

# Thriving Resilient Communities (TRC) Co-Project Initiative Report 2016

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## Co-Project Showcase: What we mean by Thriving Resilient Communities work

[Daily Acts](#) “gets stuff done” running permaculture workshops and events in rural/suburban North San Francisco Bay and running the Community Resilience Challenge that has recorded over 46,000 actions across the USA. Their annual breakfast draws over 1000 citizens and government, business, and nonprofit leaders. Their steady regional community engagement strategy has already generated enough institutional power to be adopted by regional water managers and to change California greywater use policy.

[Rooted in Resilience](#) works directly with low-income communities of color with a focus on youth. They developed a Community Resilience Toolkit used in 34 countries. They specialize in anchoring cross-cultural alliances including the Local Clean Energy Alliance (ninety organizations) and the Resilient Communities Initiative (a national model of resilience planning led by local communities most impacted by climate change).

The ReInvest Network (hosted by the [Climate Justice Alliance](#)) develops democratically governed financial cooperatives in low-income communities and a coordinated campaign to move fossil fuel and prison industry divested funds to these cooperatives. For example, [Boston Ujima](#) invested \$10,000 in 6 businesses through a democratic crowdsource pilot of over 100 people.

## The Big Picture: Why Thriving Resilient Communities Matter

Millions of people are committed community leaders today, from faith groups to first responders, from farms to factories. Yet we still face serious challenges such as violence and disease, economy instability and inequity, extreme weather and climate change, and food, water, and energy insecurity. Human society is on a journey into uncharted territory of learning how to dream, think and act together across our different geographies and cultures to create a society that works for everyone. How the heck do we actually do that?

Our social journey is known by many names such as Blessed Unrest (Paul Hawken), Just Transition (Climate Justice Alliance), and World Peace (United Nations). Movements within this broad social shift share similar visions but often use different names such as

Compassionate, Healthy, Just, Livable, Local, Peace, Resilient, Sustainable, Thrive, and Transition. The United Nations has adopted [Sustainable Development Goals](#) to describe

various objectives to “*end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all.*”



Our global journey’s goals lead us toward building resilient systems in the local communities where we live: food, water, air, land, energy, economy, emergency response, buildings, transportation, communications, etc. Resilience is a community’s ability to adapt and thrive in changing conditions instead of collapsing during a shock. Resilience is not just about “bouncing back” from a shock. Instead, it is about “bouncing forward” to eliminate the inequities and unsustainable resource use at the heart of the many crises we face. We seem to be somewhat better at dealing with shocks; it is the long term problems that get ignored and lead to instability.

We need to think and act systemically. Systems are simply groups of related parts that work together as a whole. Resilient local systems depend on each other and on larger-scale systems in agriculture, water and land management, industrial production, mass transit, etc. For instance, we can’t create food security without water, energy, justice, transportation, and so on. Complex interdependent issues require a systemic approach

that get right to the root causes of issues instead of just the symptoms. For example, instead of feeding someone a fish, a systemic approach feeds them a fish, teaches them and their neighbors to fish, and protects the local fishing hole and water sources.

“Thriving Resilient Communities” (TRC) is the shorthand name for the Initiative’s work to build local resilience. The Initiative brings together leaders of local resilience networks that involve many local communities either within a region and/or across the USA (translocal). Our systemic approach builds resilience in several ways:

- Multi-stakeholder: involving multiple issues or “stakes” such as not just food, but food/water/justice
- Multi-cultural: working together as co-leaders across differences such as class, race, age, and gender
- Multi-scale: networking many communities to create large-scale influence within and across regions

Shifting deeply-rooted social systems is complex, hard, long-term, and often lonely. People may not see the impact of their work in their lifetime. The Initiative builds trust, wisdom, and capacity across more than forty resilience leaders and hundreds of allies. This report celebrates and supports community resilience leaders to see their collective impact during 2016 and consider their next steps together in 2017.

## Executive Summary

### Description

The Thriving Resilient Communities Co-Project Initiative (TRC Initiative) brings together regional and translocal community resilience leaders across the USA in collaborative project (“co-project”) strategizing and participatory budgeting of a funding pool co-funded by multiple donors.

**The Initiative models an emergent form of multi-stakeholder peer collaboration.** The Initiative builds collective wisdom and impact through an annual cycle of Community Roundtable and Review strategic thinking forums and a Council collaborative funding process.

**The Initiative creates a new paradigm for resilience movement strategy and funding.** In conventional philanthropy, funders have the decision-making power. The TRC Initiative breaks down those power structures because activists who have applied for grants are the majority voice at the decision-making table. The 2016 anchor partners are the TRC Collaboratory ([TRCC](#) - producer) and the Threshold Foundation TRC Funding Circle ([TRCF](#) - sponsor). In 2016 eight activists (chosen from TRCC) and one representative from Threshold allocated the funds provided mainly by Threshold Foundation members.

