Overview
Over the past twenty years, the Brainerd Foundation has invested nearly $50 million in organizations working to protect the environment in the Northwest. In 2020, the foundation will close its doors. As we sunset, we are launching three initiatives that build on our investments and respond to the changing world around us:

- Expanding the base of conservation philanthropy
- Seeding a new generation of leaders
- Supporting 21st Century advocacy

Purpose of the 21st Century Advocacy Design Lab
The purpose of this two-day gathering was to get creative and generate expansive thinking about the idea of 21st Century approaches to conservation advocacy to inform the Brainerd Foundation’s 21st Century Advocacy Initiative strategy. We sought answers to these two big questions:

- How can the Brainerd Foundation and its philanthropic partners accelerate the transition to 21st Century advocacy for grantees?
- What investments can the Brainerd Foundation make over the next five years to help build an effective infrastructure of advocacy that builds power for conservation that will endure beyond the foundation’s sunset?

What we mean by 21st Century Advocacy
The Brainerd Foundation defines 21st Century advocacy as having the following attributes:

- It leverages “new” and “old” power to successfully achieve enduring conservation gains.
- It embodies networked and collaborative leadership, including “leaderful”\(^1\) and ownerless models.
- It is rooted in a culture that embraces learning, risk-taking, and nimbleness—and is inclusive of younger generations and diverse communities.
- It integrates technology in a way that is smart and thoughtful.
- It is resilient enough to weather the ebbs and flows of resources that come to our region for specific issue campaigns.

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\(^1\) “Leaderful” is a concept coined by Joe Raelin in *Creating Leaderful Organizations* that refers to many people sharing “the experience of serving as a leader, not sequentially, but concurrently and collectively. In other words, leaders will serve at the same time and all together.” [http://www.leaderful.org/leaderful.html](http://www.leaderful.org/leaderful.html)
Design Thinking
Beth Kanter facilitated the two-day design lab using a methodology developed by the LUMA Institute. This approach centers on three steps:

1. Looking: observing the human experience
2. Understanding: analyzing challenges and opportunities
3. Making: envisioning future possibilities and rapid prototyping

For more about this approach, visit Beth’s Blog.

Participants
About forty individuals participated in the design lab, including leaders from the Northwest conservation advocacy community, colleagues from grantmaking foundations, and Brainerd Foundation advisors.

Step 1. Looking: Observing the Human Experience via Idea Catalysts
The Brainerd Foundation invited four innovative practitioners and thought leaders to share their insights and spark ideas regarding 21st Century advocacy. Below are some key points from these idea catalysts, along with links to their PowerPoint presentations and other resources.

New Power: Henry Timms, 92nd Street Y
Henry began with a discussion of the theory of new power versus old power. (See his presentation slides and the article he co-authored for the Harvard Business Review for details.) Then he shared what an advocacy and engagement campaign using a new power model looks like.

- We need to think beyond conservation 2.0. This isn’t about retrofitting new technology onto our existing strategies. It’s about a culture of ongoing evolution.
- Most nonprofit leaders came up in an old power world that was all about building lists and funds. In contrast, ownerless campaigns embrace new power and focus on getting people to engage in our work on their terms, moving from consumption to co-creation. New power rests in the idea that the more agency you hand over to others, the more power you will have.
- #GivingTuesday is an example of a successful ownerless campaign. Key elements to its success included: (1) in-person meetings to share the idea and ask people to help improve it prior to launch, (2) a robust and strong coalition of backers and participants at launch, (3) a campfire communications strategy, and (4) a social media ambassador who signed people up to spread the word.
- Campfire mindset: things go viral by passing sideways through peer groups, rather than being sparked by an elite figure.
- “You know it’s a movement when it moves without you.”
- If you want to move from an old power model with old power values to a new power model with new power values, you will need to change your organizational culture and practices. It’s much easier to just shift your messaging, but simply talking more about collaboration—WeWashing—isn’t good enough. We have to walk the talk of sharing and collaboration, relinquishing control, and putting mission before brand.
Three big lessons:

1. “Watson, you are not luminous, but from time to time you are a conductor of light.” We need to lead like Dr. Watson, not like Sherlock Holmes, and spend more time thinking about how we can be conductors of light.

2. Tools, not rules. We need to create more tools to allow others to engage in our work, rather than creating a bunch of rules governing how they engage.

