



## **MODEL PARTNERSHIPS FOR IMPACT**

# THE EDNA MCCONNELL CLARK FOUNDATION AND COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

2016

Fall 2016

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### **About Independent Sector**

Independent Sector is the leadership network for nonprofits, foundations, and corporations committed to advancing the common good. Our nonpartisan coalition's networks collectively represent tens of thousands of organizations and individuals locally, nationally, and globally.

### **Our Vision & Purpose**

We envision a world of engaged individuals, robust institutions, and vibrant communities working together to improve lives and the natural world, and strengthen democratic societies. To help create this future, we lead and catalyze the charitable community, partnering with government, business, and individuals to advance the common good.

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Independent Sector (IS) works to enhance grantee and funder organizations to ensure both are effectively helping society's most vulnerable populations. From Independent Sector's cornerstone Building Value Together Initiative, which outlined practices to help foundations and nonprofits achieve successful outcomes, to Charting Impact to Threads, IS has addressed how nonprofits and foundations can have healthier relationships with one another and best fulfill their organizational missions to strengthen the communities they serve.

IS is committed to being responsive to the sector and the knowledge gleaned during our 15 cross-country Threads conversations with 80 partner organizations. In every city IS visited, one consistent impediment to meeting mission was raised: the strained relationships between grantees and funders. IS seeks to respond to what we heard by building upon previous work by IS and others, and adding to the depth of knowledge needed to move grantee/funder 'power dynamics' in a more productive direction.

Our first contribution to this conversation is a series of eight case studies, featuring grantee and funder pairs, who exemplify healthy relationships and illuminate the practices and behaviors that contribute to a positive power dynamic.





## Grantee/Funder alignment of vision and strategy strengthens communities and leads to impactful results.

The partnership between Communities In Schools (CIS) and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (EMCF) was at least two years in the making, if not more. “We were always aware of their work and their model,” says Kelly Fitzsimmons, director of innovation and policy for EMCF. “But in 2009/2010, we formally started our due diligence process. In the middle of the process, we hit the pause button. When EMCF became a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) intermediary, CIS applied for that competition and as a result was invited to join the True North Fund (TNF).”

“We felt EMCF was a partner in our work,” says Debra Montanino, chief strategy officer and interim co-CEO at Communities In Schools. “It was interesting to start with a SIF grant because [EMCF] had to operate differently too because it was re-granting and matching a government grant. They treated us like equals.”

The initial SIF grant was an opportunity for CIS to conduct a larger, more rigorous evaluation of the CIS model in order to build on its existing evidence base and to improve the quality and practice of the CIS Network. Subsequently, CIS has worked with EMCF to contribute its learning to the broader field as well as to organizations who fund work with youth.

Part of the SIF grant included a match requirement of \$6 million that CIS had to raise. Because of CIS’ commitment to building an evidence base for an entire field and the structure of the SIF grant opportunity, The Wallace Foundation, a True North investor that shares a deep commitment to both serving youth and building a field’s evidence base, stepped in and funded the match in full. The Wallace Foundation worked collaboratively with EMCF and CIS to explore and document the facilitators of and barriers to achieving scale and sustainability.

The first grant was made in April of 2011 and centered on growth in key geographic areas including the Carolinas, California, and Oklahoma, building evidence, and strengthening organizational capacity, for CIS. Following the SIF/TNF investment, EMCF made a subsequent unrestricted investment in CIS' overall growth, capacity and evidence building. Over the past five years, EMCF has invested and/or helped CIS aggregate over \$15 million in funding and the relationship has evolved so that EMCF funds all aspects of CIS' work to varying degrees. "We are a federated network of 160 nonprofits. At the national office we work on policy and advocacy on behalf of the network; evaluation of the network as a whole; and raise money nationally to reinvest in the network around talent, board development, etc. EMCF is a partner in all of this," says Montanino.

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation was founded in 1969 by its namesake and her husband Van Alan Clark.<sup>1</sup> Edna was the daughter of David H. McConnell, founder and president of the California Perfume Company which later went on to become Avon Products.<sup>2</sup> Its mission is to champion economically disadvantaged youth. To do this, they partner with other investors to expand programs with compelling evidence in order to help more vulnerable young people become successful adults.<sup>3</sup>

Communities In Schools (originally called Cities in Schools) was founded in 1977 with the mission of surrounding students with a community of support, to empower them to stay in school and achieve in life.<sup>4</sup> It was founded by Bill Milliken, then a youth advocate in New York City who wanted to bring

community resources inside public schools.<sup>5</sup> Since its founding, CIS has evolved to a \$200+ million a year network of organizations which serves 1.5 million students a year.

## The Work of the Relationship

What is clear from conversations with both EMCF and CIS is that their commitment to evaluation, analysis, and continuous improvement is shared and steadfast. For EMCF, it is one of the strongest aspects of their relationship,

"There is a shared commitment to evidence-based growth and learning. That is super aligned with us particularly among the target population of youth we prioritize. We also put outcomes for youth front and center and have a fundamental belief in people. This serves as a basis for an open relationship and allows us to partner together," says Fitzsimmons.

