assistance and service delivery have remained the dominant paradigms, internationally. In higher education, Harry Boyte describes the core imperatives of academic work as, “gather, analyze, and disseminate information.” The very ideas of “outreach” and “extension” assume that authoritative knowledge is a possession of universities that must be disseminated outward, rather than something that is cocreated in dialogue between experts and citizens. Although the dissemination model might add a “public” dimension to expert knowledge, it still places experts in the position of defining what counts as knowledge. Experts understand themselves as serving the public by acting as impartial authorities in their fields and sharing their knowledge with policymakers and lay citizens. Citizens play a largely passive role in receiving or applying information.

To say that civil society has been colonized by the inwardness of organizations, the politics of accountability, and the specialization of professions, does not mean that this colonization is absolute or irreversible. Even when an invasive plant is introduced into an ecosystem, steps can be taken to minimize its spread and nurture native species. Organizations and professionals within them can do only so much to produce a trusting and engaged citizenry, or to manufacture their own legitimacy. Still, organizations can play an important role by realigning their identities and routines with the habits and civic norms of communities. In fact, a growing set of organizations and professionals is beginning to challenge the inwardness of NGOs, countervailing groups that move beyond the paradigms of service delivery, technical assistance, and dissemination, to treat citizens as partners, coproducers, and civic actors.

Perhaps the most promising countervailing trend is the emergence of NGOs that are explicit in their attempt to strengthen the civic capacities of communities. For example, a growing network of organizations associated with the idea of “deliberative democracy” aims to create spaces for citizens to play a more active role in reaching collective decisions on controversial issues.

Citizens have a critical role to play in deepening public discourse.

Rejecting the politics of inwardness, these organizations assume that many social problems are political in nature, involving tensions between deeply held values, and that citizens have a critical role to play in deepening public discourse on complex issues. Even when they are concerned with particular issues or government policies, these organizations may have capacity-building effects as they strengthen citizens’ habits of collective judgment and decision making.

Similarly, organizations in the community-organizing tradition, influenced by figures like Harry Boyte and John McKnight, are talking about principles of “public work,” “capacity building,” and “asset-based community development.” Rather than taking a view of citizens as needy and deficient clients in need of help from above, they focus on the capacities that already exist within communities. Instead of mobilizing citizens to promote predetermined ideological agendas, they maintain a disciplined commitment to grassroots democratic principles and provide citizens with spaces in which they can learn to organize themselves. In the fields of urban planning and community development, organizations are abandoning top-down, technocratic approaches, in favor of more civic and humanistic models.
Sometimes, this countervailing trend takes the form of professionals who are critically aware of the limitations of their expertise, and see an ethical responsibility or calling to align their profession with self-ruling citizens. In his book, Democratic Professionalism: Citizen Participation and the Reconstruction of Professional Ethics, Identity, and Practice, Albert Dzur named this movement, “democratic professionalism.” In academia, terms like scholarship of engagement and public scholarship are now being used to describe collaboration with community partners in advancing cutting-edge community knowledge. Similar groups have emerged in philanthropy and journalism to experiment with ways to collaborate with citizens in their work as civic actors rather than passive recipients or spectators.

The common thread among these groups is a recognition that their professional work benefits from interaction and collaboration with citizens, giving them a structural incentive to move beyond the conventional narrow task or program focus. They may see civic leadership work as a means to rebuild public confidence in their profession or to receive input or feedback from stakeholders to increase their effectiveness. In such cases, rather than create wholly new organizations, isolated individuals or small groups are attempting to carve out niches for civic work within their established institutions. These “civic professionals” do not typically reflect the dominant paradigm within their fields, and sometimes they may even be marginalized within their own institutions, but they have successfully formed peer networks across organizations to advance their work.

Consisting of organizations on the margins of their fields, or isolated individuals challenging the dominant culture of their institutions, these may represent more of an inchoate stirring than a mature movement. However, taken together, they constitute an important countervailing force—and a reminder that the colonization of civil society is far from absolute. In creating an Open Government Initiative to make government agencies more participatory and collaborative, President Obama recently declared, “Knowledge is widely dispersed in society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge. In this sense, surely, executive departments and agencies should offer Americans increased opportunities to participate in policy-making and to provide their government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information.” Like the president, organizations and professionals in the nongovernment sector may be beginning to recognize the extent of their inwardness and engage in the hard work of decolonizing civil society.

