MOVEMENT NETLAB

Living Resource Systems

A New Approach for Supporting Movement Networks

The last five years have seen an unprecedented wave of mobilization on a global scale:

Movements have emerged all over the world

- Overthrown dictatorships [Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Tunisia]
- Taken back democracy in Spain [15M]
- Shifted the national conversation towards economic inequality [Occupy]
- Challenged the permissibility of oppressive violence [#BlackLivesMatter (BLM), Ayotzinapa]

These are *Networked* Social Movements

- They are dynamic, scalable, adaptive, creative, innovative, courageous, transversal and popular
- They amplify new voices, mobilize outside of traditional institutions, and create new avenues for meaningful participation, experimentation, and innovation
- They combine organizing through face-to-face relationship building with the innovative development and use of virtual platforms

Networked Social Movements need to be resourced in new ways

- Networked movements require a shift from foundation-centered funding to a broader conceptualization of resources
- We call this broader approach a *living resource system* to recognize the complex range of resources that need to be identified, linked, moved and in some case restructured to support the dynamic nature of networked movements
- This approach recognizes that everyone has access to resources and can help move those resources to places where they are needed. The more people see themselves as resource movers, the more transformative movements can become.

Seeds of the shift

In tandem with the many movement networks of the last decade, innovative funding channels and configurations have emerged to support them. For example, participants in Occupy Sandy set up Amazon wedding registries that identified needed items - from electric generators to cleaning supplies - that supporters anywhere on earth could purchase to be delivered directly to sites hit by the hurricane. In addition, crowdfunding sites were utilized to gather monetary donations from thousands of people.

More recently, Funders for Justice, a collaborative of donor networks and foundations, has begun working collaboratively to support the Movement for Black Lives, better known by the slogan “black lives matter” (BLM). They have invited activists to describe their resource needs. Some of their preliminary thinking in regards to next steps include developing pools of funds and an advisory group to better coordinate and target efforts, creating new funding structures such as rapid response funds, supporting leadership development for executive directors and emerging leaders, and reaching out to get more funders involved. This network is also committed to do its own internal work on racism and privilege.

In addition, other innovations are emerging such as the platform and brokering function played by Accomplices on Demand. Accomplices on Demand is a decentralized network of non-Black people in the metro Boston area showing up in the fight for Black liberation. Their work is twofold: one, to make available their resources, access, skills, and power in support of Black-led, Black liberation organizing, and two, to build powerful connections and community with other members of their racial group in an anti-racist context. Individual donors and collaborative donor funds clearly are the trailblazers in the philanthropic space.

These changes are part of the shift from foundation-centered funding to a broader conceptualization of resources we call a ***living resource system***. A living resource system provides a relationship-based approach to resources: resources are identified, linked, moved, supported, and restructured by everyone in the network so that they fit the dynamic nature of networked movements, reinforce the openness and “peerness” of network culture and enable movements to be transformative.

Assumptions of a living resource system approach

Everyone has resources. People in a healthy resource system **all** have resources, though many of those resources are non-traditional and include such things as skills, perspectives, and energy as well as money. All of these resources need to be valued.

Everyone moves resources. Everyone is also a resource mover. Resources do not simply move from funder to organization, but are most effective when many types of resources are flowing from all parts of the network to places where they are most needed to make change. Supporting healthy structures, platforms, and functions that facilitate this flow make movement networks more powerful and effective. All participants in a living resource system need support and training to be more effective in identifying, mobilizing and moving resources.

Collaborative solidarity is key. People in a healthy resource system need to collaborate as peers. The community, organizers and funders all need to participate in co-designing, co-developing and collaboratively implementing the resource system to make it more effective. Activists need spaces to interact and make decisions about resources with funders, as peers. This is called ***collaborative solidarity*****.** It means working with and supporting grassroots and marginalized communities as communities rather than as individuals or organizations, and beyond just the concept of inclusion. In fact, this term was popularized by several Black transwomen who are #BlackLivesMatter organizers, Elle Hearns and Aaryn Lang.

Funders must see their leadership differently in movement-building. Funders who see themselves as innovators and trailblazers in funding community organizing and movement-building need to be **part of the movement**, not just standing outside providing resources. Yet this requires explicit examination of their privilege and the hierarchies in which they are often embedded. Everyone in the resource system needs a deeper understanding of movement networks, how they function and how they can be supported effectively.

New movement resource structures and support systems are needed: A healthy resource system requires new structures, platforms and functions. In addition to new types of funding structures (**rapid response funds**) that fit the rapid moving, opportunity-based nature of movements, a healthy resource system develops virtual platforms and processes for connecting resources with activist needs, for supporting self-organizing, and for connecting clusters or chapters across different communities so they can learn and strategize together.

