



Reimagining Governance and Shared Power: Insights From Pediatrics Supporting Parents

HOW TO READ THIS SERIES OF THREE WHITE PAPERS

This paper focuses on Pediatrics Supporting Parents' approach to the governance structure; companion papers examine clinical practice and family partnership.

Each paper can be read on its own with no specific starting point.

These papers are grounded in what the initiative as a whole and the Proof Point Communities experienced, tried, and learned during implementation.

Reflection prompts are included to support discussion, adaptation, and use in other settings.

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Methodology Overview: *This paper explores Pediatrics Supporting Parents' approach to shared-power governance and the lessons that emerged from bringing family leaders, clinicians, community representatives, and funders together as partners in guiding the initiative. It examines how PSP shared authority, allocated resources, supported participation, and navigated the possibilities and tensions of collective governance. This paper presents a qualitative synthesis grounded in interviews, site experiences, and recurring themes observed across PSP communities.*

Introduction

The pediatric well-child visit is one of the few recurring points of contact that families have with the health care system during the earliest years of a child's life. Throughout the first three years alone, families attend up to 12 well-child visits, creating repeated opportunities to support children's health, well-being, and the relationships and caregiving environments that contribute to their early development.

Pediatrics Supporting Parents (PSP) emerged from a growing recognition, reflected in research from the Center on the Developing Child (2016) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (Garner et al., 2012), that the quality of *early relational health*—the state of the relationships surrounding young children, especially in the earliest years—plays a foundational role in long-term social, emotional, and physical well-being. PSP explored what might become possible if the work already happening in pediatric care, from vaccines and screenings to developmental checks, is approached with early relational health and family partnership in mind.

"The goal of Pediatrics Supporting Parents has been to reimagine what's possible in pediatric care—especially in the well-child visit."

– MARY ANN WOODRUFF, MD, FAAP, PEDIATRICIAN,
PIERCE COUNTY PPC

"The pediatric channel is a universal access point—a way to meet families where they are."

– INDIA ALARCON, PSP
PROJECT DIRECTOR & FUNDER
COLLABORATIVE LIAISON,
ALARCON CONSULTING

Through partnership with five competitively selected Proof Point Communities (PPCs), PSP explored how social-emotional development and early relational health could become a consistent part of everyday pediatric practice, with approaches tailored to what each community was learning from its families, systems, and local context. Within these communities, pediatricians, family leaders, administrators, and community organizations worked together to test and refine new ways of delivering care, strengthening relationships during visits, and improving connections between families and supports beyond the clinic.





PSP Reimagines Governance

PSP began as a collaborative effort among national funders who were interested in strengthening children’s social and emotional development through pediatric primary care. As the initiative evolved from a funder collaborative focused on identifying promising practices in pediatric care into a community-based initiative centered on implementation and systems change, a new question emerged: Who should influence the direction of the work?

For PSP funders, advancing these goals required moving beyond a traditional philanthropic model in which the funders set awardees’ budgets and determined priorities and the communities implemented them. During the initiative’s 12-month planning period, the Learning Community—including family leaders, pediatric providers, community organizations, and funders—partnered with Health Leads to co-design a national Governance Body grounded in collective stewardship and shared decision-making. The structure was intentionally designed to distribute responsibility for decisions affecting local implementation, national learning, and the initiative’s future.

Using consensus-based processes, transparent resource allocation, and attention to power dynamics, the Governance Body brought family leaders, pediatric providers, and funders together as partners to guide strategy; steward resources; and shape the systems, policies, and practices that support early relational health. This approach reflects a belief that the people closest to children, families, and communities bring expertise that is essential to advancing lasting systems change.

This paper examines the design and implementation of the PSP Governance Body and explores why PSP chose a shared-power approach; what the approach required; and what was learned about expertise, stewardship, and decision-making when authority was distributed across communities and funders rather than concentrated within philanthropy alone.

