

# A Collaborative Approach to Social Impact

Carolyn Shaughnessy 04 December 2017

## Executive Summary

Since 2011, more than 10,000 refugees have come to Massachusetts to escape danger in their homelands, carrying with them both assets and challenges related to resettlement. The immigrant population plays a critical role in the Boston economy as consumers, business owners, employees, and taxpayers. Despite being such a substantial part of our society's fabric, immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers often do not have access to adequate support for successful integration and advancement. Without guidance, navigating these issues can be challenging. Together, the Social Innovation Forum (SIF) and Greater Boston's local funding community created a collective response to this issue via the creation of a Social Issue Track focused on organizations or programs that promote successful integration and advancement for immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Social Issue Tracks leverage funding, capacity building, and learning opportunities to engage philanthropists in supporting the focus area. The resulting collaborative and innovative marketplace allows funders to leverage their philanthropic investment and their community impact while learning from one another in the

process.

## Article

*"As a funder committed to racial, social, and economic justice, The Hyams Foundation is pleased to support SIF and its Immigrant and Refugee Collaborative track, because the organization has provided a timely platform for funders to learn about, and collectively invest in the capacity building of community based organizations responding to the pressing needs of immigrant and refugee communities. Through their thoughtful due diligence and funder engagement processes, SIF staff have enabled us as partner funders to better ground ourselves in the sector landscape, bring an equity lens to the analysis, and potentially impact groups well beyond our catchment area."*

- Nahir Torres, Program Officer, The Hyams Foundation

Since 2011, more than 10,000 refugees have come to Massachusetts to escape danger in their homelands, carrying with them both assets and challenges related to resettlement. The immigrant population plays a critical role in Boston's economy as consumers, business owners, employees, and taxpayers. Despite being such a substantial part of our society's fabric, immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers often do not have access to adequate support for successful integration and advancement. Without guidance, navigating these issues

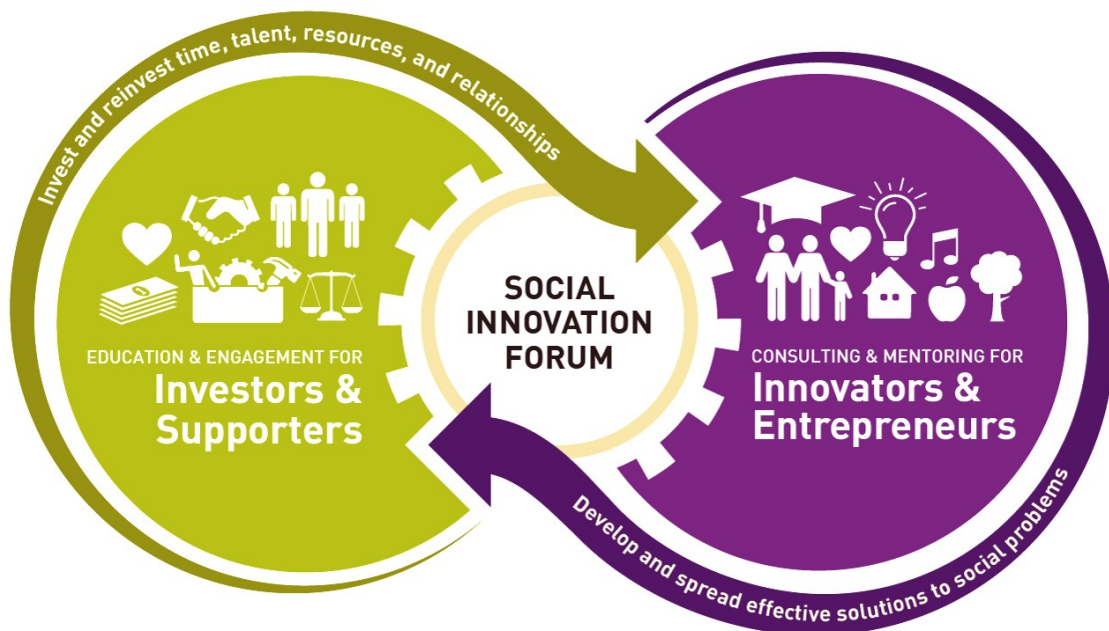
can be challenging. Equally as challenging, very little funding proportionally goes to marginalized communities like these. According to 2004's *Short Changed: Foundation Giving and Communities of Color*<sup>1</sup>, "since 1994, giving to immigrants and refugees has ranged from 0.6 to one percent of large foundation grants. This is a particularly small proportion considering the fact that foreign-born U.S. residents total more than 11 percent of the population, up from eight percent a decade earlier."