### Celebrating Outcomes & Deliverables

Collaborative thinking around project strategies

- 40+ peer reviewers from 25+ organizations

\$178,000 in funding for seven co-projects

- up 21% from 2015

Best practices of funder-activist partnership

- peer reviews & shared grant pool

Stronger solidarity among movement leaders

- Deeper relationships within & across regions



### For more Information

See more details [here](#). Questions? please contact [LeslieCMeehan@gmail.com](mailto:LeslieCMeehan@gmail.com) or [Mary@bushemeny.net](mailto:Mary@bushemeny.net)

# Story

## Why: Collaborative Movement Strategy and Philanthropy

### Our theory and strategy of change

The Initiative is an exercise in strategic movement-building (from the top-down) that harnesses grassroots plans (from the bottom-up). We call this middle way the *grasstops*. Grasstops leaders have both grassroots influence in the streets and institutional access in local government, often networking *translocally* in many places. Our local work causes powerful impact within our regions, and then our regional impact shifts policy and resources at state levels and beyond. Several members organize across the whole scale spectrum from local actions to global events like COP21. We consider regional-translocal grasstops resilience networks to be crucial building blocks for global resilience. Learn more about grasstops theory [here](#).

### Walk our Talk about Sharing Power through Collaborative Philanthropy

The Initiative emerged from ongoing inquiries that identified money as a crucial leverage point for system change, i.e. how much is flowing, where it is flowing to, and how decisions are made. The inquiries began in 2011 when the TRC Funding Circle (TRCF) was organized within the Threshold Foundation by funders already working in and donating to local community resilience. TRCF consulted with activist allies right from the start and became the founding and ongoing sponsor of the funder-activist TRC Collaboratory (TRCC). TRCC connects and builds capacity for community resilience funder & activist leaders.

In 2014, TRCF funded a co-project developed by TRCC members Post Carbon Institute and Conversation Collaborative: a series of interviews of movement leaders aimed at building greater shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the new economy and community resilience movements. A prominent theme was the need for a profound shift in the way philanthropic funding is distributed (read more in "[Weaving the Community Resilience and New Economy Movements: Voices and Reflections from the Field](#)"). As a result, in 2015 TRCF began sharing funding power by contracting with TRCC to host the Initiative as its grant-making partner. TRCF also typically funds an annual TRCC general support grant.

**Money speaks, and our TRC community has said loud and clear that our money voice is too small to create the necessary collective impact.** Our grassroots networks have critical solutions that need significantly larger resources to build local resilience systems. Collaboration is crucial to address the complexities of community resilience today, so we must step up our working as peers to develop our collective wisdom and power. Imagining the future we want together (WHY) and the way we make inclusive wise decisions together (HOW) is at least as important as the actions we take together (WHAT).

Our principles are:

- To build resilience, connect the community to more of itself.
- Support work already underway (cooperation & collaboration) as well as find new synergy (co-creation).
- Tend the whole: create conditions for multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural, and multi-scale work.
- Fund the ecosystem.

## What: Co-Projects

[Co-Projects](#) are community resilience projects that are collaboratively nominated, reviewed, and funded by the Initiative community of funders and activists. They create global collective impact anchored in the local power of the people. Myra Jackson (UN Permanent Representative, IPS, Focal Point on Climate Change) says “This is amazing work! TRC projects are contributing powerfully to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals from the local to the global.”

The TRC Council funded seven co-projects with innovative systemic plans: permaculture training mixed with organizing training, local coop funding with participatory neighborhood democracy, courageous conversations in cross-cultural campaigns, community-led "unconferences" and regional convening, etc. Proposals are [here](#).

### ReInvest Network: local loan funds & incubators

The ReInvest Network (part of the [Climate Justice Alliance](#)) develops democratically governed financial cooperatives in frontline communities and a coordinated campaign to move fossil fuel and prison industry divested funds to these cooperatives. Frontline communities are on the “frontlines” of climate change: the low-income communities and communities of color who end up with the oil refineries, coal mining, waste incinerators, etc. in their backyards. TRC funded ReInvest hubs in Boston and SFBay.