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The democratic process requires not only the right to vote on a given policy choice, but also the ability to participate in conceptualizing and shaping what that choice is.

Given the enormous challenges involved in reconciling the opposing forces of the pursuit of individual interests and the protection of the commons in the 21st century, what resources does society have to create a balance between these two? Civil society is the central construct joining private action and public purposes. Civil society’s primary resource allowing it an important degree of freedom from market-driven or governmentally dominated behavior is philanthropy, through commitments of both financial donations and voluntary time. Thus, we might well expect philanthropy, acting through civil society, to be a primary vehicle through which the well-being of the commons could be secured.

Indeed, philanthropy, with its historic blend of individualism, private resources, and concern for community betterment, would seem to offer society’s most important asset for combining private and public purposes. Practitioners of contemporary philanthropy, particularly those who serve as professionals and board members of large foundations, indeed view themselves as involved in the pursuit of public goods, whether in health care, education, environment, the arts, or myriad other arenas in which the provision of public goods is deficient. But key assumptions, both in operating style and substantive funding choices, act to limit foundations’ ability to work effectively on these problems of the commons.

An important insight into this conundrum is provided by moral philosopher David Sidorsky who describes the problems of collective action and value pluralism as posing the same challenge
to contemporary philanthropy as they do to
civil society as a whole:

The idea of moral pluralism generates
a dilemma for the practice of philanthropy. Characteristically, the practice of philan-
thropy assumes unity, coherence, or conver-
gence among the diverse virtues and moral
aims that it pursues…. Historically, this
reflects the place of a unifying religious
vision of the nature of the good or of a
secular conception of a public philosophy
which recognized the common good. Even
etymologically, the love of mankind suggests
a single passion that is directed beneficently
to the shared values of mankind.

The theory and practice of contemporary
philanthropy is necessarily pluralistic, however, and it reflects the range of decisions by individuals with different interests and values in a pluralist, democratic society. The legitimatized and recognized range of philanthropies in modern societies demonstrates divergent and even conflicting perceptions of the common good or the public interest…. The tension and possibility of conflict is apparent. It suggests the formal dilemma: if philanthropic plurality is recognized, then the pursuit of some goals
which could negate others is appropriate. Hence, the common good will not be served.

The fundamental opposition that Sidorsky
describes—between plurality and the commons —manifests itself, as we have seen, in the
broad challenges of collective action and value
pluralism facing modern civil society.

Philanthropy has the potential to
address these challenges. But two
particular blind spots in the practice
of contemporary philanthropy
inhibit its ability to do so: an
increasingly instrumentalist bias
and a failure to comprehend
the problem of reflexivity.

The first of the blind spots is rooted in an
epistemological orientation that has shaped
modern American philanthropy since the late
19th century. The efforts of the great founda-
tions of the early 20th century—those created
by Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, John
D. Rockefeller Jr., and Olivia Sage—were
generally guided by a set of assumptions that
may be broadly described as the epistemology
of applied science. As one historian notes, “A
buoyantly optimistic faith that major social
problems, like ignorance, poverty, and crime,
coined pressure for
greater governmental
oversight.

Political movement
produced pressure for
greater governmental
oversight.

Their large-scale initiatives not only ushered in the age of scientific philanthropy but also blended science and philanthropy in a particular way on the model of the successful advances of the
then newly emerging medical science. Applied
to social problem solving, this approach pursued
the discovery of causal agents behind the negative social patterns, comparable to germs’ role in disease, and then sought their eradication through application of the proper remedies, comparable to medical antidotes.

This medical model was applied literally to a number of Rockefeller projects, such as the campaign to eradicate hookworm disease, and metaphorically to many other philanthropic interventions. It was the guiding theory behind the development of the new disciplines of the social sciences that were incubated in part by the growing foundations and the application of the social scientific findings as they were understood at the time to the problems of society. A prominent example was the work of a group of aspiring young social scientists at the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial in designing a parent education program based on the newly “discovered” principles of behavioral psychology that was promulgated throughout the country in the 1920s. (The program did not show any significant results and was abandoned in 1930.) Many other programs in juvenile justice, recreation, vocational education, public welfare, and other realms of social policy were developed in a similar manner by foundations inspired with the belief in the application of scientific knowledge to society.