3. Place mission over brand. Ownerless campaigns are the future.

**Networked Leadership: Jodie Tonita, Social Transformation Project**

Jodie shared what the Social Transformation Project (STP) is currently experimenting with and provided some key terms and concepts related to networked leadership.

- STP approaches leadership development as a movement building strategy and a way to build trust between leaders. It is currently experimenting with platforms for collaborative action where leaders can come together to practice, experiment, learn and share what they are learning.
- STP is asking the question, “Is there a strategic imperative for cross-movement building?” and experimenting with answers.
- Transformational leadership is about shifting from fear and anger to a positive vision, from inefficiency to performance, from burnout to sustainable activism, from piecemeal efforts to systemic change.
- When we strategize together across movements, you unleash complexity. Emergent learning is a useful tool in complex situations like collaborative action and cross-movement building efforts. Emergent learning includes: reflecting about past actions, hypothesizing about future actions, taking action, and groundtruthing.
- Lean experimentation can provide rigor for trying new things and includes the following steps: Build. Measure. Learn. Iterate.
- **Movement moments are emergent.** But we can create collective capacity to act on them by investing in the scaffolding that supports leadership development.
- Examples of successful cross-sector collaborations include the Sierra Club and United Auto Workers supporting the Clean Power Plan, and Greenpeace making an environmental case for a path to citizenship.

**Technology: Cheryl Contee, Fission Strategy**

Cheryl talked about how culture and technology have changed and urged participants to get on board before it's too late. See her presentation for more details.

- The future is like a train. You can be the driver; you can ride; you can get run over; or you can hang off the caboose for dear life. A lot of nonprofits are just hanging on, now that the fundamental way people communicate and self-organize has changed.
- The era of broadcast is over. People power is here, now. We need to step up the way we communicate with constituents (e.g., segmenting our lists so we’re speaking to supporter’s individual interests) and reach out directly to influencers to harness the power of our networks.
- 65 percent of people learn about causes through a friend or family member on social media. Only 19 percent of people first learn about causes through an organization’s
website. (See Georgetown University’s Digital Persuasion Study for more details. Pew Internet is a resource for tracking social media usage in general.)

- African Americans and Hispanics are almost twice as likely to believe they can make a difference on a social media; they are more likely to engage with causes online.
- Attributes of 21st Century organizations: no secrets, no celebrities, no borders, no phones, no offices, no time zones, no words, no leaders (leaderful), no members (fluid affiliation), no budgets (ever changing).
- Much like Madonna, nonprofits need to reinvent themselves every five years by building, measuring, and learning. This change can be incremental.
- The environmental movement has won on the issues, but is losing the war because people don’t self-identify as “environmentalists.” We need to focus on words and themes that resonate more broadly: sacredness of nature, sustainable, stewardship and responsibility, market-based solutions, futurism and innovation, health, etc.
- Are you truly member-driven? Be confident enough to relinquish control.
- You can learn by following and lead by listening. Example: Campaign to help James Robertson get a car via crowdfunding. Ford led by listening and donated a car.

**Ownerless Campaigns & Engaging Millennials: Jessy Tolkan, Here Now**

Jessy shared how her new nonprofit, Here Now, is creating ownerless campaigns and engaging millennials, and she provided recommendations for 21st Century advocacy.

- Here Now, funded by the IKEA Foundation, is meant to be ownerless and enable others to engage in campaigns by creating conditions for transformative change.
- Here Now is an Accelerator. They Create, Accelerate, Scale, and Exit. They create campaigns that can be run on Snapchat, Twitter, or Instagram by establishing creative hashtags that can be used by other brands and advocacy groups (e.g., #PopeForPlanet and #ClimateChangeIsReal).
- Cross-sector collaboration unleashes complexity and possibility. Millennials aren’t single-issue thinkers. We need an intersectional approach to engage them.
- We need to be “movement-generous.” Movement generosity is not just about creating coalitions, but finding ways to reach the unorganized. What would the movement look like if we weren’t duplicating resources inside of organization after organization after organization?
- Vision before tactics. Example: 100% clean energy future. This vision must be baked into the culture before we start asking whether an individual supports specific clean energy legislation. We need people to be as excited about this idea as going to the moon.
- You can connect with millennials by speaking authentically to core values, recognizing lifestyle goals of happiness and success, amplifying their voice and spotlighting their experience, creating participatory campaigns, helping them stay in the know, and creating space at the table for young people.
- We can’t develop the strategy and then hand it off to millennials to execute the social media tactics. Millennials need to be in on the strategy’s development. The more responsibility you give to millennials, the less rebellious they will be.
- Millennials don’t want to join organizations (as members), but, like everyone else, they crave community. They want to feel empowered and connected. It’s moments and movements, not organizations, that engage, inspire, and sustain involvement.
Step 2. Understanding: Analyzing Challenges & Opportunities