- [Boston Ujima](#)
  - 35+ participating organizations, 600 person email list, 3,500 social followers
  - \$10,000+ invested to 6 businesses through a democratic crowdsource pilot of 100+ people
- [Cooperation Richmond](#)
  - 9+ partner organizations
  - Startup: hiring staff and funding first coops

### Regional Food/Water/Energy/etc Cohorts

- Permaculture for the People ([Movement Generation](#)) see video [here](#)
  - SFBay urban farming cohort with a public agriculture land commons
  - 30+ active partner organizations, 2500 person email list, 5,000 impressions per social post, video view 100,000+, 4500+ at trainings, retreats and speaking events in the last year

- Just Resilience Collaborative - [Daily Acts](#), [Rooted in Resilience](#), [NorCal Network](#), & [TransitionUS](#)  
The JRC grows trust and cooperation between environmental and social justice organizations by collaborating on tangible resilience-building projects. The JRC exists to help address the gap in trust, communication, and collaboration between white-led environmental organizations, and people of color-led social justice organizations. The Collaborative partners have strong local to global impact.

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46,000+ resilience actions	46 states, 50 countries
232,250 sq feet of lawn GONE!	50 civic leaders & local/state policies
600+ direct partner organizations	30,000+ online followers
30,000+ community leaders trained	20,000,000 social impressions

### Regional and National Network Hubs

Convening multi-stakeholder networks within and across regions is a top priority strategy which is typically difficult to fund through traditional means.

- [New Economy Coalition](#): 160 member groups, 1000 at convenings, social media 20000+
- [New England Resilience & Transition](#): 44 member groups, 300+ at convenings, social media 2000+
- [TRC Collaboratory](#): 40+ leaders of all these networks and MORE

## How does it work? Who does what when

This was our first full annual Initiative cycle! so here's how it works so far. The annual cycle begins in early fall when anchor partners agree to host and sponsor the next Initiative cycle. Anchor partners can choose one or more roles in hosting, participating, or funding. Anchor Partners build collective wisdom and impact by inviting respected peers' participation in Community Roundtable and Review strategy forums and a Council funding process. The Roundtable and Reviews are open to the TRCC Community and its wider network of friends and allies. Community members submit grant nominations to the Council. The Council is the peer decision-making body: a trusted diverse group of activist-funder voices. The Council selects nominations in January, reviews proposals in May, and makes grant recommendations to Grant Pool sponsors in July.

The grant pool allows the flexibility for funders to make offers to the pool and/or to specific co-projects. There is no single pooled fund. The Council makes funding recommendations to the funder, who then uses their own funding mechanism to fund the grant partner directly. Funders are encouraged to sponsor TRCC to host the Initiative. Threshold contracted with TRCC to pay \$15000 for Council activist honoraria and expenses.

Initiative Cycle	Community (volunteer, optional) members & partners	Council (paid, committed) mostly activists - a few funders
Fall Partner Launch		
2016 Anchors:  		
Fall/Winter Roundtable	X (in-person & virtual webinars)	
Winter RFP Nomination	X (virtual)	
Winter RFP Selection		X (in-person Oakland)
Spring Peer Reviews	X (virtual)	X (virtual)
Summer Grant Recommendations		X (virtual)
Grants Awarded		

# Reflections

## Benefits

### **Shared collective wisdom about strategic projects, funding, and participatory democracy**

The TRC Community and Council strengthened their expertise and perspectives in many ways.

- “It definitely expanded my scope of what is possible in the resilience/just transition field. It was great to learn about initiatives happening in the Bay Area” (Sarah Byrnes, New England Resilience and Transition Network)
- “The Council decision making process was a unique process that I learned from and appreciated as an approach. I also appreciated the regional orientation and an analysis of the relationship between municipal level projects and broader networks.” (Aaron Tanaka, Center for Economic Democracy)

### **Deep appreciation for the impact and need for sharing power between funders and activists**

Council members unanimously recommend continuing the Co-Project Initiative in 2017.

- It is one of the few spaces where funders have democratized the decision making process. served as an important model for other funders to ideally follow (Mateo Nube, Movement Generation)
- Explores the potential for transforming the funder - grantee relationship into a more equitable and impactful one (Colin Miller, Rooted in Resilience)
- Democracy in deciding how funds are spent is part of achieving a democratic society (Jamie Frank, New Economy Coalition)

### **Solidarity of working together across difference on behalf of the movement**

Every Council member reported a deepening of existing relationships and the forming of new ones, often across regions.

People developed greater insight into:

- Understanding how important it is for people to work together across color lines, sector silos and regions (Magenta Ceiba, Bloom Network)
- The deep and thoughtful way that our colleagues approach their work, and their longstanding dedication and integrity. The complexity they handle with such limited resources, and their adaptability to circumstances. In other words, the TRCC is a gathering of lemonade makers. (Ken White, PostCarbon Institute)

## Challenges

### **Limited Resources - not enough money or time**

Funding scarcity and resulting time constraints continues to be a chronic issue for most participants.