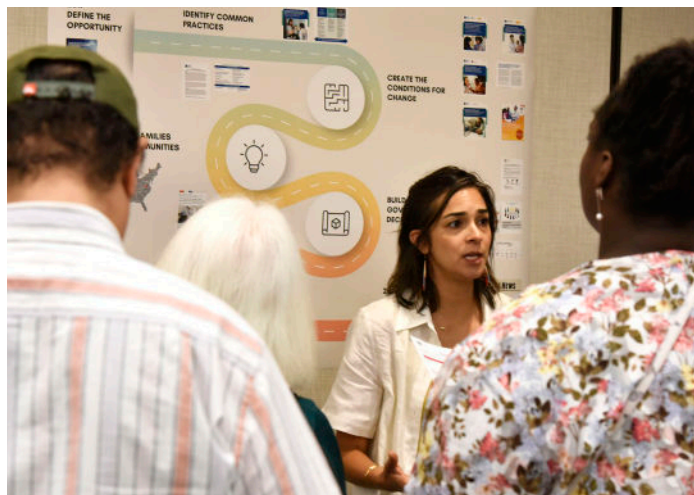
“If we ask the people who designed the health care system to fix what’s not working, we may not get the change that we need. But if we bring in fresh ideas and perspectives from people who interact with the health care system day in and out—be it families, pediatricians, researchers, policymakers, and funders—and encourage them to share ideas and collaborate, we can get to a solution that both transforms the system and works better for more people.”

– IRA HILLMAN, MEMBER OF PSP FUNDER COLLABORATIVE & GOVERNANCE BODY, EINHORN COLLABORATIVE

FROM PROMISING PRACTICES TO QUESTIONS OF POWER

Early PSP work focused on identifying effective practices and understanding the conditions needed to support young children and their families. Through research, site visits, and analysis of pediatric care models, PSP identified 14 common practices associated with strengthened early relational health in pediatric settings. Learn more about PSP's approach to [clinical practice](#) in the companion white paper.

As the initiative moved into implementation, funders recognized that naming effective practices alone would not be enough to achieve lasting change. Sustainable integration of early relational health into pediatric care required centering family and community expertise, honoring local context and cultural values, and ensuring that communities actually had a role in shaping decisions and resources. This shift moved PSP beyond a model of community consultation toward one of shared power and ultimately led to the creation of the PSP Governance Body.



"We had an approach that was very much driven by funders, and what we recognized is that we needed to have it rooted in community."

– INDIA ALARCON, PSP PROJECT DIRECTOR & FUNDER COLLABORATIVE LIAISON, ALARCON CONSULTING

A BROADER VIEW OF EXPERTISE

Central to PSP's governance approach was the belief that expertise takes many forms. Professional, institutional, and lived experience were recognized as equally essential to guiding the work. This understanding shaped whose perspectives informed key decisions, beginning with parents and caregivers, whose knowledge comes from raising children, navigating systems, and experiencing the impacts of policies and programs firsthand—knowledge that cannot be acquired through professional training alone.

The Governance Body was built on the belief that a parent's lived experience, a clinician's training, and a funder's perspective each offer distinct and necessary insights that together shape better decisions.

"For those of us who were on the Governance Body, I had never seen anything like it—equitable partnership, shared decision-making, and co-design from the very beginning and throughout."