Roses, Buds & Thorns
Day 2 of the design lab kicked off with individual reflections on what participants’ observed the previous day. Individuals jotted down their observations and reflections on post-it notes categorized as roses (pink: successes), buds (green: opportunities) and thorns (blue: challenges). Then the group gathered around the white board to share their experiences and develop a collective understanding of how the landscape of conservation advocacy in the Northwest needs to change.

Ideas clustered around the following themes:

In this graphic, text size corresponds to the number of ideas clustered each theme. The themes with the most resonance to design lab participants were Sharing Power (offline and online), Reconstruction, Funding Models, Ownerless Campaigns, and Young Leaders. Other key themes were also discussed.
Framing the Question

Then the group developed a series of questions to serve as a springboard for generating ideas that the Brainerd Foundation might consider in the design of our 21st Century Advocacy Initiative. Participants voted on the questions they deemed of highest importance. The highest rated questions were (in order):

- How might we adopt a hybrid model of new and old power?
- How do we leverage the “rain” of culture change?3
- How might we create a funding model that nourishes flexibility and innovation?
- How might we reimagine our goals so they aren’t trapped by old power values and/or culture?
- How might we better invest in young people and/or other key folks so they stay in the movement?
- How might we experiment with organizational restructuring or deconstructing?
- How might we be complicit in preserving power or dispersing it?
- How might we create a culture of sharing and listening that is less prescriptive?

Step 3. Making: Envisioning Future Possibilities

Generating & Rating Ideas

Participants worked in small groups to generate ideas for the Brainerd Foundation to consider as it implements the 21st Century Advocacy Initiative. Each group picked up to four questions from the above list and inserted them as column headers into a creative matrix to form a framework for idea generation. And it worked! Together the group came up with over 500 ideas. Then the groups transferred their best ideas onto a two-by-two grid, which allowed them to categorize each idea based on cost and potential impact.

Rapid Prototyping

Finally, each group developed a concept for what the Brainerd Foundation’s 21st Century Advocacy Initiative might include.4 Some groups chose to tell their story looking back from some point in the future. Others took this opportunity to pitch a new grantmaking venture. Overall, the concepts were intriguing and the presentations were quite entertaining. Below is a brief synopsis of each concept.

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3 During the Roses, Buds, and Thorns discussion in the morning on Day 2, Jessy Tolkan shared a helpful analogy about the role of culture in accelerating transformational change. She described culture as being the “rain” that softens the ground for change to take root. This concept took hold in the group and was often used as a shorthand to describe how a shift in culture would be an essential component of successfully implementing another concept, idea, or strategy.

4 The format of the design lab required groups to choose a concept very quickly. As a result, the following concepts represent just six of the many excellent concepts that might have been generated during the design lab.
Concept 1: Listen Up
This approach focuses on listening and looking at the infrastructure and DNA of the conservation community with humility, imagination, and curiosity. The Brainerd Foundation would follow and fund the ideas of new leaders. After projects were funded, we’d continue the virtuous circle by returning to listening mode. Funding for these new initiatives and projects would be freed up by reducing the number of greens by half, recognizing that you can’t solve a problem with the same thinking that got you into it. This approach would also create capacity for new voices and new ideas to be engaged in the environmental movement.

Concept 2: Mission: Possible
Mission: Possible focuses on a 100% clean power future achieved by investing in a new set of power brokers: moms, artists, workers, and communities of color who care passionately about the futures of their communities and are working together to achieve a safer, healthier, more prosperous Northwest. The Brainerd Foundation would invest in these individuals and demonstrate sharing and dispersing power, by supporting leadership development, campaigns, and strategies where a deep investment in diverse, multi-generational communities could bubble up. These new leaders wouldn’t self-identify as environmentalists, but would be motivated to continue driving victories for their communities. New investments by the foundation would trigger new investments by other funders around the region.