The fundamental difficulty with this approach lies in its assumption that the epistemology of philanthropy should aspire to the classical notion of *episteme* (certain theoretical knowledge) applied to reality through *techne*, rather than the practical, local knowledge of *mētis* that emerges from practical experience and involves the exercise of judgment rather than calculation. Given the socially constituted character and overwhelming complexity of the subject matter of philanthropy, *mētis* much better fits the needs for practicing and evaluating the results of philanthropic engagement than does *episteme*. James Scott’s brilliant analysis of this problem in his *Seeing Like a State* captures the correspondence of *mētis* to understanding and intervening in society—which applies as much to the practice of philanthropy as it does to his focus on the limits of scientistic state action—in his observation that “*Mētis* is the mode of reasoning most appropriate to complex material and social tasks where the uncertainties are so daunting that we must trust our (experienced) intuition and feel our way.”

Indeed, the social problems that philanthropy seeks to address are defined by several characteristics that run exactly counter to the scientific vision of prediction and control inherent in *episteme* and *techne*: the factors of randomness, countless variables, absence of the conditions of controlled experimentation, and very long time horizons are only the most prominent of these. For example, the vast sums that have been expended by both government and philanthropy in recent decades with the aim of improving public education, despite often being tied to rigorous metrics of standardized testing scores, student retention rates, and so on, have yielded unimpressive results. The reason? Too many variables and too much randomness in those variables—cultural, political, economic, and environmental—stand between the “input” of funding and the “output” of educational quality. There is little evidence to suggest that philanthropists and government officials have learned much more than the conventional wisdom has
long told us: an inspired administrator or teacher trumps almost all other factors in producing educational success. He or she personifies métis. The same can be said of youth development, community organizing, care of the aging, the arts, policy advocacy, and most other arenas in which philanthropy is active.

The investment model seeks the highest “bang for the buck.”

The role of randomness is particularly important in this argument. The unpredictable but hugely influential role of randomness in human affairs undermines almost all attempts to make reliable predictions in large-scale (or even small-scale) social planning. This is not to say that it is useless to use data in seeking to make informed judgments about the direction of social improvement, only that currently unknown “black swans” will inevitably override attempts to calibrate increments of social change according to carefully constructed theories of social change.

Although scientific epistemology was not the only guiding force in early foundation philanthropy—both Carnegie’s libraries and Julius Rosenwald's broad program of school building for African Americans exemplified a more open-ended approach to the application of knowledge to community building—the scientific model has strongly imprinted the practice of American philanthropy. While later generations of scholars and practitioners began to understand social problems as enmeshed in a more complex web of multidimensional and interactive relationships and therefore not straightforwardly solvable through the direct application of the techniques of laboratory science, the notion of linear causality has exerted a lasting influence on the thinking of American foundations.

A second powerful influence that has shaped the development of American philanthropy has political origins—the drive toward accountability for private wealth employed in the public arena. Already present in the longstanding argument between the Jeffersonians and the Federalists about the role of private groups in setting social policy, the democratic impulse to exert public control over the influence of private power surfaced with fresh force in the Progressive era. In the first decade of the 20th century this political movement produced growing pressure for greater governmental oversight over the expanding activity of large foundations. John D. Rockefeller Sr. became a particular magnet for attention to the power of private wealth; his companies’ predatory business practices and violent response to labor unrest in the early 1900s led to widespread suspicion of his philanthropic motives and a congressionally authorized investigation of his foundation activities. Frank Walsh, a Kansas City trial attorney who chaired the congressionally mandated U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations, portrayed the Rockefeller and other large philanthropies as vehicles for the antidemocratic and unaccountable expansion of the power of the wealthy. This was a recurrent theme in political life through the 20th century: Congressional committees of diverse political perspectives have expressed similar concerns in later decades about inadequate public oversight of private philanthropy, ranging from conservative suspicion of progressively oriented foundations in the 1950s to concerns expressed by Democrats about tax avoidance by wealthy donors in the 1960s to criticism by Republicans of lax financial controls in the 1990s.
These periodic expressions of governmental pressure for greater accountability in exchange for operational freedom have led to foundations’ increasing attention to issues of procedural responsiveness. Most observers agree that the resulting measures foundations have undertaken to demonstrate their openness and responsiveness to society—greater transparency, standardized financial practices, and improved governance—have had generally salutary effects on the field. But a contemporary version of the accountability theme has moved in a different, more problematic direction. There is a growing tendency by foundations to interpret accountability not as procedural responsiveness but as demonstrated substantive impact on society. What originated in public interest in avoiding outright fraud or the misdirection of philanthropic resources to private benefit has become misinterpreted as a quid pro quo requirement for philanthropy to yield a quanta of benefits equal to or greater than the costs of its tax benefits.

