgency.”

The trust that started at that meeting deepened in February 2017, when Levi Strauss Foundation leaders and the Pioneers went through Rockwood Leadership Institute's weeklong Art of Leadership program

together. As they'd done with the first Pioneers, the foundation invited each leader to bring a board member and a senior staff member with them, so that the learning would be shared across their organizations. The retreat coincided with the second week of the Trump presidency, just days after the ban against travel from several Muslim countries was announced. "It was surreal to be out in this retreat center in Napa as all these executive orders were coming down," recalled Daniel Lee. "I remember thinking, 'The Pioneers are not going to want to be in this room.'"

But the timing proved opportune for these leaders to step away from the political fray and think critically about what it meant to lead in these times. How could they play smart defense, protecting communities from harm, while building bridges with other leaders and movements? How could they best counter the narratives that the new administration was using to pit marginalized communities against one another? How could they enlist the millions of "newly activated" people, who joined Women's Marches across the country, as a force for change? What were the practices that leaders needed to develop as they faced an uncertain future? What might they gain from collaborating with one another and the foundation through Pioneers 2020, and how were their aspirations for long-term change evolving?

"The Rockwood program was critical and came at the right time," said Zach Norris. "It allowed us to demonstrate a deeper level of alignment and see the intersections of our work and our core values." Kris Hayashi felt that, too. "Rockwood was a real turning point," he recalled. "It was super helpful for me personally, and it felt critical for the fellowship." That foundation leaders went through the experience with them also left a mark. "I have never had this experience with any other funder," Hayashi noted. "They showed vulnerability in that space, laying the groundwork for authentic partnership." The Pioneers came

to a deeper understanding that the foundation wanted to learn and was also willing to be transparent. "The greatest takeaway was that we all have strengths and growing edges," said Pioneer Mike McBride. "Rockwood was transformational."

"It became very intimate, and I think it needed to," said board president Jennifer Haas, who came to Rockwood one night for dinner. Talking with the Pioneers in that vulnerable setting, Haas came to appreciate the risk that many of them had assumed by joining the program and accepting money from a corporation—an alliance that members of their base might reject or not understand. "I felt like that was a big risk for them, to take a chance on us and being open-minded and receptive to figuring out how we could work together to help leverage the company and the support of a corporation to create a wider audience," Haas said.

A few weeks later, the Pioneers and the Levi Strauss Foundation's board, which comprises both family shareholders and company leaders, met for dinner and discussion. It was the first time that these two groups had come together. Jennifer Haas sat at a table with Aparna Shah and Terry Valen, for example, while Vanessa Moses and Zach Norris sat with Kelly McGinnis, Levi Strauss & Co.'s chief communications officer. The dinner would have been important regardless of the election—corporate leaders and grassroots community activists are not groups normally in conversation with one another. But building fellowship was especially important now, as both the foundation and these leaders stepped into uncharted post-election territory. "It was an effort to bring worlds together, to sit at the table, to break bread, to have people just delve in," explained Daniel Lee.

Several of the Pioneers had never interacted with a foundation board before, and they were wary. But many were pleasantly surprised by the board

members' warmth and curiosity. "The opportunity to meet with the board was huge for me," said Terry Valen. "It was eye-opening. My takeaway was that we can make connections." Several Pioneers called out this dinner—and others that would follow—as a highlight of the Pioneers program and an important experience in boundary crossing. Said Vanessa Moses: "Given the political moment, the urgency, there is a necessity to practice solidarity and have trust across not just organizations but sectors."

The dinner was clarifying and inspiring for the board members as well. They, too, were searching for ways to prepare—personally, professionally, as a board—for any civil and human rights rollbacks that might be coming. While they could help steer a billion-dollar corporation, none had the on-the-ground experience and perspective of these grassroots community leaders. "When our board met them, there was just a deep sense of 'wow,'" said Lee. They'd had questions about the initiative, along with normal board concerns like five-year measurable outcomes. But at that dinner, "they realized that these were folks who had dedicated their lives to protecting frontline communities," said Evelia Pérez. "That was an 'aha' moment and it created alignment."

Seth Jaffe, executive vice president and general counsel of LS&Co., was among them. He recalled feeling struck at that first dinner that the foundation had picked exactly the right leaders for these times. "These risk-taking leaders were the ones who were willing and able to work with society's most vulnerable," said Jaffe. "There was this realization among us that we were helping to fund the frontlines in a way we didn't expect." At that dinner, both Jaffe and Haas helped assure the Pioneers that they were not random corporate people selected to eat with them, but rather allies eager to understand the challenges facing these leaders and their organizations and how they could help. Said Haas: "It was important for

them to see that our intentions were good and that the foundation had their back."

The December conversation, the Rockwood retreat, and the board dinner offered different but related opportunities to build trust, relationship, and community between the Pioneers and the foundation, and among the Pioneers themselves. In retrospect, said Lee, it was obvious that this was what the program had needed all along—and how it should have started. Without trust, the program might never have found its footing. "We were at a crossroads that first year—learning how philanthropy works with grassroots leaders," said Lee. "It's a no-brainer only in retrospect—you need time and trust to even begin to understand each other." And now, that trust offered new possibilities for how the foundation and the Pioneers could move forward, co-creating a program that was far more purposeful and aligned.

**CORPORATE LEADERS
AND GRASSROOTS
ACTIVISTS ARE NOT GROUPS
NORMALLY IN CONVERSATION
WITH ONE ANOTHER.
BUT BUILDING
FELLOWSHIP
WAS ESPECIALLY
IMPORTANT NOW.**

PIONEERS 2020 TIMELINE

2010–2015 The first Pioneers in Justice initiative

NOVEMBER 2015 Levi Strauss Foundation board approves Pioneers 2020

MARCH 2016 Pioneers 2020 launches with a two-day retreat

OCTOBER 2016 “Recalibration” sessions with Movement Strategy Center begin

NOVEMBER 2016 U.S. presidential election; Levi Strauss & Co. CEO Chip Bergh issues post-election letter to employees

FEBRUARY 2017 Pioneers and LSF staff participate in Rockwood retreat; Pioneers and foundation board members attend first joint dinner; LSF board approves Rapid Response Fund

MAY 2017 Mike McBride speaks at Community Day

SUMMER 2017 Pioneers 2020 funding focus shifts to “program leaps” and capacity building

JULY 2018 Pioneers 2020 resilience and well-being grants begin

SEPTEMBER 2018 *Fortune* publishes Chip Bergh’s gun violence op-ed; the Safer Tomorrow Fund launches

NOVEMBER 2018 U.S. midterm elections

MAY 2019 Foundation board approves an expanded budget and a shift to multiyear support for the Rapid Response Fund

JUNE 2019 Transgender Law Center and LSF march together in San Francisco Pride parade

FEBRUARY 2020 Pioneers Mike McBride and Zach Norris headline voting rights event at Levi’s Plaza; Norris’s book, *We Keep Us Safe*, published

PIONEER PROFILE

Zach Norris

**Executive Director,
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights**



Top: Zach Norris. Bottom: Norris and One Fair Wage president Saru Jayaraman (in red) cut the ribbon at Restore Oakland's grand opening. (Eurydice Photo, Brooke Anderson)

CREATING A NEW VISION OF *JUSTICE AND SAFETY* CENTERED IN COMMUNITY

Zach Norris grew up in East Oakland, the son of an African American father and a white mother. His dad worked in a shipyard. His mom taught elementary school. Despite East Oakland's notorious violent crime rate, Norris was fairly sheltered from it. "My mom drove me every day to school in a big green tank-like Volvo," Norris explained. He went to grade school in the Oakland hills, literally above the fray, then attended a private high school on a tree-lined street in Berkeley. "As a light-skinned African American who was sent to Catholic school, I was aware of my own privilege."

Still, Norris also had a close-up view of the criminal justice system—both sides of it. He had cousins in prison, including one serving life without parole. But he also had an uncle who was a probation officer and another cousin who worked for the Sheriff's Department. After getting laid off from the shipyard, Norris's father found work as a janitor at a juvenile detention center. "When I look at the adult African American males in my family," Norris reflected, "it's either people being incarcerated in the system or people working in it."



But it wasn't until he left East Oakland for Harvard University that Norris became fully attuned to social inequality. "I saw how young people there were treated differently when they made mistakes," he said. He watched classmates overdose and get into violent altercations that, if they'd been African American kids in East Oakland, would have been "the first step in the school-to-prison pipeline." Each time he went home, he saw the impact of systemic racism and injustice. One spring, he visited public high schools in East Oakland in an effort to recruit students to Harvard. "The schools wondered why I was bothering," Norris said. "Only half their students were graduating. The despair in the hallways was palpable."

After Harvard, Norris returned to East Oakland, where public protests against California's Proposition 21—a racial profiling statute designed to increase the number of youth of color tried as adults—were in full swing. Norris joined in and found a new path. "It was this amazing feeling of freedom, to express myself in a way that was connected to something larger," explained Norris. "That's what was missing from all my years of education. For whatever reason, I never connected to an agenda that was meaningful for me."

A year later, on summer break from law school at New York University, Norris interned at the Oakland-

based **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights** (EBC) while another massive youth protest took shape. Despite sharp declines in youth crime, the county was proposing to build the largest per capita juvenile hall in the U.S. "It was too big, too far, too racist," Norris said. After vocal protests at a Board of Supervisors meeting, Norris and eight others were arrested for civil disobedience and jailed overnight. The board voted in favor of constructing the new facility. But then Norris started showing up at one supervisor's reelection events, asking, "If you're the champion for children, how come you're supporting this super jail for youth?" Her donors started asking her that same question. She changed her vote. The size of the juvenile hall expansion was cut in half, and the building was moved to a different location.

Over the next few years, Norris worked on death penalty cases in Alabama, studied worker issues and police brutality in Argentina, and finished law school. In 2004, he returned to the Ella Baker Center as a full-time organizer—beating back racist ballot initiatives, building out campaigns, and rising to the position of program director. In 2010, he left EBC to cofound Justice for Families, a national alliance of organizations working to end the country's youth incarceration epidemic. That effort intensified Norris's commitment to finding ways to redirect

“

IT WAS THIS AMAZING FEELING
OF FREEDOM, TO EXPRESS MYSELF
IN A WAY THAT WAS CONNECTED
TO SOMETHING LARGER.

”

both funds and focus away from prisons and toward community-based solutions. “There’s an opportunity for greater prosperity across communities that is never going to happen as long as we gear so many resources toward punishment,” he said.

In 2013, Norris rejoined the Ella Baker Center as executive director, shifting the organization’s strategy to focus on “the way in which criminalization and mass incarceration are tied to every issue you might care about—from gender justice, to economic justice, to racial justice, to healthcare, to schools.” Norris is determined to use EBC’s platform to alter how the country thinks about criminal justice reform.

“Most solutions people point to are more of the same, but in disguise,” Norris reasoned. What’s needed, he believes, is something more revolutionary: a full dismantling of the association between *prisons* and *safety*. The founding of Restore Oakland, a new kind of community center embodying the principles of restorative justice, and the writing of his new book, *We Keep Us Safe*, are both efforts to break that connection. “For me, safety is about relationship. It’s about being held accountable and held in community. If we want to heal the harm faster than it’s happening, then we need to build out a new vision of what community safety looks like.”



“

WE NEED TO BUILD
OUT A NEW VISION OF
WHAT COMMUNITY
SAFETY LOOKS LIKE.