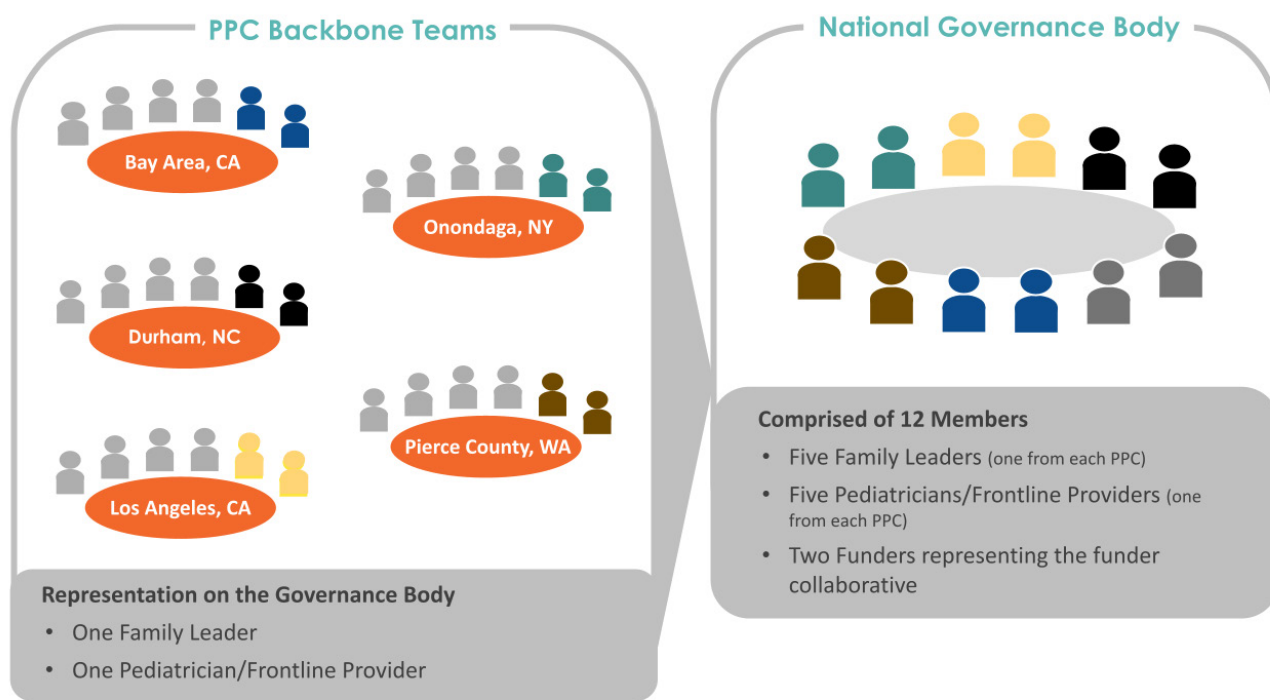
– MONIQUE HOLGUIN, LCSW, PHD, CLINICIAN & GOVERNANCE BODY MEMBER, LOS ANGELES PPC

This change also redefined the role of funders. Rather than serving solely as sponsors or directors of the initiative, funders participated along with family leaders, clinicians, and community representatives in conversations about tradeoffs, strategy, and resource allocation. The result was a governance structure in which authority and responsibility were shared across stakeholders.

Designing for Shared Governance

Including diverse stakeholders in meetings did not immediately guarantee meaningful participation or influence. Shared governance required intentional structures that enabled members with different backgrounds, experiences, and institutional roles to contribute on more equal footing (Torres Rodríguez et al., 2022).

Governance responsibilities were designed to balance perspectives among PSP's key stakeholder groups. The Governance Body included two representatives from each of the five PPCs—one family leader with children in the pediatric practice and one clinician or administrator representing the practice—with two funder representatives from PSP's funder collaborative, for a total of 12 members.



Early on, the funder collaborative —guided by Family Voices, PSP's national family engagement partner—recognized that it would take more than just bringing together diverse stakeholders. It would also require investment in compensation, facilitation, and other conditions that would make this type of governance possible.

FOUR CONDITIONS FOR SHARED POWER

PSP's experience in developing an initiative-wide governance structure revealed four conditions that are necessary to ensure genuine power sharing.

1. Clear Authority

Members needed a shared understanding of the Governance Body's role and responsibilities. In PSP, this included providing strategic guidance, allocating resources, setting initiative priorities, and making decisions that affected both local implementation and national learning. Clear definition of these responsibilities helped all members understand how they could contribute to shaping the direction of the work. For family leaders,

PSP's 2025 Budgeting Journey

August	September	October
• Proof Point Communities (PPCs) submitted budget packets • Total requests submitted exceeded the available budget by over \$500,000 • Budget Workgroup (BWG) met for 1st time in late August • BWG decided to recommend to Governance Body (GB) to move remaining Rainy-Day balance to PPCs FY25 Budget and to ask PPCs to revisit their budgets and resubmit knowing how much we are over	• GB met, approved BWG recommendation to move remaining balance to PPC FY25 budget amount available • India and Kim met with each PPC to share about the process and request to revise budget • PPCs submitted revised budgets • Total requests went from exceeding \$500,000 to exceeding just \$250,000 over budget • Budget workgroup met, determined priorities • Reviewers' guide developed and sent to BWG members based on discussion during BWG meeting	• BWG reviewed PPCs budget packets, provided feedback • BWG met, discussed themes & decided next step in process • India & Kim met with each PPC, calls were open to BWG members and recorded. Summarized feedback was provided ahead of meetings • PPCs resubmitted revised budgets • Total requests submitted exceeded budget by just under \$50,000 • BWG met, agreed to move unspent Rainy-Day from in-person to PPC FY25 budget, reduced one of the PPC's request by the amount that is typically indirect expenses included in the direct expenses, and Los Angeles and Pierce County proactively split the remaining difference

in particular, this clarity reinforced that their role extended beyond sharing perspectives. They participated with clinicians, community representatives, and funders in carrying out these governance responsibilities. Family leaders who were members of the Governance Body described this authority as most visible not only through their participation in meetings but also through seeing their ideas considered, incorporated, and reflected in the decisions and actions that followed.

