



PROTECT **RESIST** **BUILD** **BRIDGE**

**Remaining Focused and
Purpose-Led During Uncertainty**
A Reflection Guide for Funders

AUGUST 2025

Remaining Focused and Purpose-Led During Uncertainty

In today's rapidly evolving social and political landscape, systems are shifting all around us. These shifts play out across multiple levels — they are structural (such as changing policies, shifting or diminishing resources), relational (marked by shifts in power and a growing call for new relationships), and transformative (with evolving narratives, mental models, and cultural frames).

These systemic shifts are not isolated; they are deeply interconnected and pose significant challenges to democracy, justice, and nearly every facet of society. For funders across the philanthropy spectrum, including private, family, and community foundations, corporate philanthropy and CSR programs, and philanthropic intermediaries, this creates both a moment of profound uncertainty and an opportunity for bold, thoughtful action.

Many funders are already responding by increasing annual payouts, rethinking partnerships, and showing up in new ways. Many response options exist, but these aren't always straightforward and may live in tension with each other. Legal, reputational, and other risks—whether real or perceived—can also make it challenging to align on the best path forward.

Remaining Focused and Purpose-Led During Uncertainty: A Reflection Guide for Funders¹ is designed to support these critical internal alignment conversations.

Drawing from FSG's work with a range of funders, the tool introduces a framework of four strategic response domains:



Protect

Support efforts to protect targeted organizations, initiatives, and communities



Resist

Support efforts to challenge harmful policies and narratives



Build

Support efforts to foster long-term solutions and infrastructure



Bridge

Support efforts to strengthen relationships and connections

Each domain includes illustrative tactical strategies to help funders explore different ways of responding to today's challenges.

As you engage with this tool, we invite you to consider:

- Conversations with your board and stakeholders about what action/s your organization will take should begin with and be rooted in mutual alignment on your purpose, mission, vision, and values.
- There is no single right answer for how an organization can respond; rather, that response should be driven by your organization's purpose, mission, vision, and values.
- Every funder—regardless of factors such as size or political affiliation—has a role to play in contributing to improving outcomes in your community.
- Risk is a real factor in decision making. We encourage you to weigh not just the risk of any actions you prioritize, but also the risk of inaction in the face of a rapidly changing landscape and the real-time and long-term impacts on the communities you serve and issues you champion.

We believe this framework can spark meaningful reflection and dialogue across your organization—from program officers reconsidering portfolio strategies to boards evaluating long-term direction and risk. We hope it supports ongoing, purposeful action amidst uncertainty, now and going forward.

¹ This framework was introduced by Paul Schmitz, Senior Advisor, Collective Impact Forum in the [Responding to Threats and Challenges Planning Tool](#). FSG has adapted and evolved the framework for use by funders.



Protect

Support efforts to protect targeted organizations, initiatives, and communities

- Provide legal, HR, security, and other non-programmatic support
- Loosen grant restrictions and reporting requirements
- Set aside rapid response and emergency funds
- Increase annual giving



Resist

Support efforts to challenge harmful policies and narratives

- Support pro-democracy, civil rights, and community organizing
- Promote independent media, strategic communications, and public engagement
- Invest in strategic litigation efforts
- Leverage relationships with elected officials and corporate leaders

Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Values



Build

Support efforts to foster long-term solutions and infrastructure

- Support leadership development and power-building activities
- Invest in civic and collaborative infrastructure
- Fund nonprofit infrastructure and capacity



Bridge

Support efforts to strengthen relationships and connections

- Strengthen relationships with issue-adjacent funders and coalitions
- Convene or support cross-sector partnerships
- Fund dialogue and relationship building across divides

Guiding Questions

We encourage you to consider these guiding questions with your team, board, organization, community partners and/or other stakeholders to support your own reflection about which domain(s) your organization may be best positioned to focus on.

- What are we hearing from our partners about their needs and opportunities, including grantees and the communities they serve? Where are the gaps and greatest areas of need in our ecosystem?
- Which of the four domains—**Protect, Resist, Build, Bridge**—best aligns with our purpose, mission, vision, and values? Why? What tensions might this pose with our purpose, mission, vision, and values?
- How do these domains align with our current risk assessment and tolerance? What are additional risk considerations associated with the domain(s) we pursue?
- What actions are we already taking in each domain? What have we learned? How might we build on or shift those efforts?
- Which domain(s) feel absent or insufficiently resourced in our ecosystem? Who might step in to fill those gaps, and what role might we play?
- What else should we consider amid significant systemic shifts?

ABOUT FSG

FSG is a global nonprofit consulting firm that partners with foundations and corporations to create equitable systems change. Through customized consulting services, innovative thought leadership, and learning communities, we're working to create a world where everyone can live up to their full potential. Learn more at fsg.org.

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ABOUT THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT FORUM

The Collective Impact Forum is an initiative of FSG and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions. We work to inspire and support people using a collective impact approach to bolster community-driven solutions that achieve equitable outcomes for individuals and communities. The Collective Impact Forum hosts convenings, facilitates peer learning, curates an online resource center, and offers custom workshops and coaching. Learn more at collectiveimpactforum.org.



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