- Participating in the Council gave me insight into the level of transformation that is still needed in shifting how non-profit organizations are able to fund their work. Even within the Council, non-profits are still effectively competing with each other for limited funding sources, even when the table at which we are all sitting is a friendly, open, and cooperative-feeling one. (Colin Miller, Rooted in Resilience)
- We had requests from our proposals for twice as much money, and many of those projects could have taken much more money if it was available. There were other proposals that didn't make the cut (Ben Roberts, TRCC)
- It's tough to review the projects and organizations with the current model. I don't feel like I got to know the various organizations enough to make an educated decision about their funding (Susan Silber, NorCal Network)

## **Systems glass ceiling: the collaboration “penalty?”**

It's hard and sometimes discouraging to create, explain, and do multi-stakeholder systemic work. Building multi-organization, multi-cultural partnerships takes extra time and effort. It's measured by trusted relationships, not just quantitative metrics. It's also a long haul. Social resilience very likely will not happen in our lifetimes. A recent [Institute for Policy Studies report](#) estimates that it will take 228 years for African-Americans to reach the level of wealth as whites. The whites will need to be at least allies if not partners along the way. These extra challenges in critical root cause collaboration often do not get rewarded and can be de-motivating.

- I have a lot more to learn about building resilience across cultures. The Just Resilience Collaborative struggles to design programs across class and race: "Who cares about low-flow toilets - I'm happy if my toilet works at all!" What are we learning about cross-cultural collaboration where leadership comes from within many communities? (Leslie Meehan, Threshold, TRCC)
- I see patterns emerging that could potentially work against trying to increase collaboration and work across race and class (Trathen Heckman, Daily Acts)

## **On the bleeding leading edge: Unclear rules and risky conflicts of interest**

This emergent process is so outside the box that we're inventing the funder-activist rules from scratch: roles, grant criteria, financial transparency, conflict of interest procedures, and so on. Our criteria need development. For example, what qualifies a project as “regional?” Does the social justice criteria mean people-of-color led projects, cross-cultural projects or both? How are we prioritizing collaboration within TRCC versus beyond? Clear communication was also a challenge as we changed technologies and involved many more people.

Having grantees at the decision-making table is both a democratic blessing and a conflict of interest curse. We are intentionally practicing participatory democracy where community members share available resources as best as they can. Yet, money has a bad habit of damaging relationships. When distant funders don't fund your project, “they” did it. When your friends and allies don't fund it, “they” are us. For example, four active TRCC members who collaborated on one proposal were disappointed not to receive enough funding to readily share, so we're using the situation as a learning opportunity to address any lingering tensions and learn any lessons.

## **Recommendations**

### **Continue the TRC Co-Project Initiative and engage more movement strategy and funding partners**

Funder-driven initiatives are driving what happens in the movement, instead of harnessing the wisdom of activist leaders. Activists can feel frustrated when their visions and plans aren't respected, and funders can feel frustrated when activist groups duplicate efforts or don't have a cross-organization strategic perspective.

We need more truly participatory movement strategy and funding practices with funders and activists as peers at the table. Funder-activist joint planning and governance models seem to be rare. Some funders delegate decisions to activists, but few involve both funders and activists. Engaging funders in the decision-making process is important movement-building solidarity and education. We propose a 3% Commons guideline for funders to walk their democracy talk by committing at least 3% of their funds to peer collaborative philanthropy.

### **Tell a better story: develop “research” case studies, articles, metrics, analysis, etc.**

The complex long-term systemic nature of both co-projects and collaborative philanthropy can make it more difficult to see its collective impact. Develop more stories and assessments about co-projects and co-funding.

- Wish for this kind of practice to be shared and replicated. I know about ... a few others, but perhaps there could be ... an article or resource created to support others trying this approach (Ken White)

### **Refine the 2017 Initiative's rules**

Convene a 2017 Council Design working group to address process questions.

## Our Gift to You: Top Tips for Funder-Activist Peer Collaboration

We offer these words of wisdom from our experience and encourage you to find peer ways to play in your work.

- Anchor in trust: Start with a trusted multi-stakeholder group. TRCF and TRCC had a three year history first
- Honor the edginess: allow space & time to digest power dynamics and emotions
- Engage Community: engage broad community in dialogue & development then empower Council to decide
- Provide Council activists with financial compensation to support and enable their commitment.
- Build transparency & buyin: identify conflicts of interest, discuss power dynamics openly & approve plans collectively
- Protect the ally relationships of people on the ground
  - Share financial info only with permission, open dialogue but private deliberations
- Capture and share your story! This is leading-edge important work - share your lessons learned