One of the clearest examples of that authority in action was the Governance Body's role in resource allocation. Members reviewed annual budget proposals from the five PPCs and determined how available funding would be distributed across communities while also keeping in mind the broader goals of the initiative. To support this process, the Governance Body established a budget workgroup consisting of one representative from each PPC and a funder representative. The workgroup reviewed proposals, developed recommendations, and brought those recommendations back to the full Governance Body for discussion and approval. Over time, family leaders and providers participated in these workgroups in nearly equal numbers, reflecting the initiative's commitment to shared governance.

The third budget cycle proved particularly challenging, because the combined PPC budget requests exceeded the available initiative budget by more than \$500,000. By that point, Governance Body members had developed a deeper understanding of one another's priorities, constraints, and goals. Rather than approaching the process solely from the perspective of their own community, participants increasingly considered the needs of the initiative.

Members described this willingness to navigate difficult decisions together as something that developed through repeated conversations, transparency, trust, and an increasing sense of collective accountability for the work.

"Every PPC had to reduce its budget but by different amounts—yet people consistently looked for ways to share the burden. Family leaders wanted to understand what each community was trying to accomplish and how budget reductions would affect the work. As the workgroup was trying to get within budget, one representative from a PPC would step forward and offer to absorb a larger reduction, only to have another respond: 'We'll take part of it too.' It was incredible to witness and be a part of."

– KIMBERLY BRADLEY, PSP PROGRAM DIRECTOR, ZERO TO THREE

2. Participant Preparation and Support

Governance Body members brought a range of experiences, professional backgrounds, and familiarity with institutional systems. Creating conditions for inclusive and meaningful participation required dedicated infrastructure and ongoing investment, including inviting people into governance conversations and ensuring that members could understand and contribute to discussions.

After joining the initiative as the backbone organization in 2023, ZERO TO THREE provided support to the Governance Body through meeting facilitation, consensus-building, and clear, accessible communication practices. Family Voices played a central role in preparing family leaders for engagement in governance, strategic conversations, and decision-making. Project Director India Alarcon worked with the Funder Collaborative to help ensure that funder representatives brought the broader funder perspective into Governance Body discussions.

“At first, I didn’t understand a lot of the language. What helped was that people communicated clearly, didn’t use fancy words, and explained things in a way I could understand.”

– ZULMA GALDAMEZ, FAMILY LEADER & GOVERNANCE BODY MEMBER, DURHAM PPC

The initiative put practices in place so family leaders could engage fully in governance processes, including coaching, peer support, interpretation, translation, and providing materials in advance. These forms of capacity-building helped them enter conversations with the information and confidence needed to contribute. Learn more about PSP’s approach to [family partnership](#) in the companion white paper.

3. Deliberative Processes

Even when authority is shared and all members are prepared, the mechanics of how discussions are structured still influence whose voices carry weight. Meetings that move too quickly, rely on organizational shorthand, or default to majority-rule voting can unintentionally favor those who are most familiar with institutional norms.

PSP designed Governance Body meetings with relationship-building in mind. Sessions typically began by revisiting the group’s established practice agreements and included an icebreaker or mindfulness activity led by a family leader. These recurring moments created a sense of purpose, built rapport, and centered members in the work ahead.

PRACTICE AGREEMENTS

Address racially biased systems & norms

- Recognize power dynamic in the room—be intentional about how you exercise your privilege.
- Remember, we all have bias. Biases are learned and can be unlearned.
- Practice the ability to recognize personal biases, emotions, and triggers, considering how they impact actions.

Be brave, be inclusive

- Acknowledge the risks speakers take, and value the privilege to learn from one another.
- Individual values, cultures, religious beliefs, disabilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, and personal experiences matter.
- Conflict is always possible, and conflict is OK.

Be open to anti-racist dialogue

- Remember that Black, Brown, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous people’s experiences with racism are vast and vary.