”

Ella Baker Center activists
lobbying in Sacramento, CA,
for criminal justice reform.
(Terence Long)



Miya Yoshitani (left) and APEN members
at San Francisco's 2018 Rise for Climate
march. (Eurydice Photo)

CHAPTER 2

STRETCH

Even as the Pioneers and the Levi Strauss Foundation were coming into better alignment, the new administration's challenges against civil liberties, citizenship, inclusion, gender justice, and democracy unfurled at an unrelenting pace.

In the first three months of 2017 alone, the Trump administration issued the Muslim ban, expanded the number of people subject to detention and deportation, rescinded Title IX guidance clarifying legal protections for transgender students, abandoned the federal government's longstanding goal of reducing and ending the Justice Department's use of private prisons, reversed the government's stance on voter ID laws deemed racially discriminatory by the courts, called for the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, proposed defunding Planned Parenthood, announced plans to build a wall on the U.S.–Mexico border, and repealed President Obama's Fair Pay and Safe

Workplaces executive order. As the year progressed, the executive orders and policy shifts—from challenging affirmative action and DACA to banning transgender people from serving in the military—kept coming.⁶

For the Pioneers, this whirlwind created a new operating environment characterized by hypervigilance and nonstop organizing. “We’re dealing with multiple attacks from all directions. There is so much to process, it is chaotic and overwhelming,” explained Miya Yoshitani at the time. The Pioneers were playing defense—working to stop their movements from losing ground and to protect and support vulnerable communities that were at increased risk

⁶ The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights noted 60 attempts by the new administration to roll back major civil and human rights policies and legislation in 2017; 73 such rollbacks in 2018, and 52 more in 2019. For the full list, see: <https://civilrights.org/trump-rollbacks/>.

of discrimination, incarceration, and deportation. All of the Pioneers were incredibly busy, filing court actions, building coalitions, seeking new donors, training new activists, and resisting. Taking in the full force of the new administration's attempted rollbacks, Kris Hayashi put it bluntly: "Our work now is keeping ourselves alive for the next four years and beyond."

In some ways, this work felt like an extreme version of what they were used to—it was community organizing in hyperdrive. But the Pioneers were also entering new territory. Millions of people were looking to organizers like them for structure and guidance in resisting the administration's proposed policies. New funding was coming in from donors intent on using their dollars to fuel protest and change. Some Pioneer organizations experienced rapid growth as a result, and scrambled to staff up. While most Pioneers already operated as part of coalitions, new alliances were rapidly forming, as cross-cutting issues like immigration drew movements together into a common fight. As a result, the body of work being tackled by each Pioneer was morphing and expanding. By mid-2017, for example, nearly half of Asian Pacific Environmental Network's work was different from what they'd done before the election. "We made a decision to focus 60 percent of our work on growing out existing organizing while committing 40 percent on a 'resistance' agenda," explained Miya Yoshitani. That new work included doing rapid-response work related to executive orders and increasing APEN's narrative work to lift up the voices of Asian American immigrants and refugees.

For all the Pioneers, carving out space for long-term visioning in the midst of this fast-paced defensive organizing proved exceptionally difficult—but it was critical that they find a way. "It's essential not only to be responding to threats and attacks as they arise, but also to be thinking proactively beyond that frame,"

explained Kris Hayashi, whose organization was battling cases related to the detention of transgender border crossers, transgender student protection rollbacks, federal attacks on healthcare protections for transgender people, and more. Vanessa Moses agreed: "We can't afford to let go of our long-term goals or to stop providing political vision to our sector, the broader movement, and to our staff." But the constant, unpredictable nature of the oncoming threats made it difficult to get ahead or craft long-term strategies for organizing beyond them. "Things are so quickly changing and people are being impacted so deeply, it's tough to keep up with that," admitted Mike McBride. "The nature of our work has us explaining things to our communities that we haven't figured out ourselves."

Yet these leaders shared the belief that this moment represented not just heightened fear but also incredible promise. "We call moments like the one we're in now 'movement moments'—they're semi-rare opportunities for the grassroots to grow and flex our long-term power, all while accomplishing shorter-term advocacy or electoral goals," said Aparna Shah. "We are at a moment of risk and pressure. And, at the same time, there is a driving force of change that is creating a riptide. It feels fast-moving and disruptive and also full of opportunity."

PIVOTING THE PROGRAM DESIGN

The Levi Strauss Foundation, meanwhile, was looking to bring that same sense of energy and urgency to its grantmaking—and not just within the Pioneers program. In February 2017, the board approved a \$1 million **Rapid Response Fund**, the first of its kind for the foundation. The fund would make quick grants accessible to organizations and leaders working to safeguard the rights and well-being of communities negatively impacted by the new administration's

rhetoric, policies, and actions, as well as by the worsening global refugee crisis. Prioritized communities included Muslims, South Asians, transgender people, and vulnerable immigrants and refugees.

“The bottom line is that there were people and communities that we’ve long cared about that were being targeted by the actions and policies of our own administration in this unprecedented environment,” said Daniel Lee. Ultimately, the foundation’s rapid-response funding decisions came down to listening to what grantees and other local social justice leaders needed. “We looked carefully at the cascade of executive orders, then looked to grantees to identify the impact on people and communities and offer solutions,” explained Lee. In this way, listening *became* the foundation’s rapid-response strategy—and gave them a way to be nimble and responsive outside a formal program structure.

The Rapid Response Fund ramped up the foundation’s support for leaders and organizations doing legal/policy advocacy and for those engaged in “emergency response”—that is, designing new tools and strategies to help vulnerable communities. These latter grantees comprised leaders and organizations with the deep networks and delivery mechanisms to get information and resources directly to communities in need—including several Pioneers. At its February 2017 meeting, the board approved “doubling down” on selected Pioneer organizations for their work addressing immediate threats among communities targeted by executive orders:

- » **CAUSA JUSTA JUST CAUSE** received a \$50,000 grant to lead a diverse coalition providing legal representation and “know your rights” training to low-income immigrant communities in the Bay Area.

- » **LIVE FREE CAMPAIGN** received \$100,000 to train faith-based leaders and law enforcement on protecting the rights of the most vulnerable in 20 U.S. cities, and to launch an app to disseminate calls-to-action on urgent issues.
- » **POWER CALIFORNIA** received \$50,000 to organize rights trainings and walk-in legal clinics in cities with large immigrant populations across California.
- » **TRANSGENDER LAW CENTER** received \$100,000 to expand legal services to address mounting needs of the transgender community nationally and build a cadre of advocates to resist discriminatory legislation at local and state levels.

This responsive grantmaking inspired the foundation to create a revised Pioneers 2020 strategy that was better matched to this new environment—which was not a simple task. As Daniel Lee put it: “How do you have everyone pushing themselves in so many ways and still have an intelligible program?” For the Levi Strauss Foundation, the answer was to let go of their expectations—and their hope of replicating the original Pioneers program—in order to make way for

“
WE CALL MOMENTS LIKE THE ONE
WE’RE IN NOW ‘MOVEMENT MOMENTS’
—THEY’RE SEMI-RARE OPPORTUNITIES
FOR THE GRASSROOTS TO GROW AND
FLEX OUR LONG-TERM POWER.

PIONEER APARNA SHAH

”

what was needed now. “The Pioneers needed to make sure that their organizations were going to continue at all, and the needs of the people they were there to support became so immediate, that we had to pivot,” explained the foundation’s Seth Jaffe. But just as forging relationships with grassroots leaders required new muscle for the foundation, so too did releasing their theory of change one year into the program. “As a funder, it meant embracing uncertainty as well as a new level of vulnerability,” said Lee. Nonetheless, as 2017 progressed, they made several key changes to the program that would have big impact.

GIVING PIONEERS MORE CONTROL

A pillar of the first Pioneers program was its Pioneer Forums—half-day sessions that engaged the whole cohort in exploring real-time leadership and organizational challenges. In the first iteration, these sessions focused mainly on the integration of technology and social media into social movements; they were designed by foundation staff and led mostly by outside facilitators and trainers. While the new Pioneers were interested in the foundation’s perspectives on these issues, what they wanted more emphatically was space to engage with one another—but without external facilitators, who might inhibit open sharing

and vulnerability within the group. “We wanted more time to talk about our specific work and to dig deeper into each other’s strategies,” explained Miya Yoshitani.

While the Pioneers had held this view from the start, the need for cross-issue, cross-community relationships now felt more critical. Their issues and causes were becoming more interconnected—what was once one leader’s “turf” was increasingly everyone’s. This made it all the more urgent for them to have space and time to talk about their work, lean on one another’s perspectives, share theories of change, reflect on the conditions their communities and movements were facing with this new administration, and collectively problem-solve. In other words, they saw the gift of the program as the cohort itself, and wanted to start there.

In an effort to prioritize these needs, the foundation ceded control of the Pioneer Forums to the Pioneers themselves, who chose to focus these sessions on managing organizational change in tumultuous times. They arranged forums on building movements and aligning strategies in a new political age; evolving individual and organizational identity while scaling up; defining new bases and exploring “bigger we” narratives to create bridges to

JUST AS FORGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH GRASSROOTS
LEADERS REQUIRED NEW MUSCLE FOR THE FOUNDATION,
SO TOO DID RELEASING THEIR THEORY OF
CHANGE ONE YEAR INTO THE PROGRAM.



Middle photo: Youth leaders of 99Rootz, helping mobilize the youth vote in California. Other photos: Transgender Law Center protests in El Paso, TX, and Albuquerque, NM. (Latino Community Foundation, Eurydice Photo)

new constituencies; and improving staff retention and transitions. Inviting the Pioneers to keep their sessions private gave them a greater sense of ownership, engagement, and empowerment—it was the kind of “co-design” they’d been looking for. “The ability to have those conversations about who we were individually, organizationally, and collectively—and to explore who we are called to be—was invaluable,” said Mike McBride.

PROVIDING MESSAGING TRAINING

The first Pioneers had benefited tremendously from the work they’d done to develop their leadership voice—all were now occupying bigger stages. Even though leadership voice had been dropped as a formal program pillar, the foundation still wanted to support the new Pioneers’ ability to use their voices to engage a broader set of actors, so that they could attract more resources, build bigger bases, and have wider influence and impact. “We believed each of them was capable of being not just the voice of their movements but leading voices of social change across the Bay Area and on national stages,” said Daniel Lee. Indeed, this was part of the reason they’d been selected as Pioneers.

“

**WE NEED MORE EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION TOOLS SO THAT
OUR MESSAGES, OUR VALUES, AND
OUR WORK CAN RESONATE MORE
DEEPLY WITH WIDER AUDIENCES.**

PIONEER TERRY VALEN

”

While the Pioneers were breaking new ground with their organizing, many were struggling to find their voice and reach beyond their own issues and audiences. Some of this was due to their innate collectivist orientation—they were often not inclined to step forward as singular leaders, preferring to highlight other voices above their own. And while not all of the Pioneers were ready to embrace that challenge, many were eager for it. Mike McBride, for example, no longer wanted the Live Free Campaign to be pigeonholed as a faith voice. “We have more to offer than just in a religious space,” he said. “I want my voice and our voice to translate more broadly.” Kris Hayashi also wanted to learn how to step forward: “Part of what I need to unlearn to continue to be effective is my default to being more in the background.”

To encourage this development, the foundation offered each Pioneer ongoing voice and messaging support. Through Lightbox Collaborative, a communications consultancy, the Pioneers received training on tailoring messages to new audiences, including new kinds of funder audiences (e.g., high net worth individuals, larger national or private independent foundations); holding on-camera interviews on controversial topics; and delivering “TED”-style talks. Foundation staff also offered steady networking support, encouraging the Pioneers to engage with audiences outside their usual spaces and actively connecting them with speaking opportunities. The aim was to raise the visibility of the Pioneers as go-to experts on social justice issues and definitive translators of the events of the day. The dinners with the Levi Strauss Foundation board also helped in this regard—giving these grassroots leaders more opportunities to “bridge” their messages to new (in this case, corporate and wealthy philanthropic) audiences.