Concept 3: Foster Sharing & Innovation
In this approach, the Brainerd Foundation would focus on fostering sharing and innovation by thinking differently, funding differently, collaborating with other funders differently, and sharing differently—all starting tomorrow. The foundation would provoke new thinking by defining big ideas, contemplating what a new/old hybrid power model might look like, and evaluating whether nonprofit boards of directors are useful or just in the way. The foundation would fund differently by bringing grantees to the table to develop grantmaking guidelines, offering un-branded grantmaking to coalitions, and providing funds for research and innovation. Collaborating more with other funders would led to the creation of a pooled fund, more multi-year funding, a common grant application, and the ability to be more nimble. Sharing what we’re doing and learning would expand the impact more broadly; we could convene an annual gathering to showcase successes, share failures and create a space for grantees and funders to build, measure, and learn together.
**Concept 4: 21st Century Enquirer**

This concept responds to the question: “How do we develop a funding model that nourishes innovation and flexibility?” The answer centered on the idea of a revolving loan program (“loans for good”) with the Brainerd Foundation giving loans (rather than grants) for organizing that is monetized and can be repaid. This concept also included groups from different sectors doing long-term strategic or campaign planning together, with some groups daring to merge. Groups would also get together to discuss failures and lessons learned, so the broader community can be more successful.

**Concept 5: New Power / Old Power Hybrid**

This approach centered on a vision of diverse, powerful people living in a vibrant and healthy natural environment brought to life by a shift in culture. To this end, the Brainerd Foundation would reach beyond the usual suspects to listen to the needs and ideas of people in the environmental and social justice movements, and bring in new people and approaches via a “find them and fund them” strategy. New power and old power leaders would have opportunities to learn from and mentor each other. And nonprofit staff would receive cross-cultural exchange grants to be temporarily embedded (1–2 weeks) in another organization from different sectors or regions where they would develop new skills and knowledge while helping another organization with a campaign or project.

**Concept 6: Dinner Party Fund**

The dinner party concept responds to the question: “How do you leverage the “rain” of cultural changes?” A series of dinner parties would create space to bridge the personal and professional, build new relationships, and have conversations that we can’t have in other settings. Mindful of the power dynamics of inviting other people to our tables, this fund would be flexible, providing resources for conservationists to spend time in the community, so they could connect without an agenda and without wearing their organizational hats. This fund would focus on creating opportunities to hear from young leaders, diverse communities, and prospective allies. It would be nimble and able to fund spontaneous dinner parties quickly, providing funds to both individuals and nonprofits. The Brainerd Foundation would also host more formal dinners to both model and encourage the type of behavior it hopes to fund, learn from, and encourage in others. These dinner parties would inform the rest of the foundation’s funding by serving as an incubator to spark and experiment with new ideas.
Discussion & Reflection
After all the concepts had been presented, the group voted on their favorite overall concept and favorite details. The Dinner Party Fund and the 20th Century Enquirer concepts received the most votes for overall concept.

Participants appreciated that the Dinner Party Fund was a concrete, actionable strategy with an outward-looking approach that invites others to be a part of the conversation and help identify solutions. Others noted that unstructured social interactions are the best way to build relationships and cross-cultural exchanges, and that the conservation community excels in face-to-face interactions. Another participant noted that in a survey asking “Who would you least want to have dinner with?” environmentalists topped the list “because they are so judgmental and gloomy.” This would be an opportunity to change those perceptions and demonstrate the power in quiet humility.

There was also much conversation about the idea of reducing greens by half. Some noted that it was similar to the idea of long-term cross-sector strategic planning which could result in more power and lower staffing costs. Others connected these ideas to the concept of new power, noting that cross-collaborative and intersectional approaches might result in too many people focusing on too many things.

Next Steps
As we hoped, this design lab sparked new ideas and revealed additional questions for the Brainerd Foundation to consider as we develop our 21st Century Advocacy Initiative. Over the next couple of months, we will be thinking more about how we can incorporate the themes of new power, ownerless campaigns, learning by listening, sharing power, culture change, and intersectional leadership into our grantmaking strategy.

In November the Brainerd Foundation board and advisors will convene in Seattle for its final meeting of 2015. These ideas and questions will be brought before the board and advisors for additional input and conversation.

Throughout the fall and into 2016 and beyond, the Brainerd Foundation invites you to continue sharing ideas and having conversations with us about how we can accelerate the conservation community’s transition to 21st Century advocacy approaches, and build effective infrastructure for advocacy. You can reach us by email, telephone, or on Twitter at @BrainerdFdn and #21advo.

Thank you for your insights, ideas, and willingness to build, measure, and learn with us!