This interpretation stems from a third major influence that has shaped the rise of the modern foundation, one that has become ascendant in recent years—the effort to apply the commercial success of the “business model” to philanthropy. This trend originates in the modern tendency to translate the life of society into the language of the market. This language migrates into philanthropy and becomes expressed as concerns of donors in allocating portions of benefit, reassuring them that their investments are producing demonstrable results. While a desire for results is reasonable, the exaggerated emphasis on metrics, so-called “substantive accountability,” becomes a driving force in the field, creating unrealizable expectations that can lead to an unjustified image of failure when not met.

Guided by a more general worldview of the primacy of market-oriented relationships, the business model views philanthropic funding as investment in social problem solving. On this view, philanthropic investment is the means, while incremental steps toward social problem solving are the product. This approach, with its emphasis on metrics and deliverables (the “huge push toward measurability” as described by Intel founder and philanthropist, Gordon Moore), skews the work of nonprofit organizations through the narrow strictures and highly directive requirements of outcome-oriented funding. The early initiatives of Carnegie and Rockefeller had already begun to introduce this perspective to American philanthropy, but it was only late in the 20th century that the full conceptual framework of business approaches began to gain widespread influence in the field.

The investment model seeks the highest “bang for the buck” in the allocation of philanthropic funds, translating into the emphasis on outcomes for the purpose of accountability. Increasingly, this model, particularly in its “venture philanthropy” version, adds other dimensions borrowed from the for-profit world: an emphasis on
managerial efficiency and effectiveness; bottom-line outcomes; going to “scale”; investor control; and exit strategies patterned on the public buy-out. The transposition of the business model to philanthropy entails donors becoming investors and nonprofit organizations becoming contractees, a conceptual transference that, as I have argued elsewhere, has important negative consequences for civil society. Commercial markets are very good at accomplishing their intended purpose of efficiently allocating resources in exchange relationships. They are not very good at solving complex social problems.

The cumulative effect of these forces—the epistemology of scientific control, accountability interpreted as accounting for quantitative value delivered, and economic emphasis on return on investment—creates powerful momentum to move philanthropy in the direction of highly discrete instrumental objectives directed at solving specific social problems. The modern model for this approach is that of strategic intervention in the commercial market. In an era when the efficiency and effectiveness of market forces make their presence felt worldwide, this model has wide appeal, especially to those who, like many philanthropists, have experienced substantial success in the business world. But, as has already been argued, the market is fundamentally flawed in its ability to provide public goods and its conceptual structure is seriously limited in its capacity to address the vastly complex, multivalent, and interactive problems of human society that do not lend themselves to linear, demand-driven solutions.

Beyond the limits of instrumentalism and the practical problems of randomness, innumerable variables, and indeterminate time horizons, philanthropy also has to confront yet a deeper conceptual issue: the problem of reflexivity. This is a problem that extends beyond the realm of social prediction and control, going to the very heart of what it means to understand human action and social change.

Reflexivity, in its contemporary use, refers to the interactive nature of social knowledge and action—the fact that the thought and action of actor A in a social situation affects and is affected by the thought and action of actor B. Reflexivity is a concept that has gained current visibility in part through the work of George Soros, who describes the “two-way street” relationship between thinking and social reality. Soros has pointed out the severe limitations of the market model, especially evident in recent times, in understanding and predicting complex social interactions. A significant portion of his critique derives from his insight into the failure of most economic and social analysis (he is a writer with deep roots in the market but also a thoughtful commentator about concepts of social change) to take into account the fact that social intervention is not unidirectional. Social thinkers and actors who do not adequately comprehend the circular mutability of social information—Soros’s two-way feedback mechanism—are doomed to misinterpret social reality and misjudge their attempted interventions in it.
Taking into account the reflexive nature of human knowledge in coming to understand the intentions and actions of other human beings also has an important democratic dimension. Treating the subject of one’s knowledge (and action) as an equal participant in defining the problem and shaping its potential solution is fundamental to democracy. The democratic process requires not only the right to vote on a given policy choice, but also the ability to participate in conceptualizing and shaping what that choice is. Thus, taking reflexivity into account is important to all attempts to intervene in the public arena, such as in the pursuit of public goods, the democratic polity.