There were also pointed efforts to help the Pioneers develop a new level of savvy around effective messaging in the growing context of fake news and

PIONEER PROFILE

Terry Valen

Executive Director, Filipino Community Center

BUILDING *POWER* AMONG FILIPINOS AND ACROSS COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Terry Valen grew up in New Orleans, where racial politics were very black and white. As a Filipino, it was hard to know how to fit in. “People didn’t know what a Filipino was, and there weren’t many Asians,” he said. “I was called ‘Chink’ and ‘Gook,’ and people would make stereotypical Asian noises at me.” Watching his parents endure racism was often harder than experiencing it himself. Valen vividly remembers the racial discrimination his mom faced at local stores, the language discrimination his dad experienced at work, and harassing calls made to their home phone.

But racism wasn’t something talked about in the city’s small Filipino community. “There was this belief that if you succeed and fit in, then you won’t have to worry about these things,” said Valen. And yet he saw how this perspective fed a kind of classism, an infighting for status where those doing well looked down on those who were not. Valen started to see this dynamic—where one group of people felt pitted against another—replicated everywhere in society. And he felt an almost primal urge to find ways to address it. “Why didn’t we look out for the other parts of our community, or beyond it? I thought, There’s got to be a way for people to be in deeper solidarity.”

As a student at Duke University, exposure to progressive ideas both radicalized Valen and gave him language for what he was seeing. After



Top: Terry Valen. Bottom: Valen leading protest at San Francisco International Airport, April 2018. (Eurydice Photo, Dawn Bohulano Mabalon)



graduating in 1994, he headed to UCLA for a master's in public health with a focus on environmental health science. He also started volunteering and organizing with recent immigrant and working-class Filipinos in Los Angeles. "Being away from campus and out in the community was game-changing for me," he said. "It took me out of the realm of ideas on a college campus and got me working with everyday people."

In 2001, Valen moved to San Jose, California, to work for a nonprofit addressing the environmental injustice impacts of Silicon Valley's high-tech industry. That move came just one month after 9/11—an event that would propel Valen more deeply into the world of community organizing. Roughly 90 percent of screeners at the San Jose, Oakland, and San Francisco airports were Filipino. But with the Philippines now considered the "second front" of the War on Terror, the national origin discrimination against non-citizen Filipino security workers was immediate—more than 1,000 local Filipino screeners were abruptly fired. Valen joined efforts to organize these workers to get their jobs back and find them housing and healthcare. That work exposed him to a host of issues confronting Filipino immigrants—from wage theft and exploitation to discrimination and increased deportation. "Seeing all of the issues," he said, "I was getting more

grounded in the daily struggles of immigrant Filipinos and how these were connected with other communities in the new political context of the War on Terror."

He also noticed how few organized efforts there were to help these immigrants thrive. In San Francisco's Excelsior neighborhood, where the city's largest Filipino population was concentrated, there were no Filipino nonprofits, nor any other forms of culturally appropriate support. In 2004, Valen founded the **Filipino Community Center (FCC)** as a way to fill this gap, organizing and giving voice to the low-income immigrant Filipino community concentrated in that neighborhood. In the 15 years since, FCC has grown far beyond a local community center in the Excelsior. Valen and his staff have built a strong base of Bay Area Filipinos and continue to lead campaigns on a host of issues important to this community—from wage theft among caregivers, to youth development, to anti-domestic violence. Several FCC campaigns have drawn national attention. The organization also got Tagalog, the primary Filipino language, certified as a language in the city of San Francisco, and continues to serve as a bridge between very localized volunteer groups and more established Asian-led advocacy organizations.

“

I THOUGHT, THERE'S GOT
TO BE A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO
BE IN DEEPER SOLIDARITY.

”

In the last few years, much of Valen's focus has been on combatting the rising tide of gentrification and displacement that is forcing so many working-class families, including Filipinos, out of San Francisco. "The gentrification is so intense that in some parts of the city we might have half the Filipino population we had 10 years ago," he said. "We are defending our right to live and stay in the city." But Valen and FCC are not doing it alone. The Filipino Community Center tends to work collaboratively, actively seeking opportunities to organize alongside Latino, Chinese, African American, Asian, Arab, and other communities in the city struggling with similar issues. "I always talk about our growth and development as linked with other immigrant, working-class, people-of-color communities," Valen said.

In this way, Valen's work is addressing that dynamic he'd railed against as a boy—where groups stand in competition rather than finding common ground and alliance. He hopes it can serve as a model for how all communities can forge multiracial alliances and work together in solidarity. "These are critical times right now, and the Bay Area has a long history of confronting some of the biggest issues in our country," he said. "We have an opportunity to lead not just locally but nationally, and not alone but together."



“
WE HAVE AN
OPPORTUNITY TO LEAD
NOT JUST LOCALLY
BUT NATIONALLY,
AND NOT ALONE
BUT TOGETHER.
”

FCC members and supporters
fight for better pay for Filipino
healthcare workers. (FCC staff)

pervasive social media. Several Pioneers attended a workshop on crafting narratives around polarizing issues like race and immigration, led by the national communications lab Opportunity Agenda. The session proved especially valuable for the Pioneers, who widely recognized the power of learning how to communicate values over issues or identity. “So few of us are making these connections in our messaging,” said Miya Yoshitani. “We could help move our issues faster if we did.” Acknowledged Terry Valen: “The new context of fake or alternative news means we are on new terrain in the battle of narratives. We need more effective communication tools so that our messages, our values, and our work can resonate more deeply with wider audiences. We need to learn that to be effective in this era.”

SHIFTING THE GRANTMAKING STRATEGY

In the first Pioneers in Justice program, the grants followed the program design—the Pioneers identified their goals within each programmatic pillar, and the funding flowed from there. With those pillars largely gone, the foundation needed a new process. And so they turned to the Pioneers, asking: What do you need in order to advance social change? What project do you want to take a risk on? Where do you want to try a new approach? How can we best help you? This shifted the program’s strategy toward funding talent

and supporting leaders where they were, versus following a blueprint. Consequently, the foundation reoriented the Pioneers program grantmaking around two types of grants, adding a third type in 2018.

Capacity Grants

Even without the upheaval sparked by the 2016 election, most Pioneer organizations had a spate of existing capacity needs they were eager to address. They wanted to develop their own skills as leaders across a broad range of areas, including fundraising, leading through growth and change, and managing difficult conversations. The Pioneers also identified the need for better communications infrastructure and skills, as well as basic technology upgrades. But in this new “movement moment,” their capacity needs were growing exponentially. All were balancing the need for focused work on community priorities with the ability to seize emergent opportunities and respond when their issues were under siege. From an organizational perspective, this meant that these leaders needed to shore up their organizational foundations while simultaneously stretching beyond their constrained capacity in order to achieve new scale.

Indeed, all of the Pioneers were stretching in this way. Several were steering their organizations through a major structural change, while others were expanding their geographical reach.

» **APARNA SHAH** was poised to lead Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, which engaged monolingual adult immigrants and refugees, through a merger with YVote, which mobilized millennial voters, in an effort to form a new broad-based voting bloc under the name **Power California**.

» **ZACH NORRIS** and the **Ella Baker Center**, in partnership with Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, were navigating the complexity

WHAT DO YOU NEED IN ORDER
TO ADVANCE SOCIAL CHANGE?
HOW CAN WE
BEST HELP YOU?

PIONEER PROFILE

Aparna Shah

Senior Advisor, Power California



Top: Aparna Shah. Bottom: Youth activists rally in Los Angeles, 2019. (Eurydice Photo, Carlos Gonzales)

BUILDING THE LONG-TERM POWER OF ALL PEOPLE TO DETERMINE THEIR COLLECTIVE FUTURE

Born in Manila and raised in Mumbai, Aparna Shah grew up in a household defined by multiple perspectives. Shah's father was Hindu, her mother Catholic—and both were quite religious. “Going to Catholic school and having an altar at home with the Hindu pantheon, that was just normal,” said Shah. When she was six years old, the family emigrated to the United States, where Shah felt startled by the discrimination that her parents faced in their new country. “I watched the way they were treated,” she recalled. “They were highly educated, had strong accents, and were not white. They both hit a ceiling.” That discrimination cut against Shah's belief, ingrained in her as a child, that all people should be valued for who they are. “I was raised with a strong sense of fairness and justice.”

After graduating from UC Davis in 1995, Shah earned a master's degree in public health at Johns Hopkins University. While living in Baltimore, she observed a different type of injustice. There was incredible wealth connected to the university, yet there were few social services or safety nets available to the working class and poor Black communities surrounding it. “I had never seen old money and institutional resources like that before,” she said. “It was so stark, the two realities.” That experience inspired her to take a job at the Community Bridges Beacon Center, in



San Francisco's Mission District, helping transform a public middle school into a youth community center. But that work also took a toll on her personally. "The depth of inequality in these immigrant, refugee, and U.S.-born communities of color was hard to see every day," she said.

In 2003, Shah moved to Forward Together, an organization fighting for the self-determination of women, girls, and queer people of color. "These people were being largely ignored by most of the larger, established reproductive rights and health groups," Shah explained. During Shah's tenure, Forward Together did groundbreaking work giving voice to the challenges facing people of color on these issues, becoming one of the first organizations to reframe reproductive rights as reproductive justice based on the analysis and vision of Black women leaders. She also helped develop two national movement-building initiatives that brought together organizations and communities in diverse, multiracial coalitions, and helped advance Forward Stance, a mind-body practice now widely used in the social justice field.

In 2009, Shah joined Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (now **Power California**), as its second staff person. Founded by six female executive directors eager

to address inequities in voter representation, the organization launched with a big vision: to help California's active voter pool more closely resemble the state's demographics. Under her 10-year leadership, the organization began running statewide field campaigns, eventually reaching half a million immigrant, refugee, and young voters of color. Shah also established and developed a sister organization to build the power of these communities to participate and lead systems of government at all levels. "Fundamentally, this work is about building the power of people to transform their own futures," she said.

Throughout her time at Power California, Shah balanced more immediate electoral work with long-term vision setting. "If we work from today, we're just trying to stay alive," she said. "For me it is more important for any organization to ask: How can we envision structural and systemic change? What is it, in the deepest sense, that we are seeking?" It was this kind of visioning that led to the 2018 merger of Mobilize the Immigrant Vote and YVote into Power California, which plans to mobilize 500,000 young voters of color in California by 2024.

“

FUNDAMENTALLY, THIS WORK IS
ABOUT BUILDING THE POWER OF PEOPLE
TO TRANSFORM THEIR OWN FUTURES.

”

While the social justice issues that Shah has worked on have shifted over the years, the through line is her ongoing quest for intersectionality—encouraging others to incorporate multiple perspectives into their work and worldview toward a better collective future. “Coalitions and intersectionality are about really seeing each other and lifting each other up as family, as community,” said Shah. And she sees that need extending far beyond the limits of the people within a shared movement. “Part of the moment we’re in right now in this country and globally is because we are not seeing the humanity of each other,” she said. “We harm ourselves when we harm each other.”

“Organizers know how to defend and fight because our people have had to fight, and because we are not yet making change happen fast enough at a scale that is big enough,” added Shah. “So how do we harness that energy and spirit toward imagining and co-creating a shared future where we value all humanity and the natural world for generations to come?”



“

HOW CAN WE ENVISION
STRUCTURAL AND
SYSTEMIC CHANGE?
WHAT IS IT, IN THE
DEEPEST SENSE, THAT
WE ARE SEEKING?