Resources need to be placed in funding pools where activists can be **central to the decision-making process**, and funds need to be structured so they can flow to the **emerging landscape of self-organized actions** rather than just through formal, pre-existing organizations. New types of **activist intermediaries** need to be developed to fill a supportive fiduciary function for these short-term collaborative projects and actions. These intermediaries also need to work together to learn how to fortify the movement-building support system for longer term support and investment. Organizers need to be able to have instant access pools of consultants with **expertise** (and willing to provide training) in organizing, social media and safety with simple, agile processes for approval. New types of functions, such as “resource mover,” need to be articulated and supported.

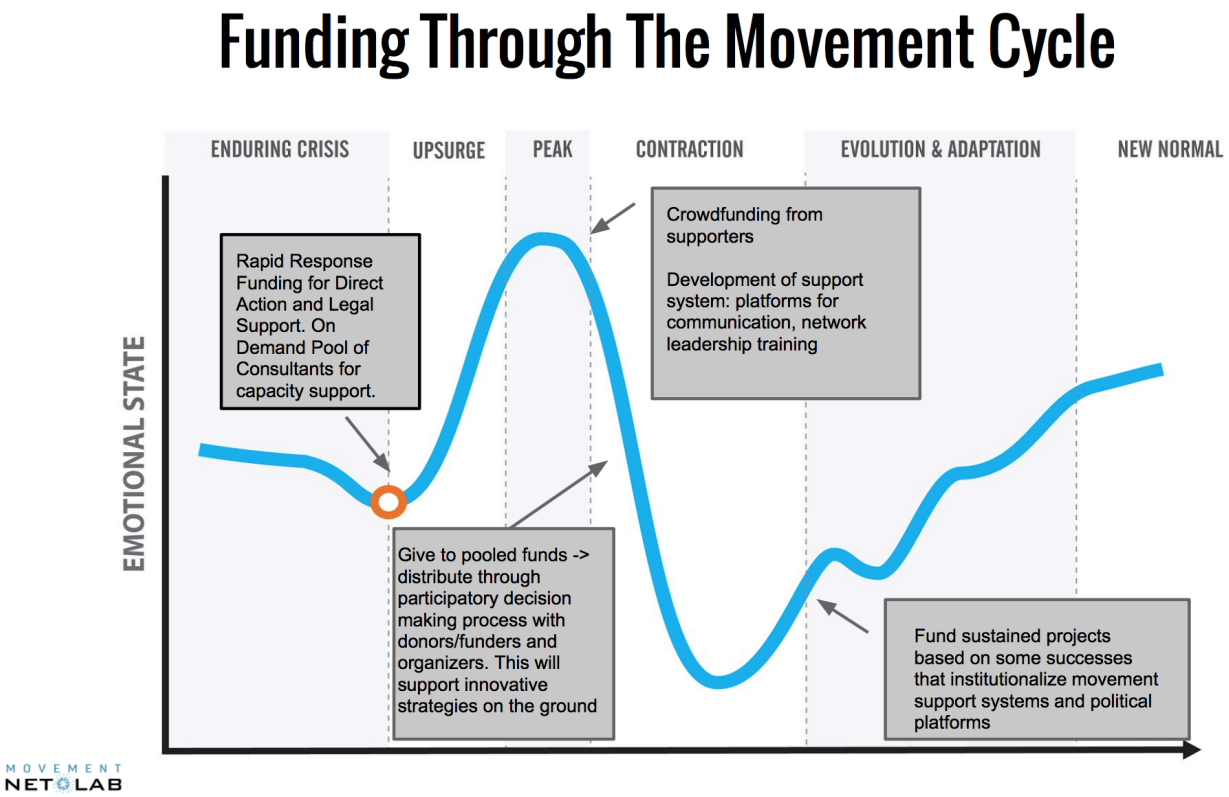
For example, Intelligent Mischief (a creative collective of cultural organizers in Boston) is working on a research and development project for funding Black liberation in a way that subverts the oppressive nature of traditional philanthropy and fundraising. They are planning on presenting prototype(s) for a new funding mechanism late this year.

Funding must fit the movement cycle and timing is critical. Healthy movements have cycles, and the needs of a thriving, expanding movement change dramatically and rapidly. However, these shifts are neither unpredictable nor random. Funders must be able to anticipate these shifts and be able to respond with agility in order to be most effective.