Together, the Social Innovation Forum (SIF) and greater Boston's local funding community created a collective response to this issue via the creation of a Social Issue Track focused on organizations or programs that promote successful integration and advancement for immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Social Issue Tracks leverage funding, capacity building, and learning opportunities to engage philanthropists in supporting the focus area. The Immigrant and Refugee Funder Collaborative (Ansara Family Foundation, Barr Foundation, The Clowes Fund, The Hyams Foundation, Landry Family Foundation, Macomber Family Fund, Suhrbier Family Fund, John H. and Naomi Tomfohrde Foundation) allows funders to leverage their philanthropic investment and community impact while learning from one another in the process.

Since 2003, the Social Innovation Forum (SIF) has been encouraging local funders to direct their resources to effective community led organizations. SIF believes that

social innovation is critical to ensuring that our public and private resources are leveraged in the most effective ways to address social problems. Yet, it is often difficult for emerging innovations to receive the recognition and support they need to develop and spread their impact. SIF provides a unique opportunity for innovative nonprofits to gain visibility, expand their networks, and build capacity. We actively connect supporters (funders, investors, and volunteers) and practitioners (nonprofit and social business leaders) to build productive relationships focused on growing social impact.

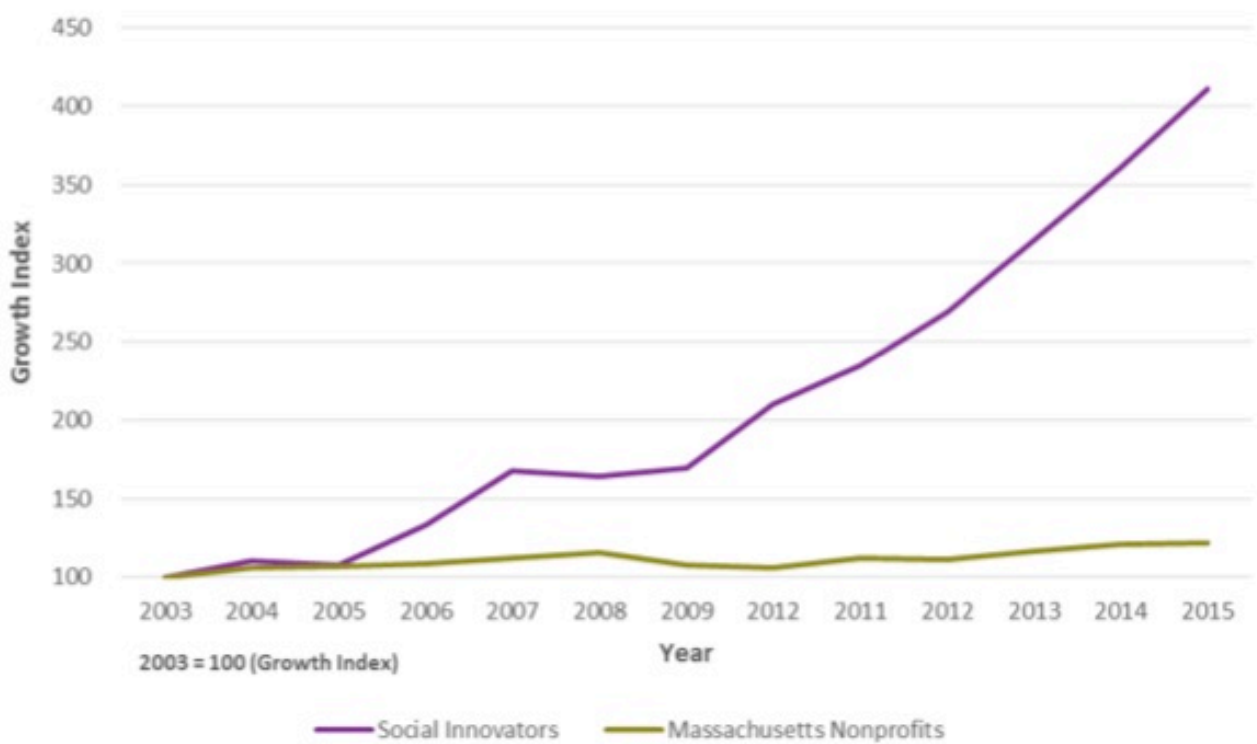
## THE SOCIAL INNOVATION FORUM builds networks that create social change