The tendency of philanthropic foundations to place increasing emphasis on narrowly defined funding targets and quantitative assessment propels the field in the direction of the imposition of a conceptual model—in this case the input-output paradigm of market transactions—that fails to do justice to the complexity of life in society. The market model flows from the requirements of the economic sphere in having a singular purpose and a simple, one-dimensional test of success: Does it make money or not? There is no equivalent unitary test in the broader social world. To seek to impose one in order to justify dollars invested in solving social problems distorts the very nature of civil society.

Thus philanthropy finds itself in a conundrum. The most pervasive problems facing society today—deficient provision of public goods, such as education, public health, environmental protection, and intercultural understanding—are problems of the commons which philanthropy should be most able to engage. Philanthropy can play a special role here, because neither the political process nor the market deals well with the complexity, uncertainty, or long time horizons of such public goods problems. Yet modern philanthropy finds itself limited in its ability to address just those problems.

The reason lies in the trend noted above: the increasing tendency in philanthropy to pursue narrowly focused, self-directed programs that promise marketlike results—in increments of measurable outcomes that can be correlated with increments of investment—rather than a different category of judgment (exemplified in métis) about social success and failure more appropriate to the complexity and multidimensionality of the problems of civil society. If philanthropy can better understand its role in a world characterized by collective action problems, value pluralism, instrumentalism, and reflexivity, it will have a much better chance of engaging problems of the commons.

I am suggesting that, by approaching its work not as managed process with product outcomes, but rather as a métis-guided engagement with other players in the social arena, philanthropy will have a much better prospect of making headway on the value-laden, “wicked” (reflexive) problems of the commons. At their core, these problems all derive from the unresolved tension in civil society: between the summed pursuit of
individual interests and the collective pursuit of larger public interests. As we have seen, this tension is endemic to modern civil society. Neither the state, with its necessarily circumscribed ability to intervene in the private domain, nor the market, with its limited capacity to pursue public goods, can effectively address it. Philanthropy, by contrast, operates as a vehicle that bridges private and public spheres and therefore is conceptually well suited to engage collective action problems.

A key to addressing all such problems is the strength and well-being of civil society itself. Civil society is the arena in which citizens connect their private interests with a larger sense of public commitment and collective action. Thus, in addition to philanthropy’s engagement with its many substantive areas of concern in the environment, health, education, the arts, and so on, it has a special role to play in supporting and strengthening civil society per se. This is an arena largely overlooked in current foundation philanthropy.

William Galston catalogues a list of primary public goods problems related to the diminished strength of civil society. In his view, these shortcomings are shared by almost all Western democracies: an emerging imbalance between the social promises of the welfare state and the resources that governments can mobilize to meet those promises; an increasing orientation toward present consumption at the expense of investments for future needs; increasing tension between the requirements of national unity and the centrifugal tugs of subnational identity groups based on region, ethnicity or religion; an escalating citizen mistrust of government and established institutions in general; and a weakening of the voluntary associations of civil society that should discharge many of the functions that governments do not.

The necessary balancing norm in the age of the ascendancy of individualism has been a commitment to some sense of the common good. It is, of course, easy to become nostalgic about the historical importance of this cultural value in the American experience, which has always competed with the longstanding pursuit of individual interests: from the early emphasis on individual liberty to the modern political rhetoric about freedom as the central defining American value, individualism has been the prominent theme. Yet, a broad agreement on the common good as an aspirational goal has also been a continuing thread in American history since the arrival of the earliest settlers. The classic statement of this commitment appeared in John Winthrop’s “City upon a Hill” declaration on board the Arbella as it approached the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. The sense of community and the goal of solidarity conveyed in Winthrop’s words defined the character of the societies the first American colonists began to establish. The ethos of the common good radiated from the common spiritual and practical bonds of the settlers; it was sustained and cultivated in the subsequent course of development of the colonies and the early United States.

This ancient norm of civil society has experienced waves of increasing and decreasing emphasis throughout the course of American history, but there appears to be a broad pattern of decline of commitment to the ethos of the
common good since the mid-20th century. Robert Putnam’s portrayal of the dramatic drop in civic participation and social trust has been the most prominent among many analysts’ descriptions of a rapidly diminishing set of core values related to communal commitment, civic mindedness, and concern for the well-being of the commons, accompanied by a corresponding increase in pursuit of individual ends and competition. Robert Bellah and his coauthors have recounted the story of this post-World War II trend in Habits of the Heart, in which they describe a late-20th-century American society with a progressively diminishing sense of communal attachment. More recently, Benjamin Barber has analyzed the contemporary cultural ethos that leads to the erosion of civic commitment, emphasizing the corrosive power of unrestrained markets.