"We have a shared vision" says Montanino, "We serve 1.5 million kids a year, but there are 11 million we could serve. We want to scale evidence-based solutions to serve these kids. We also believe we need to establish Integrated Student Supports and create visibility of this as a solution to the achievement gap. To accomplish that, we need to mobilize our constituents and so we have grown the number from a few thousand to more than 40,000."

How best to build and implement this evidence base is driven by CIS, with EMCF partnering to provide counsel and resources, and the many staff from both organizations being in continuous conversation.

1. "Our History." The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. Accessed July 5, 2016. <http://www.emcf.org/about-us/our-history/>.
2. "David H. McConnell." Wikipedia. Accessed July 5, 2016. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_H.\\_McConnell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_H._McConnell).
3. "THE EDNA MCCONNELL CLARK FOUNDATION." GuideStar Profile. Accessed July 5, 2016. <http://www.guidestar.org/profile/23-7047034>.
4. "Form 990 – Communities In Schools" GuideStar. Accessed July 5, 2016. <http://www.guidestar.org/FinDocuments/2014/581/289/2014-581289174-0bbbf7f-9.pdf>

5. "About Us : Communities In Schools." Communities In Schools. Accessed July 5, 2016. <https://www.communitiesinschools.org/about/>.

“There is no one I would rather debate or learn from” says Fitzsimmons. “Organizationally for EMCF, we have learned how to engage better with grantees because of CIS. CIS has been able to share their experience with new grantees on how best to work with [us] which has helped [us].

CIS will push back on consultants, evaluators. That dialogue has strengthened our community of partners and helped inform me of the difficulties of managing complex networks.”

“We pride ourselves on being a learning organization and that means dealing with the good, bad, and ugly,” says Montanino.

“In January 2016, we codified our organizational values of honesty, integrity, and accountability. We have clear milestones and are held accountable by EMCF to them. And we hold them accountable too. The way the relationship unfolds is consistent with [both of] our values.”

## **The Impact of the Relationship**

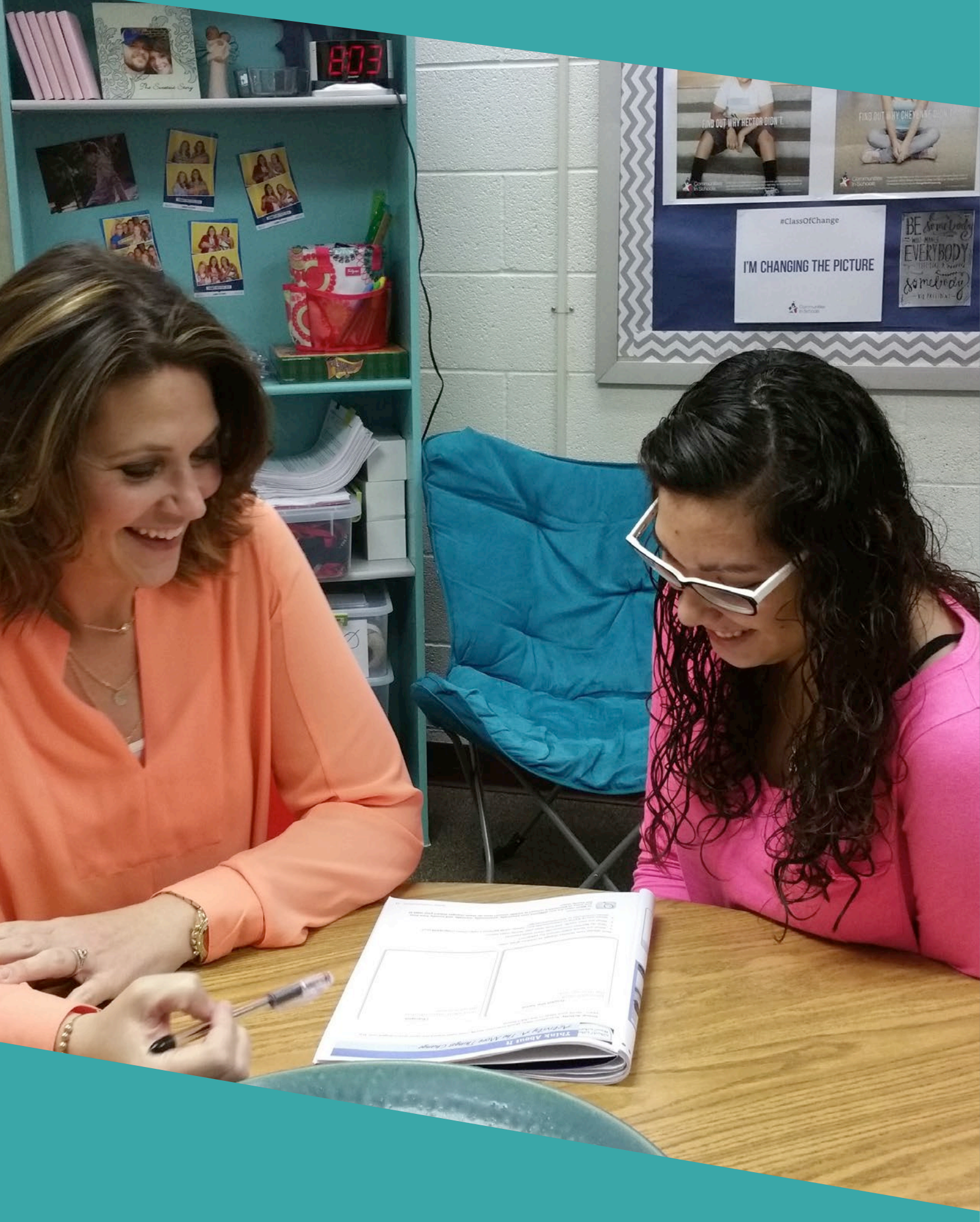
“From 2008-2015, CIS served 20% more students, reduced administrative costs by 24%, and graduated 35% more students. This is due, in part, to EMCF’s investment,”