- Honor and give grace when Black, Brown, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous people speak from lived experiences with racism, that may never be fully understood by individuals who have not had the same experience.
- Recognize that conversations about race and racism can be triggering for others.

Be present, be accountable

- Listen—feel no pressure to speak, yet resist the temptation to only witness the dialogue.
- Listen to understand, not just to respond.

Take space, make space

- Call attention to the unheard voices of people, ensuring that all individuals have space to participate fully.
- Respect and seek to understand when individuals choose not to speak.

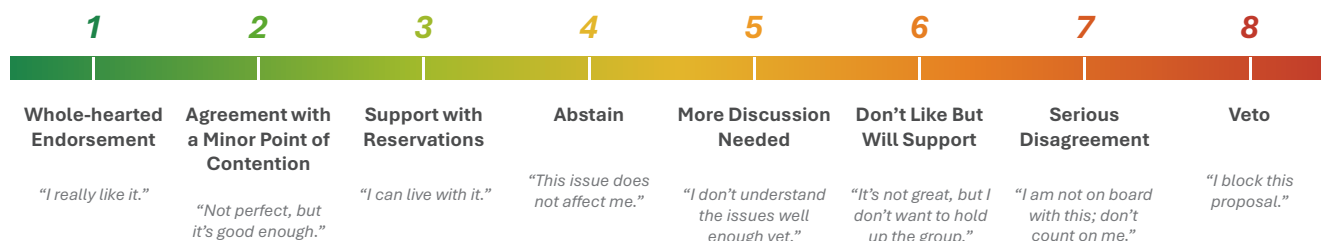
The Governance Body also experimented with approaches to collaborative decision-making. One example was the Gradients of Agreement framework, which allowed members to express various levels of support or concern and created space to explore what it would take to find common ground.

“[The Gradients of Agreement] allowed us to say, ‘Okay, you’re a four—tell us why you’re a four. What additional information would you need to move to a two?’”

– ALLYSA WARE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FAMILY VOICES

By making disagreement visible rather than something to avoid, the process encouraged deeper dialogue and helped members work toward collectively agreed-upon decisions.

GRADIENTS OF AGREEMENT



4. Attention to Power Dynamics

PSP recognized that Governance Body members brought different institutional roles, networks, and forms of expertise to the work. Family leaders, providers, and funders entered governance conversations with various levels of familiarity with decision-making processes and experience participating in cross-sector spaces. The initiative used transparency, skilled facilitation, and intentional opportunities for connection to foster open dialogue and meaningful engagement.

“At first, they were just people in Zoom boxes. Then we became a team.”

– SEKANI TIMOTHY WAYNE HARRIS, FAMILY LEADER & GOVERNANCE BODY MEMBER, LOS ANGELES PPC

The Governance Body met virtually every month for two-hour sessions. Although members participated remotely from their respective communities, they remained on camera throughout meetings, which helped strengthen relationships. Furthermore, the regular cadence of meetings helped all members develop a broader

understanding of each other's work, including their progress and challenges. The frequency of meetings and the selection of agenda items that drew on the perspectives and expertise of all members were intentional and critical to building the trust and mutual understanding on which the governance model depended.

The emphasis moved toward how different forms of expertise contributed to decision-making. For family leaders, this often meant contributing in spaces traditionally occupied by professionals. For providers, it meant participating with family leaders whose knowledge came from lived experience rather than formal credentials. In practice, this expanded who held influence within governance.

For funders, participation in shared governance required thoughtful attention to how their roles and perspectives might affect discussions. They described being intentional about when they spoke, creating space for other members to offer their perspectives first, and remaining mindful of how institutional authority could shape group dynamics. However, this did not diminish the value of their expertise. Family leaders and providers appreciated



the important relationships, resources, and broader field knowledge that funders brought to the table, particularly with regard to questions about long-term sustainability and systems change.

These dynamics shaped not only how Governance Body members experienced one another but also how the structure functioned in practice. Although these shifts opened new possibilities, they also required ongoing attention and resources to maintain.

“I used to see them as being on a different level because of their titles and credentials. Over time, I realized that my lived experience and perspective were just as valuable and deserved an equal place in the conversation.”

– HEATHER BUSHNOE, FAMILY LEADER & GOVERNANCE BODY MEMBER, ONONDAGA PPC

“I think in reflecting back, we’ve had great facilitators who have been able to help us equalize the playing field....”