Social Innovation Forum: A Marketplace for Social Change

Each year, the Social Innovation Forum (SIF) selects a

cohort of Social Innovators through a six-month evaluation process that brings together a range of stakeholders, including funders, practitioners, and leaders from business and academia. Once selected, Social Innovators receive 24 months of focused support from SIF and its partners, including consulting, executive coaching, and presentation advising. A five-month consulting engagement culminates with SIF's annual Showcase event, where Social Innovators pitch to an audience of more than 350 local leaders in business and philanthropy. After the Showcase, Social Innovators stay in the SIF portfolio and can continue to access support and services from SIF and its in-kind partners. In-kind partners use their unique professional talents and skills to provide meaningful, hands-on support to current and past Innovators, helping them to build their capacity to improve our communities. Drawing on the in-kind support of our partners also enables SIF to extend the per-dollar impact of our financial contributions to achieve greater impact. In 2017, the SIF community provided in-kind services to our Innovators valued at \$420,000. Outcomes of the Accelerator include a 2x revenue growth for organizations four years post-participation and \$28 million dollars of cash and in-kind services. Over a 12-year period, our Innovators' revenue has grown fourfold.



### A Fourfold Increase in Innovator Revenue

The collaborative funding model has a series of positive implications for both the particular social issue track and the field of impact investing: due to its nature, a diverse group of funders can participate and leverage their impact, learning alongside peer funders who have engaged across multiple giving levels. This both increases diversity within our funder community and also leads to increased visibility for core issues facing greater Boston.

We refer to this unique approach as our marketplace: engaging a broad community in the work of social change in which market-goers (volunteers, philanthropists, social impact investors, and leaders of mission based organizations) exchange resources (time, money, expertise, and social capital) in order to collaborate on creating social impact.

The Funder Collaborative chose to extend its work in the marketplace by sponsoring a Capacity Camp, a condensed version of the Accelerator. Six to eight nonprofit applicants from the Social Issue Track applicant pool will participate in sessions designed to build participants' organizational capacity, providing them with a set of valuable tools that will help them move their organizations to the next stage of development. Session topics will mirror key content from the Social Innovator Accelerator, including communication and messaging, performance measurement, fundraising, and governance. Experienced business and nonprofit leaders from the Social Innovation Forum community will join SIF staff to deliver content and provide pro-bono services to participants, including one-on-one coaching and advising.

Core to our model is utilizing a "big tent" methodology for applicants. While the eligibility requirements are clearly outlined, our thorough process is designed to create multiple opportunities for applicants to learn about the Accelerator and decrease the risk of discriminating against effective, but less formally polished organizations doing critical work. Funders, content experts, and SIF staff participate in a due diligence process that includes reviews of a written application, interviews, and site visits. This allows the funding community to get to know new organizations over time that may lead to sustainable funding relationships outside of the Accelerator.

Our work at SIF is to use a marketplace approach to

create social change. Today's political climate led a group of dedicated investors to create opportunities in support of organizations that work with one of our most vulnerable communities. SIF's model creates opportunities for multiple forms of diverse engagement from volunteerism and mentoring to direct financial investment in a Social Issue Track or Capacity Camp. Together, this vibrant network of investors, supporters, and social impact organizations partner to create a more equitable greater Boston.

## **Author Bio**

### **Carolyn Shaughnessy**

As Senior Manager of the Social Innovation Forum's Social Impact Community since 2012, Carolyn designs and implements strategies to engage business leaders, philanthropists, and funders from greater Boston with the work of the Social Innovation Forum (SIF). This includes facilitating mentoring engagements with Social Innovators and Impact Entrepreneurs, creating new education and learning opportunities, bringing new people into the community, and cultivating investments to support the ongoing work of the Social Innovation Forum and the organizations in our extensive portfolio.

Carolyn is currently a member of the Bpart (Boston Philanthropic Roundtable) Steering Committee and was a founding member of A Step Up, a group that encouraged

women and their families to become involved with innovative nonprofits that are having an impact in their local communities. Previously, she worked in higher education supporting students with learning disabilities by developing and implementing programs to enhance academic and social success.

## **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/pitz.pdf>