Although there may be differing views on the degree of decline, the fact of a decline in a shared sense of commitment to the common good—“a steady attenuation of everyday cooperation and civic friendship”—is acknowledged by a wide social spectrum of social observers. Because of its central role as a defining norm of civil society, the ethos of the common good should thus be a major concern of philanthropy that seeks to build the capacity for collective action. But, as we have seen, this barely appears on the radar screen of contemporary philanthropy. If foundations were to begin to pay attention to strengthening social commitment to the common good, how might this effort be translated into action?

A growing body of research on social capital and the provision of public goods suggests that a healthy civil society with a high level of civic commitment is prerequisite to an ability to address the kind of wicked problems that inhibit the provision of public goods. One avenue to strengthen civic commitment would be to follow the recommendations by Putnam and others about supporting work that builds social capital. Putnam and his colleagues have developed a series of recommendations, described in the Better Together report of the Saguaro Seminar, as steps to help generate new forms of social capital in the United States, such as overhauling business practices by encouraging civic groups to meet on site, incentivizing community service, and creating flexible work hours; changing educational goals and curriculum to mandate service learning, sponsoring more after-school activities and encouraging participation of students on public boards and agencies; strengthening religious organizations through funding and partnerships; increasing opportunities for participation in community-based arts activities; and working for reforms in the political system that would increase the

It is easy to become nostalgic about the American experience.
public’s access to civic spaces, expand civic uses of the Internet, and encouraging greater consideration of the impact of public policies on family and community connections.

Among these recommendations, one in particular stands out as widely endorsed by scholars and public commentators across the political spectrum: strengthening civic education. William Galston, surveying the most recent research on the relationship between civic education and civic commitment, concludes that there is solid evidence that civic education based on both substantive and experiential learning leads to enhanced support for democratic values, tolerance, civic participation, and social trust: “The more knowledge we have of civic affairs, the less we have a sort of generalized mistrust and fear of public life. Ignorance is the father of fear, and knowledge is the mother of trust.” This relationship appears to be true whether civic education is provided through schools, voluntary associations, or other modes of adult learning. In all circumstances, the important characteristics of effective civic education appear to be an emphasis on ideals and principles combined with learning in real-life situations that have direct relevance and consequence for the participants.

For Crenson and Ginsberg, the trend toward privatization of the public sphere in the latter half of the 20th century has gradually transformed the idea of a citizen from that of active political participant to that of consumer. They note that the political consumer makes individual marketlike judgments about the delivery of governmental services but decreasingly sees it as his or her role to join with others to shape or change government policy:

The transformation of citizens into customers is significant. Citizens were thought to own government. Customers, by contrast, are merely expected to receive pleasant service from it. Citizens, moreover, are members of a political community with a collective existence created for public purposes. Customers are individual purchasers seeking to meet their private needs in a market. What is missing from the experience of customers is collective mobilization to achieve collective interests.

Active citizenship in a democracy requires active civic engagement, which, in turn, requires access to information about public affairs, the right to join in collective action, and a commitment to achieving one’s interpretation of the common good. What is called for, according to Zukin et al, is a “conscious, collective, and systematic effort to provide young Americans with the motivation, skills, and opportunities to participate in politics [to avoid] a slow but steady exodus from this realm of the public sphere.” Foundations can support the expansion
of civic engagement in many ways: directly through programs that draw people into public decision-making processes like deliberative polling, public forums, community organizing, volunteerism, community service, and indirectly through support of improved media and civic education.

Beyond individual elements of civil society in need of specific support, one important arena of civil society work is commonly overlooked even by those philanthropic foundations that are interested in assisting the field: organizations that support and promote the essential processes and structures of civil society. These are the membership, research, and advocacy institutions that create the knowledge base for understanding civil society and champion its healthy development worldwide.

The recent dramatic growth in the size and importance of civil society throughout the world has not been accompanied by a corresponding expansion of organizations dedicated to generating knowledge and support for the field. Compared to the support structures focused on the business and government sectors, organizational activity dedicated to analyzing and championing civil society remains quite limited. Yet, absent the natural support bases that exist for business and government, civil society organizations have a vital need for such information and advocacy. In the largest sense of their mission, philanthropic donors, both individuals and foundations, should understand that one of their overarching tasks is to strengthen the fundamental structures of civil society.

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