”

Participants in Power California's
2019 Our Future Fest. (Mike Dennis)

of founding the new community development hub Restore Oakland—doing everything from securing a lease on the building to setting the vision for the restorative-justice joint venture—at a time when EBC’s local campaigning against abusive practices in prisons and jails was reaching new heights.

- » **VANESSA MOSES**, as a new executive director, was leading **Causa Justa Just Cause** through a leadership change. Many of CJJC’s founding staff had left to head up national-level organizing efforts. Moses wanted to better position CJJC’s Black and Brown staff and membership for a new era, which meant rethinking how CJJC operated and developing systems to support a new generation of leadership.
- » **Asian Pacific Environmental Network** was already the country’s largest Asian and Pacific Islander civic engagement program within environmental justice, having activated thousands of Asian Bay Area residents to stand up and fight for environmental rights. Now **MIYA YOSHITANI** wanted to build that same kind of engagement statewide—an effort that would require a new strategic plan and new capacity.
- » With their rising national influence, **KRIS HAYASHI** and the **Transgender Law Center** wanted to strengthen the organizing skills of local transgender and gender nonconforming activists across the country. That meant expanding TLC’s reach and presence to regions with the greatest need and capacity challenges: the South, Midwest, and Southwest.
- » Similarly, **MIKE MCBRIDE** and the **Live Free Campaign** were deeply embedding their models for gun violence prevention and dismantling systems of mass incarceration of Black people

locally and spreading them to new communities—while simultaneously ramping up their outreach and voter education work.

- » The **Filipino Community Center**, led by **TERRY VALEN**, was deepening the Filipino community’s fight against displacement and gentrification in San Francisco while also expanding its reach to other parts of the Bay Area and strategizing how to spread the organization’s knowledge and best practices to Filipino communities and organizers in other parts of the country.

By any measure, this was a tremendous amount of work for these organizations to take on in already demanding times—and it was doubtful they could build the requisite new capacities without additional resources. In an effort to help, the Levi Strauss Foundation earmarked \$50,000 per year (of the \$100,000 set aside for each leader/organization) for each Pioneer to address these mounting needs—including developing new capacity around culture and change management, identifying core organizational needs, navigating the challenges of rapid growth, and clarifying organizational vision and the infrastructure needed to achieve it.

Leap Grants

Additionally, each Pioneer received \$25,000 to \$50,000 annually to support “leap” projects that represented a catalytic jump forward for themselves, their organizations, or their movements. Given how far and how fast these leaders were pushing themselves, in many cases their leap grants and capacity grants were synonymous, essentially funding the same transformational work. In other cases, the Pioneers used this funding to forge separate projects that moved them into new territory. For example:

- » **MIKE MCBRIDE** wanted to build out the Live Free Campaign’s social media, documentary, and video channels as a way to give greater voice and visibility to the people most impacted by gun violence and incarceration—literally giving them places to tell their firsthand stories, lift up local solutions, and shape their own narratives of racial injustice.
- » **ZACH NORRIS** wanted to write a book showcasing the Ella Baker Center’s track record for reducing recidivism rates in Oakland and laying out a new vision for community safety—one based not on fear, punishment, and imprisonment but on restorative justice, economic opportunity, and community support systems.
- » **KRIS HAYASHI** and other leaders at Transgender Law Center, having spearheaded the training of more than 200 trans activists across the country through TLC’s co-led National Training Institute, wanted to bring this growing network together to explore the formation of a national coalition and a national trans agenda.
- » **TERRY VALEN**, while intent on sharing a range of campaign strategies and best practices with other Filipino organizers across the country, also wanted to double-down on one key issue: the abuse, exploitation, and trafficking of Filipino workers who hold temporary work visas in the U.S. He hoped to host anti-trafficking summits for Filipino organizers so they might together build a nationwide campaign.

The Pioneers appreciated the funding—but they appreciated the framing and the push from the foundation as well. “Having that orientation that this was going to be a categorical step forward, a catalyst for us, was helpful to have in the back of my mind,” said Zach Norris. For Norris in particular, who was

delving into new territory by writing a book, the split between capacity grants and leap grants matched his assessment that scaling his organization’s impact would require both internal and external focus. “Levi Strauss helped me see that I could keep doing the campaign work while also taking a step back to reflect on what’s next and to put that vision forward,” Norris said. “You don’t find too many foundations that want to invest in your capacity to do that.”

Resilience and Well-Being Grants

One additional funding stream—added in 2018—proved timely and pivotal. While the Pioneers were experiencing remarkable wins as the program advanced (see page 60), the pressures of their work were mounting. Community members were being physically attacked as part of a rise in hate crimes, unfairly jailed and detained, and seeing their neighborhoods raided by ICE. The Pioneer organizations were largely staffed by people of color, including many DACA recipients, Black Lives Matter activists, and individuals with family members fearing deportation. The Pioneers, their staff, their families, and their communities were now living under conditions of chronic stress and trauma. “Some folks who have

“
IT’S NO SMALL THING TO
RECOGNIZE THAT THE ONLY WAY
THESE WINS ARE HAPPENING IS IF
WE’RE TAKING CARE OF OUR PEOPLE.

PIONEER VANESSA MOSES

”

been in this work for a long time are really shaken by the level of attack, vilification, and life-threatening conditions,” explained Terry Valen. Across the board, personal and professional stresses were becoming intermingled. “People are scared,” said Aparna Shah. “It’s weighing on our people, our staff, our communities.”

The Pioneers had deep levels of energy, optimism, and hope for the change they were building collectively. But they also felt the heaviness of the political and psychological warfare being waged against them. As a result, they were wrestling with a constant tension—trying to advance their movements and capture new opportunities while also dealing with rising stress, anxiety, and health challenges among themselves, their staff, and their communities. By early 2018, this tension was having real impact, as the Pioneers and their staff struggled to stay energized amid exhaustion.⁷

In their conversations with the Pioneers, the Levi Strauss Foundation heard a rising need for tools and processes to address trauma and burnout. Consequently, they began offering resilience and well-being grants. “We saw these grants as supporting their ability to bring self-care to their organizations, even as the attacks continued,” said former Pioneers program manager Evelia Pérez. Most Pioneers received annual grants of \$15,000 in 2018 and in 2019.

The resilience grants enabled the Pioneers to address a different but equally important kind of capacity within their organizations—one that they would likely not have been able to prioritize without dedicated funding. Individually, the Pioneers began exploring a spectrum of approaches to help their staff release some of the trauma they were holding—and develop new practices for taking care of themselves. Some

hired trainers to introduce staff to mind-body practices and launched in-office wellness programs or restorative justice practices to manage conflict. Others used their grants to introduce new safety and security practices or to hold resilience-building retreats where teams explored how to stay connected to vision and purpose under pressure.

These grants were transformational for the Pioneers and their staff. Kris Hayashi said that the grants had a pivotal impact on the Transgender Law Center’s organizational culture, changing the way that they onboarded new hires. TLC also created a buddy system among staff to ensure that they felt supported. “It would be hard to imagine us expanding without having these new practices in place,” he said. Power California worked with trainers to help their expanded post-merger teams come together around a common purpose. Mike McBride found the healing training he did with his staff so valuable that they extended it to key youth organizers, “as a way to cultivate self-care and healing practices that can be replicated in their respective circles of influence.”

All of the Pioneers began weaving these practices into their regular operations, making self-care and community care part of their organizational culture. “It’s been vital to strengthening our leadership, cohesion, and sustainability,” said Miya Yoshitani. Added Vanessa Moses: “I’m not running into other institutions who are invested in the sustainability and health of the people carrying out the work. It’s no small thing to recognize that the only way those wins happen is if we’re taking care of our people.”

⁷ For more reporting on the capacity needs of progressive organizations during the Trump administration, see Adene Sacks, Heather McLeod Grant, and Kate Wilkinson, “The New Normal: Capacity Building During a Time of Disruption,” Open Impact, 2018.



Clockwise from top:
 Longtime APEN leader Lipo Chantanasak speaking at APEN's 2019 Leaders Advance retreat.
 Restore Oakland housewarming celebration, 2019. Power California's Our Future Fest, 2019. (APEN staff, Brooke Anderson, Mike Dennis)



Pioneer Vanessa Moses, leading Cause Justa Just Cause supporters at the 2019 May Day rally. (CJJC archives)

CHAPTER 3

SUCCESS

As the Pioneers continued pushing their work into new territory, the Levi Strauss Foundation was doing the same. In this challenging political climate, the foundation was rapidly shifting how it operated—taking on new risks, accelerating its funding, and experimenting with how to catalyze transformational change in the social sector.

“It’s like we were grappling with what type of foundation we needed to be,” said Daniel Lee. Changing the Pioneers program midstream by adapting it to leaders’ needs gave the foundation new practice in funding from a place of learning and trust. It also opened the door to a new kind of relationship with their grantees.

Funder/grantee relationships are often transactional in nature—funders provide money to nonprofits, which in turn produce reports demonstrating the

impact of that funding. The funder might also have a theory of change to be tested, prompting grantees to align their work with that theory. But the shakeup of the Pioneers program—driven not just by the extraordinary political circumstances but by the oppositional, bottom-up nature of these grassroots leaders—moved the Pioneers and the foundation into a more egalitarian relationship. As the program progressed, the dynamic between the foundation and Pioneers became more of a partnership, with the advice, influence, and learning running both ways.

Indeed, with the external context changing so quickly, these grassroots leaders had a frontline perspective that foundation leaders and staff were eager to learn from. The joint Pioneer/board dinners provided one opportunity for exchange. In late 2017, Daniel Lee also began inviting Pioneers from both cohorts to give “state of the state” talks to board members and staff—sharing their insight into the evolving movement ecosystem, what needs they were seeing in their communities, and where Levi Strauss funding could make the most difference. Some took on even more involved roles. In May 2019, when Lee and his team set out to convince the board to make rapid-response funding a mainstay of the foundation’s work, they brought three grantees—including two Pioneers—with them to help pitch the idea.⁸ “It was a powerful moment, to have them engaging with our leaders, including our CEO, talking about what our support and our alignment means to the workings of these movements,” said Lee.

This was a far deeper and more reciprocal relationship than the foundation had anticipated having with the Pioneers—but it reflected a new operating principle emerging from their experimentation. With Pioneers 2020, the foundation had made a hard turn from funding issues to funding leaders and their capacity to spearhead movements—not just within the Pioneers program but across other portfolios. “Pioneers 2020 prompted a bigger shift in our foundation from funding issues and causes to working with leaders who are on the frontlines of social change,” said Daniel Lee. In a way, this had them operating more like a private-sector entity than a foundation—identifying leaders to bet on, then trusting them with capital, rather than holding tightly to a theory of change and control.

Moreover, this shift was teaching the foundation to listen even more closely to what grantees

needed—which helped create the conditions for deeper relationships to form. Simultaneously, the foundation was also forming partnerships with other movement leaders they were now funding through their rapid-response work—leaders like Ai-jen Poo, executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and Saru Jayaraman, cofounder of Restaurant Opportunities Centers United. “We realized that we’d found a way to walk alongside leaders, to really shift that traditional grantee/funder dynamic,” said Lee.

CORPORATE INFLUENCE

This wasn’t the only relationship that shifted in surprising ways during the Pioneers 2020 program. While the Levi Strauss Foundation and Levi Strauss & Co. are inherently connected—the foundation serves as the philanthropic arm of the company—they operate as largely separate entities. Company employees were aware of the foundation, but most didn’t know the details of who or what they were funding. But now this, too, was changing.