The schematic below (*Funding Through the Movement Cycle*) shows these relationships

- Movement moments and actions: rapid response funds and on-demand pool of consultants and support organizations

- Upsurge and Peak: ongoing support of consultants and organizations to help movement expand, platforms for communications, self-organizing and learning, and network leadership training
- Contraction and Evolution: pooled funds with participative decision-making for ongoing network building, self-organized long-term collaborative support system development and community projects; development of reflection-based materials draw from experience of the recent cycle



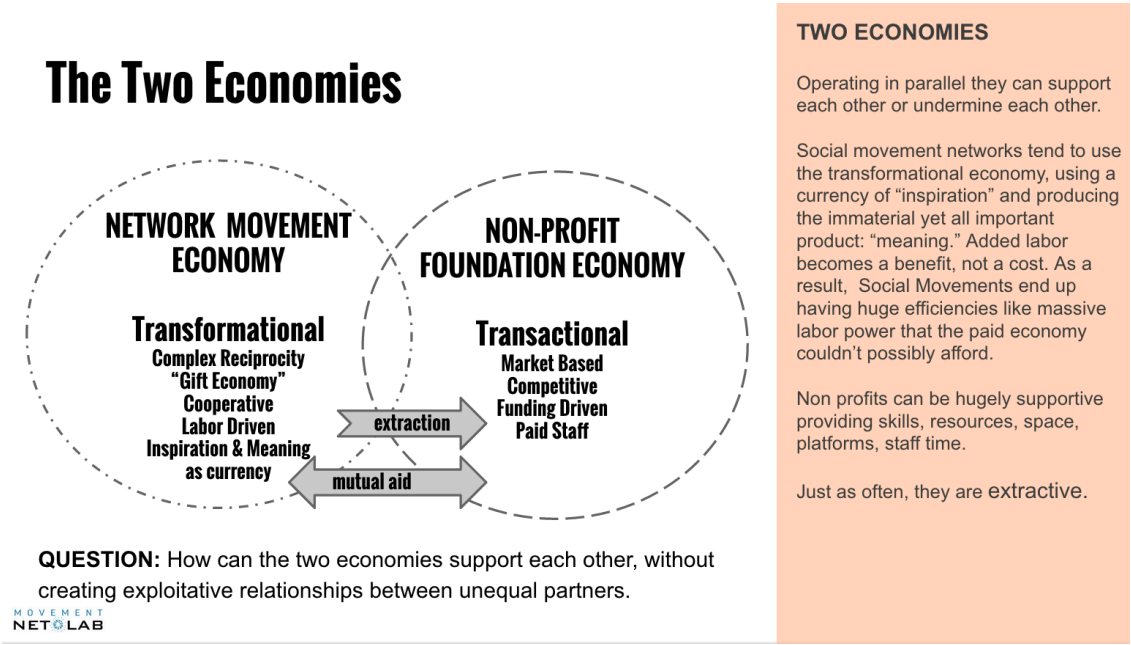
Funders can have much greater impact if they know how to support with greater precision at each moment, shifting and adapting in real time as the moment evolves. For example, during the upsurge phase where the potential for expansion is greatest, it's important to be able to respond rapidly by facilitating self-organizing on a massive scale. In turn, these expansive phases are more impactful if movement participants have ready access to expertise (strategy, social media, safety, fundraising). The impacts are accelerated if those with expertise, in addition to giving advice, are then able to shift into a post-action phase where they facilitate training in those skills and then lead deep reflection so the next cycle is more effective.

A key type of support currently missing is the investment in infrastructure that encourages more self-organizing. Examples of this infrastructure are

- new platforms for communication and self-organizing where activists can find others interested in particular emerging opportunities and have easy access to virtual spaces to discuss and organize their actions

- network leadership development that provides deep understanding of network movements and the skills needed for effective collaboration
- support for learning communities that encourage the sharing of what was learned with others around the country (who might be in a different phase of the cycle) is critical to build the momentum and capacity of the movement overall.

Networked leadership development is a key to success. A resource system needs widely distributed, trained and supported network leadership**.** The most underutilized resource in our movements is collaborative leadership - people in communities willing to take action for change together. This leadership needs support and development that is very different from traditional leadership programs. Training needs to be embedded before, during and after actions which means resource people need to learn how to train as well as provide expertise. Training in network leadership and approaches needs to be integrated into existing movement training programs. Activists need support to form communities of practice or peer learning clusters where they support each other around challenges, share learning and reflect deeply. They need to learn how to understand, map and enhance their networks. New materials needs to be spread widely through social media so that networked movement approaches become viral.



Funders must be aware of movement economics' risks*:** It is crucial to understand the paradox that outside funding, even when applied with good intentions, can often be a destructive, divisive force that can destabilize movements. What funders often don't see is that social movements already have their own economies – which we refer to as ***economies of meaning – that are able to effectively mobilize labor on a massive scale with very few resources. These economies are based on material exchange systems of complex reciprocity and non-monetary "currencies" like mutual aid. These complex exchanges are able to thrive by being embedded in a system of shared meaning, steeped in values of passion, dedication and sacrifice.

