

Holiday Year-End Campaign: Fund Our Futures!

Conversation 2: Anbar Mahar & Roshni Sampath - RVC Co-Executive Directors

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

On RVC's Thought Leadership & why it's a necessary part of our work:

Roshni: In October, we attended the convening of Robert Sterling Clark Foundation grantees. RSCF funds organizations in NYC that have leadership development as an equity strategy, and **"field builders"** — organizations that are changing the landscape of leadership and organizational development.

And what was really lovely is that, at one point, the person facilitating was like, "yeah, so we have national field builders...and then we have people that are just so ~*fly*~ that we have to include them because they're making a difference...we're talking about you, RVC!" and that really gave me perspective, like, oh, we are so fly. We do something different; unlike the other field builders there that are set up to operate nationally, we are place-based in our work.

But precisely because of our local context, our understanding of the local systems, and how we work with our partners...we bring a unique perspective to the national conversation.

Anbar: It was just one of those affirming moments! And at that same convening, we gave a presentation about our shared leadership, and I added a slide that was like, "and we're only on month 10!" — we're still learning so much about it.

But there is something energizing about the fact that we can share what we're learning and be able to say, "we're just figuring this out." It's going to evolve, we're going to iterate, and it's okay for us to share where we are at that moment.

Usually people wait, you know, until it's perfect, right? And I don't think this is something we're going to have fully figured out for a very long time.

It's been a minute since I've been exposed to it, but, we do have something that comes up in our sector where, because we're all competing for the same funding, you encounter that mindset: "we want to hold onto what we're learning." So there's just a lack of information sharing, in general, in the nonprofit sector.

I do think there's a shift happening, and it's not just with RVC; others are willing to share, too. As a sector, we can be healthier if we share how our experimenting is going; there's no need to reinvent the wheels. The fact that there are a lot of organizations doing exactly what we're doing only makes it more important for us to share our information.

We believe shared leadership to be part of the answer, but if we're also able to stop that reinvention of the wheel, we believe it can help with the burnout and with the turnover that's so prevalent in our sector.

Roshni: First of all, I think it's a part of our DNA. But there's a reason for that, right? We are founded to back BIPOC leaders and organizations, create collaborations, support our communities to flourish. And as an organization centered around BIPOC folks, full of BIPOC folks...it's important that **we are doing that also for ourselves**. We have to keep experimenting, make mistakes. And normalize making mistakes by talking about what we've learned, because that's something we need to do as we move ourselves forward using the nonprofit vehicle.

And the other thing is that it helps us move the sector into something that allows more of us to flourish. It keeps us in the abundance mindset and keeps us out of perfectionism. It keeps us from feeling like, oh, we have to hide our struggles and our mistakes. We celebrate the highs, but a lot of what we are learning and what we do is **sharing what we've tried and haven't worked...**and then what we tried after that.

I think there can be a lot of pressure, like with the whole thing about "people of color know the answer. They know what is needed." That's true, but then I think the other thing that slips in – for a lot of us as BIPOC organizations – is where we're then not allowed to make mistakes, or try new things, or take big risks.

I think being able to do all of that and being flexible is critical for us to be able to shift things in our communities. **We don't have to do business as usual**. There are ways to build leaderful environments, build more sustainable organizations, build a more effective sector.

Interviewer: anything you were surprised by during this journey?

Roshni: **That we're working on a lot of things that lots of people are hungry for.** I mean, we are trying these things because we are hungry for it, too, you know?

I did a shared leadership seminar with Ananda as a collaboration between TREC and RVC. Over 400 people signed up and 280 people came. When I read the feedback around what we presented, so many people started their sentence with 'all of this is helpful.' We've gotten practiced at sharing our learnings in a way that people can pick up, I think.

What being on a Co-Executive Team has been like:

Anbar: One thing that you hear over and over again, even if you're not an ED role, is about how isolating that position is. And, being part of a team, I can actually feel that I'm not isolated. I constantly have someone to turn to and say, "Hey, I need a thought partner on this," or, "Someone needs to just take this off my plate." I just cannot even imagine doing it by myself.

Roshni: One thing that I talk about a lot is that **a group of people is not a team**. Part of building shared leadership is you have to take that group of people and *decide* to be a team...decide that you're really doing it together. And we did. We took time as we were onboarding to do team building, make a charter,

get to know each other, and actually share feedback. I think I said yes to this because I got in a room with these three people and...thought: Yes. I want to take this on with *you*. There's no moment where we have to face any issue alone. Any problem, any personal life crisis, any org crisis, or even any org conversation...we don't actually have to do any of it alone.

That combination — I don't have to do it all, and we don't have to do any of it alone — mixed with a level of humor, joy, and wellness...that's what we've been trying to center.

It isn't perfect. It's still a lot of work. There are still crises in the world, and in our org, and in our lives. But in this way, we have a **strong sense of collective care**, a strong sense of grounding, and we have a really fun time. And I'm like: oh, if this is how the ED job was in more places, I think people would be more for it.

I love us. I just couldn't go a week without my team.