Members of the foundation board who were also leaders of the company—like President and CEO Chip Bergh—were forming relationships with the Pioneers and were driving awareness of their work within the company. The foundation’s staff was doing the same, showcasing the Pioneers’ work to internal audiences and sharing how these leaders were protecting vulnerable communities in ways that aligned with the company’s core values. LS&Co.’s corporate affairs department, in turn, began looking for ways to make company employees more aware of the Pioneers and their work. Inviting Pioneer Mike McBride to rally employees at Community Day in 2017 was only one part of this effort. “It just became a ripple effect,” former Pioneers program manager Evelia Pérez

⁸ The board approved an increase in budget and a shift to multiyear grants, also expanding the fund to include one-time grants around voting rights and voter engagement.

explained. “We began partnering more, connecting the Pioneers and other grantees to the company.”

These tighter connections led to another dynamic that nobody anticipated—Levi Strauss & Co. drawing on the experience and wisdom of these Pioneers as it crafted its own groundbreaking new corporate platforms and policies.

In his letter to employees sent just after the 2016 election, CEO Chip Bergh signaled that the company would be stepping up in new ways and taking bolder stands in response to the political moment. Soon after, he began actively using the platform of the company to defend the communities and issues that LS&Co. has long cared about. One of those causes was ending gun violence. In 2016, following an incident where a customer accidentally shot himself while trying on jeans at a Levi’s store, Bergh had issued a statement requesting that no firearms be brought into company stores, factories, or offices. But in 2018, against the backdrop of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and the surge of activism against America’s gun violence epidemic that followed, Bergh and the company were determined to go further.

In September 2018, the company established the **Safer Tomorrow Fund**, directing more than \$1 million in philanthropic grants to fuel nonprofits and youth activists working to end gun violence in America. To ensure that the fund reached deep into impacted communities, the company tapped Mike McBride. Through the Live Free Campaign, McBride was working to break the silos between different groups experiencing gun violence—suicide victims, students in mostly white suburbs, urban Black and Brown youth—in order to bring them, and the issue of racial equity, into one conversation. His insights helped inform the company’s emerging anti-gun violence platform and bring communities of color

to the center of that discussion. “The foundation was already working with Pastor Mike and his organization,” said Seth Jaffe, executive vice president and general counsel of LS&Co., and board member of the Levi Strauss Foundation. “It was this very synergistic opportunity for the foundation to support the company’s new gun violence initiative, and the company to help support the foundation message, and both of us to learn from organizations like Live Free.”

In September 2018, Bergh published an op-ed in *Fortune* magazine outlining the company’s bold new public stance. “We simply cannot stand by silently when it comes to the issues that threaten the very fabric of the communities where we live and work,” he declared. In addition to the Safer Tomorrow Fund, Bergh announced that Levi Strauss & Co. would also partner with Everytown Business Leaders for Gun Safety, a coalition of business leaders who believe that business has a critical role to play and a moral obligation to do something about America’s gun violence epidemic.

For a multinational company with one of the most recognizable brands in the world, it was an audacious move. Even the Pioneers noted how unusual it was

“
WE REALIZED THAT WE’D FOUND A
WAY TO WALK ALONGSIDE LEADERS,
TO REALLY SHIFT THAT TRADITIONAL
GRANTEE/FUNDER DYNAMIC.

DANIEL LEE, LSF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

”

for a business to go out on a limb in support of a controversial issue, advocating for legislation *and* corporate responsibility. “That open letter was beyond the status quo,” said McBride. “They are taking calculated but still significant risks on issues of gun violence and trying to shift their advocacy in ways that go far beyond statements.” LS&Co. also trusted McBride to help guide what this “beyond” could look like, making him one of the Safer Tomorrow Fund’s first grant recipients. McBride used the funds to launch the National Black and Brown Gun Violence Prevention Consortium, which works to scale proven grassroots gun violence reduction strategies in impacted communities.

McBride wasn’t the only Pioneer to influence the company and its practices. When LS&Co.’s human resources team crafted a Global Transgender and Gender Transition Guideline, rolled out in late 2018, Transgender Law Center staff reviewed the policy and helped with the launch. Representatives from TLC spoke at the company in the months that followed, socializing the importance of a trans-inclusion policy. Kris Hayashi was among them. “He told his personal story, and it was incredibly moving,” recalled Daniel Lee. “Afterward, a human resources colleague who’s been in the company for more than 20 years said to me, ‘I’ve never had to ask these questions about trans

visibility, but I realize by not asking these questions we’re not doing our work,’” said Lee. “Because of the Pioneers, we’re asking things of ourselves that we wouldn’t have otherwise.”

For McBride, Hayashi, and other Pioneers, this kind of alliance was new territory—an almost unheard-of opportunity to have influence and extend their reach into the private sector. At the same time, they were seeing how their alliance with a corporate foundation could build their visibility as leaders and create a larger platform for their causes. “A lot of Levi Strauss’s brand is about being an American brand—epitomizing a certain kind of everyday mass appeal. The company is helping others not see us as radical or ancillary,” said McBride. Kris Hayashi shared, “Building a relationship with Levi Strauss & Co. has raised the impact of our organization’s work, and the movements and campaigns that we represent.” And it’s mutual. In June 2019, at the San Francisco Pride parade, TLC staff and supporters marched beside LS&Co. employees, marking the first time a company and nonprofit had paired up in the event’s history.

“Corporations remain invisible in our work at our peril,” noted Mike McBride at the start of Pioneers 2020. “Can we challenge the corporate sector to be better political champions?” Clearly, they

THIS KIND OF ALLIANCE WAS NEW TERRITORY—AN ALMOST
UNHEARD-OF OPPORTUNITY [FOR THESE LEADERS] TO
**HAVE INFLUENCE AND EXTEND THEIR
REACH INTO THE PRIVATE SECTOR.**





Clockwise from top:
Filipino Community Center
youth activists. APEN youth
activists. Activists at APEN
and TLC rallies. (FCC staff,
APEN staff, Eurydice Photo)

could. The Pioneers' willingness to step into that relationship has, in turn, given both the LS&Co. and the Levi Strauss Foundation practice not just in funding movement work but in being part of it themselves. "If there's anything I'm most inspired by and most proud of, it's the way that we have been able to align the goals of the foundation, the goals of the Pioneers and organizations and leaders like them, and the longer-term goals of the company in having an outsized impact on the world and leading through values," said Seth Jaffe. "The Pioneer program started as a way for us to invest in these great organizations, but helping them has helped us as well."

PROGRESSIVE PROGRESS

While Pioneers 2020 has not yet ended, all of the Pioneers have already significantly advanced their work, expanded their development, and better positioned themselves for long-term movement building. At the outset of Pioneers 2020, all of these leaders and organizations were doing outstanding local work and were poised to break through onto larger stages. Today, they are working at the forefront of their issues, gaining broader visibility at the state and

national levels, and rapidly deepening their progressive impact. Below are a few highlights of what the Pioneers have achieved:

» Through its "Stay the Right Way" campaign, **Asian Pacific Environmental Network** defeated plans to build a new A's baseball stadium in Oakland's Chinatown, which would have displaced local businesses and thousands of Asian immigrant residents. That campaign helped lay the groundwork for greater tenant protections across Oakland. "It's one small real change that leads us to do comprehensive land trust across a whole city," said Miya Yoshitani. APEN also developed a strategic plan for scaling its cross-cutting environmental justice agenda statewide—building out a new communications team, expanding its state policy team to have greater impact for Asian immigrant and refugee communities in Sacramento, and executing initial steps to expand its presence to Southern California, with local organizing activities planned in Los Angeles's Asian American community. APEN also played a notable role in shaping California's approach to a Green New Deal and influencing the similar federal deal proposed by U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—bringing the perspectives of disproportionately impacted communities of color to that conversation.

» **Causa Justa Just Cause** promoted new leadership among its base and updated its policies and structures to better position itself for greater growth and impact. As a result, CJJC helped pass numerous local ballot measures—including a tax on large corporations to support homeless housing and services and an expansion of renter rights to roughly 8,000 Oakland tenants. During the Pioneers grant period, CJJC also played a vital role in winning "sanctuary city" status in the Bay

“

THE PIONEERS PROGRAM
STARTED AS A WAY FOR US
TO INVEST IN THESE GREAT
ORGANIZATIONS, BUT HELPING
THEM HAS HELPED US AS WELL.

SETH JAFFE, LS&CO. EXECUTIVE VP AND GENERAL
COUNSEL AND LSF BOARD MEMBER

”

PIONEER PROFILE

Kris Hayashi

Executive Director, Transgender Law Center



Top: Kris Hayashi. Bottom: TLC activist's handmade sign. (Eurydice Photo)

BRINGING TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NONCONFORMING RIGHTS TO THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

The urge to organize came early for Kris Hayashi. As a gender nonconforming Asian child raised in predominantly white Seattle, he faced harassment from a young age. “I understood that the world was not set up for young people like me to survive,” said Hayashi. He felt drawn to do something about the many forms of unfairness and injustice he saw in the world, but he wasn’t sure how to get started. In high school, efforts to add his voice to protests against the Iraq War were brushed off by adult organizers. If anything, the lack of a clear path toward activism made Hayashi more determined to find one.

Hayashi left Seattle to attend Stanford University in the early 1990s, when campus-based youth organizing was reaching new heights. Hayashi met other Asian and queer organizers, learning immensely from them. But when he joined off-campus protests against California’s Proposition 187, an anti-immigrant state ballot initiative, he experienced ageism once again. “There was a real divide between youth activists and campaign organizers,” Hayashi recalled. “It made me realize that youth needed to organize for themselves, and how powerful that could be.”

While still at Stanford, Hayashi joined Youth United for Community Action (YUCA), a grassroots organization building a movement of young people-of-color organizers in California, with a focus on social and



environmental justice. At YUCA he learned from seasoned leaders of color in the environmental justice movement, like Keisha and Peter Evans. Then, at 23 years old, he became YUCA's executive director, serving in that role for three years. As a new and young ED, he learned a ton about everything from grant writing to fundraising—but *not* about traditional hierarchical leadership. Like many grassroots social justice organizations, YUCA has a leadership approach that focused on raising up other voices above their own. “It wasn’t about me being a visible lead,” he said.

After serving as a regional organizer at Western States Center in Portland for a year, Hayashi headed to New York to become executive director/co-director of the Audre Lorde Project (ALP), a prominent community-led organization for LGBTSTGNC* people of color. For Hayashi, who came out when he was 19 and started to understand himself as trans in his early 20s, leading ALP enabled him to merge two parts of his life: social justice organizing and his identity as a queer trans person of color. “It felt like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” he said. Hayashi steered the organization through a major shift from serving as a community center to becoming a bigger platform for LGBT people-of-color organizing. In

2014, ALP launched TransJustice, one of the first transgender and gender nonconforming organizing projects in the country. Along with several partners, TransJustice coordinated a campaign to push New York City’s welfare agency to pass a groundbreaking nondis-crimination policy—one of the first such policies in the country.

After 10 years with ALP, Hayashi felt burned out and ready for change. “Being an executive director was all I’d ever done at that point,” he said. He wanted to move into trans-specific organizing focused on racial justice—and got his chance when a deputy director position opened at the **Transgender Law Center** (TLC). At the time, TLC was one of the few staffed (and largest) organizations in the country focused on advancing the rights of transgender and gender nonconforming people. But Hayashi’s respite from the ED role was brief. Shortly after he joined TLC, the executive director left. At first, Hayashi didn’t want the role. But he saw the opportunity to help position TLC for a new era of movement building. In 2015, he took the job—and within two years, TLC boasted a racially diverse staff nearly double in size with work that prioritized the issues and needs of TGNC people of color.

* Lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, trans, and gender nonconforming.