Funders often make the mistake of wanting to help, by introducing a new, cash-based "currency" that can actually disrupt and undermine these pre-existing economies, collapsing the massive "labor market" that is a social movement's greatest asset, and the one major strategic advantage it holds over the forces that it challenges. Put another way, the extrinsic motivation of cash-based currency can crowd out intrinsic motivation of meaning-based currency. Understanding and navigating these two economies becomes essential for funders to have positive impacts, rather than negative ones. By working with activists and other funders to design new funding structures that can be easily accessed by actions for immediate needs, and at the same time, working collaboratively to develop and resource the support system needed for long term movement sustainability (i.e. training and platforms for self-organizing), funders can play a critical role in increasing the transformative potential of movements.

The MNL Resources Working Group

Movement NetLab has convened a group of funders, activists and MNL core to develop the conceptual framework offered in this document and to begin experimenting with resource structures and processes. For example, the group has set up an Amazon Gift Registry, building on the model used by Occupy Sandy, to support the group at the Fourth Precinct protest site in Minneapolis with generators and clothing. The goal of this working group is to develop ways of monetarily and materially resourcing movement-building infrastructure that is responsive and responsible in the movement cycle.

Our strategy for meeting this goal makes use of the following methods:

- Creating alternatives to mobilizing and coordinating resources with organizers by creating and testing new infrastructure.
- Shifting how institutional philanthropy funds movements by creating space for existing institutions to fund in partnership with underrepresented movement groups who traditionally don't get supported by funders and donors.

MNL is also reaching out to share this paper and start conversations with donors and foundations with the goal of identifying a group interested in moving forward on these ideas.

Steps Funders Can Take Right Now

1. Join the MNL Resources Working Group.

2. Bring activists from movements such as Movement for Black Lives, movement collaboratives such as Movement NetLab and innovative nonprofits in to funder gatherings, not just as informants but as partners in learning about, designing and implementing a living resource system.

3. Working with these partners, map out additional foundations and donor networks who might be interested in supporting movement networks and develop a strategy for drawing them into the living resource system development efforts, building their

commitment to learn from organizers and each other and to create resource structures that reflect the realities of grassroots organizers and their communities.

As part of this expansion effort, support the continued development of concept papers, case studies, slides and toolkits as well as support for facilitation of learning and action clusters. Make it easy for funders to access coaching from movement collaboratives so that funders can examine every aspect of their organization through a network lens and take steps to make appropriate changes in how they operate.

4. Identify one or two pilots projects where this resource network could work together to develop new resource pools and platforms. For example, three BLM chapters (NY, Boston, and Minneapolis) have expressed interest in moving forward as a learning cluster and could be supported to participate in a pilot. Such a pilot might include
    - supporting the training of local #BLM groups in the use of Amazon gift registries and other crowdfunding platforms
    - development of rapid response funds and working with innovative nonprofits to provide supportive fiduciary services better suited to action
    - integrating network and movement training
    - developing a pool of consultants and resource organizations and platforms and processes by which these can be accessed and working with these individuals to provide just-in-time training as well as services needed for actions
    - develop larger collaborative funds with virtual and other decision-making processes that encourage participation by activists as well as funders

5. Invest in the development of a support system (network training and communities of practice, pools of consultants for actions, virtual platforms for self-organizing, learning and innovative resource brokering) that enables people to operate more effectively in a networked movement economy. For example, an easy first step could be support for a movement fellowship or movement network leadership program that provided much needed training support and peer learning for grassroots organizers, innovative intermediaries and donors.

6. To move all this forward, support Communities of Practice. Some may be for movement leadership in different communities who want to share what they are learning and support each other. Another key Community of Practice might be among those funders, organizers and support organizations and collectives interested in developing a living resource system. Movement NetLab is willing to convene such a group and is ready to start now!

About MNL

Who are we? **Movement Netlab** is a "Think + Do" tank collaborative, founded *by* social movement practitioners *for* social movement practitioners. Most of us have been directly involved at the frontlines of social movement organizing, including Occupy Wall Street, The Climate Justice Movement, and Black Lives Matter.

What do we do? Movement NetLab...

- Develops rich, easy-to-understand frameworks and analyses so that we can understand how movement networks function and can transform our world
- Provides trainings and materials so that movement activists can put analysis into practice in their organizing and actions
- Designs support systems for network movements that include face-to-face and online platforms, restructured resource systems, processes for deep reflection and learning, and ongoing communities of practice for long term evolution.
- Forms innovation labs and collaboratives to experiment with and learn from the implementation of a network approach

We are not an organization but an expanding set of collaboratives working on a growing number of projects to increase the impact of movements.

http://movementnetlab.org

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We are looking for funders and movement support organizations to partner with on a pilot project to build a living resource system with grassroots organizers. We are also interested in trainings or a community of practice that includes funders interested in learning more about networked movements.