– MONICA BELTRAN, MEMBER OF PSP FUNDER COLLABORATIVE & GOVERNANCE BODY MEMBER, W. K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

REALITIES, TENSIONS, AND TRADEOFFS

PSP’s experience demonstrated that shared governance involved continual learning, deliberation, and tradeoffs. The same transparency and collective responsibility that supported collaborative budgeting also brought moments of discomfort, differing perspectives, and difficult choices that members worked through together.

Reaching decisions through consensus-building required significant time and engagement. Full participation also depended on resources, including adequate preparation, facilitation, and compensation.

The ongoing need for these types of investments points to a larger, unresolved question: How to sustain this shared approach over time? Each component of the structure that PSP built depends on continued funding, long-term organizational support, and the enduring commitment of the members across multiple stakeholder groups. What happens when those conditions change—when grants end, when staff turns over, when the external pressure that drives reform dissipates—is a challenge that the initiative has not yet fully resolved. These tensions do not undermine the case for shared governance, but they are part of an honest account of what it requires.

Conclusion: The Possibilities of Shared Power in Governance

The most significant impact of the PSP Governance Body may not be in the individual decisions it made but in how the process of sharing power changed what members were able to see, understand, and appreciate about one another's experiences and constraints. Family leaders gained greater visibility into the realities of clinics, organizations, and funding structures. Clinicians and administrators recognized the value of expertise rooted in lived experience. Funders gained a deeper understanding of how choices made at a national level affect communities, families, and providers.

These exchanges challenged historical assumptions about who holds expertise, who should influence priorities, and who can responsibly steward resources. By creating space for diverse perspectives to sit alongside one another, the Governance Body fostered greater empathy and more productive dialogue around complex decisions.

PSP does not offer a universal blueprint for governance. What it suggests, however, is that when authority is more evenly distributed, participants can move beyond advocating solely for their own interests and begin grappling with the tradeoffs facing the system as a whole. The result is not necessarily easier decision-making but, rather, more informed decision-making that is grounded in a wider range of expertise and strengthened by the people most affected by the outcomes.



"Governance Body members are selected because we bring different backgrounds and perspectives. Often, it was the family leaders who would raise an alternative perspective that made me look at things differently. It's almost like if you were looking at a map and someone turned it 90 degrees—you see the world in a different way."

— IRA HILLMAN, MEMBER OF PSP FUNDER COLLABORATIVE & GOVERNANCE BODY MEMBER, EINHORN COLLABORATIVE

Considerations for Governance

Governance involves more than structures such as committees, advisory groups, and decision-making processes. PSP's experience highlights the importance of considering how authority is shared, what forms of expertise inform decisions, and how participants are supported in contributing. The following questions are offered as reflections for organizations exploring how governance structures and practices align with their goals and values.

Whose voices and experiences inform decision-making?

One approach to determining who should be included in decision-making is to ask, "From whom do we have the most to learn?" This question encourages organizations to consider whose experiences, perspectives, and expertise are the least represented, and whose insights may be most important to the work. Organizations can reflect on whether the people most affected by decisions, and those whose experiences are most relevant to the challenges being addressed, have the opportunity to influence outcomes.

What decisions are stakeholders helping to shape?

Participation and governance are not the same thing. Surveys, listening sessions, and advisory groups can provide valuable insight, but governance involves directly influencing priorities, resources, and direction. Examining which decisions stakeholders make—and which remain outside their reach—can reveal whether participation is consultative or shared.

How are participants prepared to contribute?

PSP found that providing meeting materials in advance, accessible information, interpretation, compensation, relationship-building, and skilled facilitation can all have an impact on how participants contribute to governance discussions.

How are difficult decisions and competing priorities navigated?

Moments that involve limited resources, competing priorities, or differing perspectives can provide opportunities to examine how organizations approach transparency, collaboration, and shared ownership. PSP participants found that working through these moments together often strengthened relationships and expanded understanding across stakeholder groups.

These questions do not have easy answers. PSP's experience demonstrates that the gap between participation and shared power is shaped not by good intentions alone but by the approaches to authority, preparation, facilitation, and support. These decisions were not handed down by funders or designed by experts: They were built, tested, and refined by those engaged in the work.

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PSP BACKBONE, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, & FAMILY PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT



PSP FUNDER COLLABORATIVE