“ I UNDERSTOOD THAT THE WORLD WAS NOT SET UP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE LIKE ME TO SURVIVE.

”

2015 was also the year when the first wave of “bathroom bills” swept the country, with more than half of U.S. states initiating legislation to restrict bathroom access based on gender identity. “There were visible, public, anti-trans legislative attacks across the country, with an explosion of visibility for trans people and then a backlash,” Hayashi explained. TLC was suddenly thrust onto the national stage. The organization’s skill at responding to these attacks through court cases, trainings for grass-roots leaders, and campaigns drew new resources, more than doubling TLC’s budget. As the attacks intensified, so too did TLC’s visibility. “We were breaking into new foundations as the first trans organization to get funded.”

The sustained attacks on trans people have been traumatic. But they have also made Hayashi more determined to make *this* the moment when trans and gender nonconforming individuals gain the rights and justice to which they are entitled. “People are so clear about the ways in which we are under attack and what is at stake. There’s opportunity happening in ways that feel different than before,” he said. Hayashi has found his place in this movement—and the work he feels he was always meant to do. “I know there’s no organization or movement I’d rather devote my time, energy, and heart to.”



“

PEOPLE ARE SO CLEAR
ABOUT THE WAYS IN
WHICH WE ARE UNDER
ATTACK AND WHAT
IS AT STAKE.

”

Kris Hayashi (right) leads
Transgender Law Center protest
in Albuquerque, NM, 2018.
(Eurydice Photo)

Area and cofounded the Bay Area Resistance Network, a multi-sector network that launched a rapid-response text alert system to keep local members informed, engage new activists beyond its base, and mobilize both groups around swiftly coordinated mass actions in defense of local communities. At the regional and national levels, CJJC hosted convenings like California Renter Power and the Solidarity to Solutions Summit that brought together grassroots forces to build more coordinated, cross-sector movements. More recently, CJJC launched the Community Futures Framework, a tool to help align various movements in the years ahead.

- » In addition to its own campaign wins, in July 2019 the **Ella Baker Center** launched Restore Oakland. The multi-organizational cooperative now houses several community nonprofits, including Causa Justa Just Cause, and is rooted in restorative justice as a means of building thriving communities. Its launch drew significant press coverage, including by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. EBC hopes that Restore Oakland can become a nationwide model for how to foster economic opportunity and create care-based systems in communities harmed by prisons and punishment. In February 2020, Zach Norris's book, *We Keep Us Safe: Building Secure, Just, and Inclusive Communities*, was published by Beacon Press. The book aims to shift the conversation about public safety away from fear and punishment and toward community support systems, building relationships, and bridging divides. Before Covid-19, Norris was planning a national book tour, with speaking engagements around the U.S.
- » **Filipino Community Center** continued to mobilize its base to fight the gentrification forces pushing Filipinos out of San Francisco, working

in solidarity alongside other immigrant communities. FCC also intensified its engagement with Filipino community groups in Northern California and beyond. Its consultations with Filipino organizers in Long Beach, California, led to the development of a wage theft ordinance that mirrors FCC's work in San Francisco. In December 2019, FCC co-hosted a national summit on labor trafficking, sharing best practices on tackling this entrenched issue with movement leaders from across the country. Recently, Terry Valen participated in a U.S. congressional hearing focused on taxpayer dollars funding human rights abuses in the Philippines and is also leading a campaign against the militarization of borders and homelands. All of these efforts have given the organization greater visibility. "We are at our growth edges, playing more of a strategic role in the region, nationally, and internationally," said Valen.

- » The **Live Free Campaign** continued to operate at the forefront of Black voter mobilization, both within and beyond the faith community. Live Free played a pivotal role in the election of the first Alabama Democrat to the U.S. Senate in decades and in the groundbreaking 2018 passage of Amendment 4 to Florida's state constitution, which restored voting right to Floridians with felony convictions. Live Free also built bridges with local law enforcement in defending communities facing attacks from ICE, continued to implement proven violence-reduction methods, and gave voice to the moral obligation of the faith community in troubled political times. Mike McBride's leadership platform also grew. In August 2019, he organized a forum where he interviewed five Democratic presidential candidates before 5,000 Black millennials and church leaders, to gauge their understanding of Black

voters and their priorities and plans, including on mass incarceration and gun violence prevention.

» **Power California** has galvanized thousands of people of color in California to get politically engaged. In the 2018 midterms, young adults contacted by Power California turned out in substantially higher numbers than those who were not contacted. The organization has since accelerated its efforts to mobilize youth of color through novel organizing approaches. In November 2019, Power California hosted Our Future Fest, a lively festival that drew young leaders, activists, and artists together to inspire youth of color to take action in the 2020 election. Along with 20 network partners across the state, Power California is working to turn out more than 300,000 young Californians of color, which would make up 5 percent of the voting electorate. The organization also began building a leadership pipeline to train thousands of new electoral organizers from communities of color, to ensure young people of color are valued as decision makers in California and beyond, and launched a participatory governance project called Reset, which is building the power of youth of color to lead at all levels of government.

» **Transgender Law Center**, as the only legal service provider in the Pioneers cohort, led dozens of legal battles, including a huge campaign, launched in partnership with several other organizations, seeking justice for Roxsana Hernandez, a trans woman who died in ICE custody after crossing the U.S.–Mexico border. TLC also built its capacity to run a larger and more distributed organization, while increasing its support for and mobilization of more than 200 grassroots trans leaders across the country, ensuring they have the skills, resources, and connections needed to run powerful local campaigns. In 2018, TLC brought together dozens of prominent transgender and gender nonconforming leaders from around the country to share knowledge and strategy, with the goal of building a national trans agenda. “We’re building infrastructure, which is work that hasn’t been done before,” Kris Hayashi explained. Creating a national trans policy and culture change agenda from the grassroots up, he said, “has real potential to build a long-lasting national movement infrastructure that is community-centered.”

THE PIONEERS ARE WORKING AT THE FOREFRONT OF THEIR ISSUES,
GAINING BROADER VISIBILITY AT THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS,
**AND RAPIDLY DEEPENING THEIR
PROGRESSIVE IMPACT.**

It's critical to call out that participation in Pioneers 2020 did not produce these victories—these leaders, their organizations, and their active, mobilized communities created these wins. But the Pioneers program did contribute to the capacity of these grassroots leaders to scale their work, experiment with new strategies and approaches, and attend to the well-being and resilience of their organizations at a time when doing so deeply mattered. Indeed, some Pioneers believe that what they've focused on building over the past several years, during the program, has now enabled them to be in positions of thought leadership on the issues of the day.

The Pioneers program has also given many of these grassroots leaders new confidence in stepping out as more prominent voices of their organizations and movements. Through the voice and messaging training offered through the program—as well as the speaking and networking opportunities the foundation set up and encouraged them to embrace—they gained valuable practice in public speaking and connecting with new audiences. For several Pioneers, this has meant a significant switch from operating behind the scenes to literally stepping onto bigger stages in order to draw broader attention to their issues—across sectors as well as movements.

“One of the themes for me individually has been my relationship with public speaking and the more external facing work and my resistance to visible leadership,” said Vanessa Moses. She found the speech-making practice and feedback invaluable, naming it as the reason she felt comfortable participating in a town hall panel with leaders like U.S. Representative Barbara Lee. “I was able to hold my

own, and to know that the work that I represent absolutely belongs in those conversations.” That same training helped Terry Valen emerge as a leading voice in the media during the May 2018 protests of the arbitrary detention and inhumane treatment of a Filipino human rights activist⁹ at San Francisco International Airport, led to Kris Hayashi assuming a more public leadership role, and enabled Zach Norris to feel more comfortable at the microphone and also as an author.

Additionally, in their interactions with the foundation board and Levi Strauss & Co. leaders and employees, all the Pioneers gained new fluency in adapting their messages to different audiences—a key skill as they look for ways to gain influence and forge alliances beyond their existing base. “I’ve refined how I bring the voices of hurting, marginalized people into rooms that are proximal to them,” said Mike McBride, who entered the program feeling challenged to talk about racism, gentrification, and other issues in ways that resonated with (let alone influenced) new audiences. “I’ve been able to develop a voice where you can say things that are maybe outside of their comfort level without destroying your ability to be welcomed back.”

10 On April 17, 2018, human rights activist Jerome Aladdin Succor Aba was detained for 28 hours at SFO by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents. Aba was on his way to Washington, DC, to speak about issues facing the Philippines’ Muslim and indigenous populations. According to Aba, he was repeatedly tortured during his unexplained detention and also denied access to a lawyer. FCC’s Terry Valen was a leading voice in the media around this event. In 2019, the National Lawyers Guild and other human rights groups filed a lawsuit to force the CBP to comply with several pending FOIA requests to which it has yet to respond. “We keep the pressure on despite these delay tactics,” said Valen.

PIONEER PROFILE

Miya Yoshitani

**Executive Director,
Asian Pacific Environmental Network**



Top: Miya Yoshitani. Bottom: APEN's 2019 Leaders Advance retreat. (Eurydice Photo, APEN staff)

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AND POWER IN LOW-INCOME IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

Ask Miya Yoshitani where her dedication to environmental justice came from, and she'll point to her father. Yoshitani grew up in the Chicago suburbs, where her father was an environmental engineer who worked on cleaning up hazardous waste sites and contaminated landfills all over the Midwest. While the work was highly technical, her dad talked about it openly, giving Yoshitani, even as a small child, a strong awareness of industrial pollution and its impacts on people and their health. She vividly recalls seeing news stories on TV about Three Mile Island, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and other major industrial accidents when she was growing up and feeling determined to prevent more from happening. Said Yoshitani: "I remember thinking: This needs to stop."

In high school, Yoshitani took a summer job with Greenpeace as a door-to-door canvasser. At the time, Greenpeace was supporting a local grassroots campaign organized by residents of Altgeld Gardens, a low-income African American public housing project on Chicago's South Side. The project was built atop a toxic landfill, and pollutants from a nearby chemical incinerator, landfills, and numerous industrial plants were creating catastrophic health conditions for thousands of residents. Inspired by the leadership of local activist Hazel Johnson and her resident-led organization People for Community Recovery, Yoshitani developed an understanding of environmental racism, which had a



pivotal impact on her career. “I knew the technical side of how bad these toxins were for human health and how much it cost to clean them up,” she explained. “But here were industry and government dumping the worst of what they had in these economically stressed neighborhoods and communities of color. It brought me to a new understanding of how the issues of inequality, racism, and pollution were connected.”

There weren’t many opportunities to participate in environmental justice organizing at the University of Illinois, where she attended college. “The only environmental group on campus was all white and basically doing recycling,” she said. She gravitated instead to doing campus organizing around racial justice issues. “I was learning the history of the Black Panthers and reading about Malcolm X,” recalled Yoshitani. “That exposure to racial justice helped me understand why the most polluted communities are always communities of color.” She also joined the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), the largest national student environmental network in the country at the time.

Through her work with SEAC, Yoshitani was invited to attend the first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, held in

Washington, DC, in 1991. Though still a college student, she joined the committee that drafted a seminal set of environmental justice principles still used globally today. “It felt historic, even at the time,” said Yoshitani. Meanwhile, the few Asians present at the conference started meeting informally. “I remember all of us sitting around a restaurant table, talking about why low-income Asian American immigrant and refugee communities were not there, and also what was missing in terms of leadership development and power building in these communities.”