says Montanino. “In addition, their investment got our Board and the broader funding community to see what is possible. It elevated our game. That came in partnership with EMCF and getting through their due diligence process.”

## **The Future of the Relationship**

When asked where the partnership will be in 10 years, neither predicts whether a funding relationship will be in place, but both believe in CIS’ potential for helping more kids. Fitzsimmons says, “They are one of the big ideas in education and they have a great opportunity to continue to impact and scale. I hope their impact will be sustained in the market ten years from now.”





# SECTOR LEARNING

This is one of a series of case studies that grounds IS' larger post-Threads power dynamic work by providing the cornerstone for a set of prototype tools to help aid the transfer of healthy behaviors, practices, and conditions from one relationship to another. This case study reflects a number of transferable behaviors, practices, and conditions, including but not limited to:

- **Investing in Organizations as Opposed to Projects.** CIS sought to grow its service levels, improve quality, and build its evidence base. Receiving unrestricted funding against a strategic plan to meet these objectives, CIS is well positioned to pursue its organizational and field-building objectives.
- **Leveraging the Work of Others.** The SIF grant allowed engagement from The Wallace Foundation, and also provided EMCF the opportunity to deepen its understanding of the complexity of working through networks. This deeper understanding facilitated deeper investment of EMCF in CIS as well as the network itself.
- **Influencing one another's practice.** EMCF staff has learned how to better support all of its grantees because of the continuous conversations and commitment to learning which is shared by both organizations. CIS has influenced EMCF's understanding of the complexity of networks which had led to some changes in its practice. For CIS, the mutual accountability and commitment to building an evidence-base has aligned the organization internally, as well as mobilized funding beyond EMCF.
- **Shared values and vision for the impact.** CIS' and EMCF' organizational values align with one another. Chief among them is their commitment to youth and a fundamental belief in people.
- **Establishment of clear milestones and mutual accountability to achieving them.** There is a shared commitment to achieving milestones and a forum for both organizations to raise concerns with one another. The metrics are seen as a shared goal, rather than a punitive aspect to the relationship.



# METHODOLOGY

Through a variety of sources, including, but not limited to, IS' Power Dynamic Advisory Group recommendations and IS member suggestions, we identified a universe of 112 potential examples of healthy grantee/funder relationships. From this initial universe, 40 nonprofits and foundations, constituting 20 pairs who believed they had healthy relationships, were interviewed via telephone for 45 minutes each between May 20 and June 15, 2016. Grantee and funder interviews were conducted separately so alignment between pairs could be better assessed.

All case studies were evaluated against the following set of criteria developed in partnership with IS' Power Dynamic Advisory Group. For the purpose of this work, a healthy relationship was defined as:

1. Alignment between the grantee/funder responses.
2. Embodying a relationship that is authentic/honest, representing the opportunities and challenges which come with partnership.
3. Discussing, at all or with some frequency, both productive and unproductive aspects to partnership.
4. Having jointly developed terms of the relationship/what the future looks like.
5. Illustrating demonstrative impact in their communities as a result of their work together.

Other factors which may have been considered in the determination of the final case studies, but did not rise to the level of required criteria were: (1) IS membership status; and (2) availability of the Center for Effective Philanthropy Grantee Perception Report (GPR - *the GPR provides funders with comparative, actionable feedback from their grantees based on responses to a customizable online survey*).

Each case study selected represents the experience of the specific individuals who participated in that particular grantee/funder pair. It is only meant to represent that individual relationship. The collection of case studies was selected to represent the diversity of the sector. This diversity includes but is not limited to: size of the organization's scale of investments, geography, and focus of organization. In showcasing a range of relationships within the sector, it illustrates the differences which make our sector fundamental to providing a vital voice to our most vulnerable populations.

*The views expressed in this case study reflect the experience of those interviewed and not the views of IS. Each case study was chosen based on a series of criteria and evaluated by a panel of nonprofit and philanthropic sector professionals.*







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