Soon after graduation, Yoshitani moved to North Carolina to serve as SEAC’s executive director. She held the position for nearly three years, overseeing SEAC’s organizing training for student environmental groups on different campuses and ensuring that environmental racism was included in the curriculum. Meanwhile, one of the organizers Yoshitani had met around that restaurant table, Peggy Saika, had founded the **Asian Pacific Environmental Network** (APEN) in Oakland, California, and encouraged her to come work with them. Yoshitani started at APEN in 1996 as a youth organizer and quickly took leadership of APEN’s main organizing project, which was aimed at mobilizing local Laotian refugees living in one of the most toxic neighborhoods in the country to protest and advocate for change.

“

HERE WERE INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT
DUMPING THE WORST OF WHAT THEY HAD IN
THESE ECONOMICALLY STRESSED NEIGHBORHOODS
AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

”

APEN enabled her to do the work she was meant for, said Yoshitani. “I wanted to focus on what communities could do to build power for change in their local environments, recognizing that people who are the most exposed to a problem must be at the center of leadership around solutions to those problems.” After five years at APEN, Yoshitani moved to Australia with her family. After their return to California, she rejoined APEN as associate director in 2008 and then stepped into the executive director role in 2013.

The subsequent years have been busy ones for APEN and Yoshitani. Community organizing and leadership building are still at the heart of APEN’s work. But Yoshitani has expanded the organization’s focus to include activating tens of thousands of Asian American immigrant voters; driving locally owned clean energy projects; winning transformational state policy for climate equity; and building cross-sector, multiracial coalitions and alliances. “We’ll never win by ourselves—we are intrinsically linked to the fate of other groups and people of color,” Yoshitani said. All of these shifts have given APEN greater influence and reach—and better positioned communities to lead the systems change they seek. “We are shifting the power to these communities, trying to replace top-down decision making with democratic local control,” she said. “My gut tells me we’re on the precipice of great change.”



“
I WANTED TO FOCUS ON
WHAT COMMUNITIES
COULD DO TO BUILD POWER
FOR CHANGE IN THEIR
LOCAL ENVIRONMENTS.

”

Miya Yoshitani rallies the crowd,
San Francisco’s 2018 Rise for
Climate march. (Eurydice Photo)

ONWARD

As the formal Pioneers 2020 program comes to an end, the Pioneers are still grappling with staff transitions, managing multiple campaigns, and pushing the boundaries of their own leadership, organizations, and movements. Some of their nonprofits have been growing so quickly in the past few years that they need to slow down, pause, and regroup for the next wave of effort.

While the influence of the Pioneers' work has grown substantially, it has not gotten easier, nor is it likely to anytime soon. But these leaders are now confronting these challenges from a stronger place, armed with new alliances and momentum.

The Pioneers share a deep optimism around current movement-building efforts and their ability to serve as a counterforce to this new political era. Millions of newly active people have joined social movements, and people of color, women, and LGBTQ individuals are running for office in unprecedented numbers. Certainly, the results of the 2020 election will have an enormous impact on all of their issues

and movements. In the run-up to the election, the Pioneers have redoubled their efforts around political education, voter registration, and voter turnout. They are also exploring opportunities to collaborate and connect their strategies around local and state ballot measures and political races. The Levi Strauss Foundation, for its part, is providing a significant boost in funding around the engagement of low-propensity voters, including African American communities, Native Americans, and women of color.

Both the foundation and the Pioneers are *also* looking longer term, beyond the election, to the prospects of expanding what they started through Pioneers

2020—that is, a new kind of cross-sector solidarity that brings corporate foundations and grassroots leaders together into new partnership. The movement landscape is changing, with new coalitions and cross-cutting bases forming across issues, communities, and geographies. “There are common threads running through all the struggles we are waging that can bring all our movements together,” reasoned Terry Valen. But in partnering with a corporate foundation to advance their leadership and their movement work, the Pioneers showed a willingness to experiment with a much more unfamiliar kind of connectivity.

It took guts for these seven leaders to embrace a radically inclusive vision in which funders and corporations are also counted as actors within the movement landscape. But if the ultimate goal is for all of society to align around social justice goals, then it is imperative that experiments in new forms of cross-sector connection—like Pioneers 2020—continue. “We have to grow our understanding of how to connect, because no single organization or sector is going to be able to produce the kind of transformation we want,” said Vanessa Moses. As Aparna Shah put it: “To end up somewhere different, we need to start somewhere different. We have to develop the courage.”

Corporate foundations, along with other funders, also need to demonstrate that courage, now more than ever. They need to allocate more resources to movement-building work and to supporting leaders of color operating on the frontlines of their issues and communities. They need to take the risk of making bold investments and running experiments designed to strengthen local communities. They need to bring disparate worlds together by building bridges of

empathy and concern. And they need to think more like venture capitalists, willing to give these leaders the time, space, and support to experiment with how to truly change the world for the better.

“Funding grassroots leaders has made us realize that there is tremendous room for foundations to make a difference,” said Daniel Lee. Pioneers 2020 was not a smooth and simple program. It involved many pivots, changes, and moments of reflection—but it also produced notable breakthroughs and powerful new alliances. “We’ve been able to build a relationship with the foundation and the company in ways that have impacted both the work of our organizations and the movements we represent, which feels really important and different,” said Kris Hayashi. The foundation, meanwhile, found the beginnings of a new path forward for engaging more deeply with social movements. “This idea of being a moral compass alongside of our grantees—it wasn’t neat, it wasn’t tidy. It wasn’t something that we preordained,” said Lee. “But it’s a new operating system for us now.” He added: “We’re looking at the world around us and putting our voice, influence, and dollars on the line. I don’t know if it’s possible to do social justice work without that commitment.”

“

**THIS IDEA OF BEING A
MORAL COMPASS ALONGSIDE
OUR GRANTEES—IT WASN’T NEAT,
IT WASN’T TIDY. BUT IT’S A NEW
OPERATING SYSTEM FOR US NOW.**

DANIEL LEE, LSF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

”

Postscript

As this report goes to press, an unprecedented health crisis and an extraordinary global push for racial justice are simultaneously sweeping the country, thrusting grassroots social justice leaders onto the frontlines of yet another “movement moment” full of pain and promise. Covid-19 is killing and impoverishing people of color at a disproportionate rate, starkly exposing the deep inequities embedded in our health and economic systems. The killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, and countless others have ignited a global movement against the harassment, violence, and discrimination that have plagued the lives of people of color for far too long. Across the country, waves of protest are erupting, with millions risking their bodies to raise their voices for justice.

The Pioneers—and thousands of grassroots social justice leaders like them—are leading that charge. Deeply embedded in their communities, these leaders are pivoting to meet the evolving needs of the most vulnerable during this pandemic, while also rallying communities to add their voices to the fight for seismic structural change. On anemic budgets, they are ensuring that their communities remain visible and healthy in this rapidly evolving landscape.

The moment for philanthropy and corporate America to partner with these leaders and lend support to their work and their movements is now. The pioneering cross-sector work described in this report can no longer be viewed as optional. Foundations and funders must respond differently and better to the structural crises we’re facing and shift more resources to grassroots leaders. Philanthropy has a role to play in disassembling systems that have never served Black, Brown, Native, LGBTQ, or Asian communities—or any other community that stands outside the circle of white privilege. It’s on all of us to get at the roots of these systems, so that communities can be uplifted and something better can flourish. If the goal is to transform broken systems, the best place to start is by joining with and supporting the social justice leaders spearheading these movements to envision and create a better world for us all.

**FOUNDATIONS AND FUNDERS MUST RESPOND DIFFERENTLY
AND BETTER TO THE STRUCTURAL CRISES WE’RE FACING AND
SHIFT MORE RESOURCES TO GRASSROOTS LEADERS.**

Lessons FOR FUNDERS

Sometimes the learning that emerges from a funder-driven initiative is incremental—its application feels limited to that program alone.

But in the case of Pioneers 2020, the learning proved more transformational, having impact not just on the program but also on the foundation's operating model, its relationship with its corporate host, and its partnerships with the Pioneers.

Through Pioneers 2020, the foundation learned essential lessons about how to work with grassroots leaders—and what factors were critical in advancing not only how these leaders work, but the foundation's ability to have impact on these issues as well.

1 TAKE A LONG-TERM VIEW

Programs like Pioneers 2020 aren't about funders making safe bets and tracking short-term returns on investment. They're longer-term bets that start with funders envisioning the world they want to create, then considering what it will take to move the community, the nation, and ultimately the world to that place. No program of this type is going to be popular with everyone; it

will inevitably involve some risks. But these risks diminish when funders widen their definition of "stakeholders" to include not just shareholders and customers but also local community—particularly the most vulnerable people within it. As Seth Jaffe, executive vice president and general counsel of LS&Co., and a board member of the Levi Strauss Foundation, put it: "I think we're coming to an age where everybody in a company, particularly if they have a foundation, needs to see the stakeholder world as far broader than it used to be, and to be thinking about our impact on society with every decision we make."

2 SELECT THE RIGHT LEADERS

While the leaders who participated in Pioneers 2020 were all exceptional organizers, they had different levels of willingness and ability to stretch themselves through the program, get vulnerable, and "go deep" alongside the Levi Strauss Foundation. This was true of the first cohort of Pioneers as well. Looking across both cohorts, it is clear that neither the size of a leader's organization nor their issue of focus is as important as the leader's readiness to participate in this new kind of work. That willingness can be difficult to screen for at the outset. But given the intensity of the program and the multiyear commitment, finding ways

to understand whether these leaders are open to entering a new kind of partnership is important—and has implications for which leaders are selected.

START WITH TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP

Building trust and relationship is a crucial early step to running a program of this kind. The foundation learned this lesson in hindsight, only after creating space for the Pioneers and the foundation team to show vulnerability and begin to understand one another's perspectives. Many funders shy away from what they see as touchy-feely conversations designed to create connection of this sort. But in a situation where program participants don't know one another, don't know the funder, and yet are expected to be in a multiyear relationship, they're critical. And they require a willingness on the part of *both* the grantees and the foundation team to be open and vulnerable. Building relationships—and being *in* relationship—is the bedrock of this work. This is especially crucial when those involved hail from groups or sectors that don't typically engage with one another.

HOLD "PROGRAM REPLICATION" LIGHTLY

Funders can't take the design elements of a successful program, roll them out for a different set of leaders, and expect the same result. Predesigned roadmaps and theories

of change don't apply to this deep, messy work—especially when the types of leaders are categorically different from those a funder has worked with before. Through Pioneers 2020, the Levi Strauss Foundation learned a lot about discerning which elements of their original program could carry over, the need to test assumptions and design elements before applying them, and the value of co-creation alongside a new group. This is particularly critical when the group in question comprises grassroots leaders with little appetite for overly prescriptive programming.

TAKE A HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH

So many funders come at their grantmaking with a rigid theory of change—they control the program and set the frame. But these approaches are counterproductive to generating social justice wins—and funders often don't know what is needed in grassroots communities. By shifting from fitting leaders into a pre-designed program to asking these leaders what they needed and then investing in them to do the work, the Levi Strauss Foundation helped change this formula. Leaders of grassroots organizations are often doing double or triple duty compared to those of better funded organizations. LSF learned to ask these leaders: What challenges are you and your organization facing in this political climate, and what is needed to overcome them?

BE WILLING TO FLEX AND ADAPT

It was nearly a year before Pioneers 2020 found its rhythm, and during that time there was notable lack of clarity about expectations, funding schedules, and program timelines. Just as leaders might have benefitted from time to reflect on their trajectory, the foundation also needed time to consider the needs surfaced by the group and how that impacted program design. Additionally, nobody could have foreseen the Pioneers would be operating in an entirely different political context less than a year into the program. Even without that disruption, four years is a long time. Grantee needs and opportunities change—and funders should help the program change along with them. Staying responsive to grantee feedback and retaining a willingness to pivot are essential to keeping a long-term program like the Pioneers focused on impact.

PRIORITIZE PEER LEARNING

All the Pioneers said being in a cohort of like-minded leaders facing similar challenges was another invaluable piece of the program. They built trust with one another, while gaining deeper insight into the ways that their work on different issues, and their strategies, were related. In this new political moment, it *all* felt related. “Every struggle that I see [the other Pioneers] helping to lead, there is a connection to my work and the work that we’re doing in

our community,” Pioneer Terry Valen said. Giving grantees space and time to interact enables them to explore these connections. In this case, the foundation’s relinquishing control of peer learning sessions gave the Pioneers the freedom to make these connections organically and at their own pace.

LIFT UP THE LEADERS

Running a program like Pioneers 2020 requires more than writing grants and running a program—it calls for championing the participants. Throughout the program, Levi Strauss Foundation leaders actively worked to unlock new resources for the Pioneers, connect them with networking opportunities, and push their own organizational boundaries to help the Pioneers expand their impact. Mentorship is not enough; sponsorship is what’s needed to elevate traditionally underrepresented groups into spaces of leadership. “I appreciated their sensibility around helping us to build out individual and organizational potential, while making no bones that we need to be out there connecting with others and pushing beyond our usual audiences,” said Pioneer Zach Norris. The Pioneers also noted the warmth and encouragement they felt from the foundation—another intangible aspect of this work that made a real difference in the relationships that formed. As Terry Valen put it: “The Levi Strauss Foundation has shown a willingness to invest in social justice in a way that no other foundations have.”



BRIDGE DIFFERENT WORLDS

One of the most unusual features of Pioneers 2020 was also its most valuable: creating repeated opportunities for these grassroots leaders and members of the Levi Strauss Foundation board to form authentic relationships. Grassroots leaders and foundation boards don't typically interact, and if they do, it is only briefly and with some degree of formality. But for Pioneers 2020, welcoming social justice leaders into the board space—and introducing them more widely around the foundation and company—was essential. It enabled a funder/grantee dynamic that was less about “us” and “them” and more about recognizing common values and commitments. “If foundation boards remain insular, impermeable places, then we're all missing the point,” said Levi Strauss Foundation executive director Daniel Lee. Indeed, the bonds and connections that began forming among Pioneers and board members were among the program's most important outcomes, enabling a level of honesty, insight, mutual empathy, and vibrant common ground that would not have emerged otherwise.



MAKE A SERIOUS COMMITMENT

It's hard to imagine the Pioneers 2020 program succeeding without the foundation's board, leadership, and staff fully committing themselves to the program and the grassroots leaders at its center. “Something like this can't be successful without really amazing people involved who are passionate and committed to growing and working with other people, and imagining something better,” said board president Jennifer Haas. “I don't think this program could be as strong without every individual having a deep commitment to this work.” It was remarkable that everyone from the program director to the president of the board to the company CEO developed this commitment, along with a willingness to take risks, be vulnerable, and engage. Many attribute this to the inspirational leadership of Daniel Lee and his ability to help others see both the promise and the imperative of the Pioneers program. But it was this collective stance—this shared belief in the program even when things got messy—that enabled Pioneers 2020 to break new ground.

APPENDIX

PIONEER ORGANIZATIONS

Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) builds the leadership of low-income Asian immigrant and refugee communities to fight for environmental justice. Founded in 1993, APEN runs one of the largest multilingual Asian American voter mobilization programs in the nation, engaging immigrant and refugee voters in seven languages to advance a shared vision for racial justice, economic equity, and climate solutions. By mobilizing communities that politicians and political parties too often ignore, APEN is winning groundbreaking policies that put working-class communities of color first.

apen4ej.org

Causa Justa Just Cause

Causa Justa Just Cause (CJJC) is a Bay Area grassroots social movement organization focused on achieving justice for low-income communities of color most impacted by gentrification, housing instability, unemployment, police harassment, and threat of deportation. Through rights-based services, policy campaigns, civic engagement, and direct action, CJJC builds grassroots power and leadership while also building bridges of multiracial, multigenerational solidarity among working-class communities. CJJC has helped pass more than a dozen tenant rights ordinances in recent years and win sanctuary city status in both San Francisco and Alameda counties.

cjjc.org

Ella Baker Center for Human Rights

Named after a Black hero of the civil rights movement, Oakland-based Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC) organizes with Black, Brown, and low-income people to shift resources away from prisons and punishment and toward opportunities that make communities safe, healthy, and strong. EBC works locally and statewide to win policies that reduce sentences, remove barriers, and restore opportunities for communities of color. EBC also works to shift the national narrative about public safety away from fear and punishment and toward living wage jobs, healthy food, and affordable childcare, healthcare, and housing.

ellabakercenter.org

Filipino Community Center

Founded in 2004, the San Francisco-based Filipino Community Center (FCC) is dedicated to providing a safe space where Filipino families can access services, receive support, and build community. FCC fosters and develops community empowerment, grassroots leadership, advocacy, and organizing to address immediate and long-term issues facing Filipino communities locally, nationally, and in the Philippines, from local gentrification to the international trafficking of Filipino workers. FCC runs on the spirit of bayanihan, where people know their neighbors and work collectively to build strong communities.

filipinocc.org

Live Free Campaign

The Live Free Campaign is a leader in the movement to implement public health and community-centered gun violence prevention programs, which have helped reduce gun-related homicides in Oakland and in many other cities across the country by half. With hundreds of congregations as well as countless leaders and movement partners throughout the country, Live Free is mobilizing voters—particularly low-propensity voters—in order to influence policies, practices, and programs that reduce homicides related to gun violence and the number of people incarcerated in county jails.

livefreeusa.org

Power California

Power California works to ensure that all who call the state home have an equal say in the decisions that impact their lives. Power California emerged from the union of Mobilize the Immigrant Vote and YVote, two of California's most successful organizers of immigrants, refugees, and youth of color. Through a network of on-the-ground community partners in urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout the state, Power California is building the power of young people of color and their families to participate and lead systems of government at all levels and to ensure that voters and elected leaders mirror the rich diversity that is California.

powercalifornia.org

Transgender Law Center

Transgender Law Center (TLC) is the largest national trans-led organization advocating for a world in which all people are free to define themselves and their futures. Grounded in legal expertise and committed to racial justice, TLC employs a variety of community-driven strategies to keep transgender and gender nonconforming people alive, thriving, and fighting for liberation. TLC's mission is to change law, policy, and attitudes so that all people can live safely, authentically, and free from discrimination regardless of their gender identity or expression.

transgenderlawcenter.org

CONTRIBUTORS

Jenny Johnston, lead author



Part journalist, part anthropologist, Jenny is an expert in helping leaders and organizations find innovative and “sticky” ways to communicate their visions and their stories to the wider public. Her recent clients include Omidyar Network, N Square Collaborative, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Presidio Trust. She’s also served as developmental editor on a handful of bestselling books. Before starting her own practice, Jenny was senior editor at Global Business Network, a scenario planning consultancy and futurist think tank based in the Bay Area, where she shepherded publications and presentations from concept to completion and ran modules on strategic storytelling for clients and coworkers. Prior to that, she was copy chief for a major consulting firm and an arts and culture editor in Boston. She holds an AB in cultural anthropology from Princeton University, an MA in the same from UC Boulder, and an MS in journalism from Boston University.

Heather McLeod Grant, Open Impact editor and producer



Heather is the co-founder of Open Impact, a social impact advising firm, and consultant with 25 years of experience in social change. She is coauthor of the bestselling *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits*, named a Top Ten Book of the Year by *The Economist*, and numerous case studies, articles, and other publications. Previously she was the principal of McLeod-Grant Advisors. Heather helped lead the nonprofit practice at Monitor Institute and served as a McKinsey & Company consultant. She began her career as an Echoing Green Fellow when she cofounded Who Cares, a national magazine for young social entrepreneurs published from 1993 to 1999. She has been a Venture Partner with Draper-Richards-Kaplan and has served on numerous local, national, and global nonprofit boards. She holds an MBA from Stanford University and an AB from Harvard University.

Lisa Monzón, program advisor



Lisa serves as faculty at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, where she teaches leadership and coaches executives. Outside of the classroom, Lisa maintains an executive coaching and impact consulting practice, focusing on leadership, strategy, and transformation. She has a background as a strategy and organizational development consultant, corporate HR professional, and leader in the philanthropic sector. Lisa brings experience in designing and developing networks, leadership programs, and creating large-scale system change, and enjoys partnering with change agents across issues to unbox possibilities and design for impact. She was honored to serve as a fellow with the Aspen Institute, Goldman Sachs, and Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment. She currently serves in a board leadership role for a local Bay Area nonprofit and is on the advisory council for Stanford University’s Centro Chicano/a y Latino/a, the Latinx community center. Lisa is an alumnus of the Latino Board Leadership Academy through the Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley.

J Sherman Studio, designers



J Sherman Studio, Ltd. is a top-tier design firm in Newton, Massachusetts lead by principal and owner, Julie Sherman. The Studio partners with nonprofits, foundations, and companies to create clean, creative, and intentional design. Julie's team strives to bring clarity, confidence, and energy to clients' ideas, helping them achieve their goals and getting them the attention and results they deserve. For more than ten years, J Sherman Studio has worked with major foundations including: Barr Foundation, Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Levi Strauss Foundation, and The Rockefeller Foundation. The Studio is proud to work with many local and national organizations, amplifying their messages, strengthening their brands, and magnifying their impact. These include Centering Healthcare Institute, The diaTribe Foundation, Harvard Office for Sustainability, More Than Words, Open Impact, and the Social Innovation Forum.

Eurydice Thomas, photographer



Eurydice took many of the photos featured in this report. She is self taught and has been shooting since she was 14. Her passion is capturing the beauty of things as they are. She is taken aback by the inherent meaning and power of photos—how they often convey more than the viewer is conscious of receiving. When Eurydice is shooting, she is in the zone, feeling very much a conduit and trying to get out of the way of what beauty and messages are coming through to form. Eurydice holds a BA and MA in geography (sustainable development and cartography/UC Berkeley and University at Albany). Her work can be found at eurydicephoto.com.

Pioneers 2020: Funding the Frontlines of Social Justice

Published by Levi Strauss Foundation, 2020

YOU ARE FREE TO:

Share—copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt—remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially

Attribution—You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use



Creative Commons License

Attribution 4.0 International | CC BY 4.0

LEVI STRAUSS FOUNDATION

The Levi Strauss Foundation is the corporate foundation of Levi Strauss & Co., one of the world's largest brand-name apparel companies. The foundation's philanthropic work is grounded in the company's values of originality, integrity, empathy, and courage. For over 60 years, the Levi Strauss Foundation has embraced the energy and events of our time to advance pioneering social change in the areas of HIV/AIDS, worker rights and well-being, and social justice in the communities where the company has a business presence.

ABOUT PIONEERS IN JUSTICE

In 2010, the Levi Strauss Foundation launched a first-of-its kind initiative designed to help local social justice organizations amplify both their reach and their impact. Through Pioneers in Justice, LSF set out to support a cohort of Bay Area leaders, all of them Gen Xers, who had recently taken the helm of legacy social justice organizations and were charged with helping their nonprofits adapt to a rapidly changing world.

In 2016, LSF launched a second round of Pioneers in Justice, called Pioneers 2020. Whereas the original Pioneers were leaders of established "grassstops" organizations, these new Pioneers were seasoned community organizers operating on the frontlines of dynamic social change. By partnering with grassroots leaders, LSF aimed to move its work into the very heart of marginalized communities facing deep injustice and fighting for transformative change from the ground up.