Outgrowing the Flowerpot

How might we create space for grassroots, community-led approaches in Calgary's larger systems of care?

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"Sometimes it is the people no one can imagine anything of who do the things no one can imagine."

Alan Turing

Acknowledgement

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Introduction

In the words of Margaret Mead, an American cultural anthropologist, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" (Williams, 2017, para. 7). The concept of grassroots change-oriented groups — "small groups of thoughtful, committed citizens" (Williams, 2017, para. 7)— has existed for millennia. Groups of citizens banding together to solve community problems have been seen through the Great Depression, the World Wars and recessions (Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, n.d.; National Women's History Museum, n.d.). Originally, grassroots groups were the first supports for individuals in Canada, through community groups that aided recent immigrants or the creation of co-ops to ensure farmers received fair prices for their products. Grassroots groups within Calgary started as community helping community.

> **The definition of a grassroots group:**
>
> *A community-driven, social change group focused on a specific region or subset of a population.*

More recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw incredible growth in community-led support for our neighbours, families and communities in Calgary (Edwards, 2021). While formalized volunteering has dropped, the newest generation, iGen, saw increased motivation to volunteer in informal ways during COVID-19 (Hahmann et al., 2020). However, COVID-19 is not the only time we have seen grassroots groups rise to meet the community's needs during a crisis in Calgary; from the 2013 floods or the 2009 recession, grassroots groups tend to rise to the need at any time of crisis. With the current increase in awareness around natural and community-led support, the focus from using formal support as all-encompassing is shifting to a holistic approach to meeting human needs from those who know best, both community and professionals (see Kozhukhar, 2022). This is in stark contrast to the current deficit in the social sector, with the current systems in place not being able to meet the needs of our population fully (Imagine Canada, 2018). Nevertheless, what if the solution to this "social deficit" is not to increase the "professionalized" system of care but to look to our ingrained supports in our communities, neighbours helping neighbours, if you will? What if the best way to grow a thriving society is the same as a plant? What if it starts at the roots?

The Background

Recently, Calgarians have experienced increased economic hardship, high food and housing costs, and increasing complexities of our needs (Helpseeker, 2022; Stauch, 2023). These hardships, however, have not been felt evenly across all Calgarians, with racialized and at-risk individuals (including parents raising children alone, those living with disabilities, immigrants and newcomers with English as a barrier, etc.) being the hardest hit. As noted by Helpseeker (2022) in their November webinar, "more than ¼ of the children and youth hospitalized for all mental health conditions live in the least affluent neighborhoods" (slide 8). With snowballing household costs, we have seen rising incidents of domestic violence, theft, and burglary (Helpseeker, 2022). There has also been a growing amount of unsheltered homeless individuals, compared to those who are sheltered, due to increasing overall complexities of their needs as well as shifts in the desirability of shelters (Helpseeker, 2022; Stauch, 2023). In the post-COVID world, we have seen shifts in service use patterns, a high turnover rate for the social sector and widespread burnout (Helpseeker, 2022). Furthermore, municipal governments are facing pressure to solve and mobilize solutions for an expanding complexity of issues, with fewer organizations being capable of meeting the demand of community members (Helpseeker, 2022; Lasby & Barr, 2021; Stauch, 2023).

The Why

Grassroots groups have been a pivotal factor within our communities for millennia. The formal system grew out of this and is continuing to envelope many of the natural and informal supports that are currently in existence. Nevertheless, why should we focus on grassroots community-led supports in this time of ever-growing complexity and strife? With the trend of society moving towards the professionalization of the service sector, the power held by the community is rarely acknowledged, with more and more of us seeking an "informed" perspective on our social needs. With this rise in expert-led fields, we have fallen into a negative network effect, as shown in the figure on the next page, due to the increasing complexity and rapidly changing needs of the community with limited ability to calibrate our "professional" structures to those needs. Many grassroots initiatives have become professionalized over time as government policies, programs, and funding have grown to address the need or opportunity identified initially by grassroots groups - for example, on immigrant and refugee settlement, climate action, and an aging population.

Many grassroots groups morph into more highly structured, often professionalized, organizations to create programs that help action these policies and put this funding to work.

Nevertheless, now Canada finds itself in a chronic 'social deficit' situation, where the combination of public finance, philanthropy and other sources of funding are insufficient to meet the demands placed by the growing impact or scale of the issues. In our current negative network effect, the network's value declines with usage growth. This "social deficit," where there are not enough services to meet the increasing needs of society, is driven by increased income inequality, a rapidly aging population, the transitional needs of immigrants and refugees and the impacts of climate change (Imagine Canada, 2018; Stauch, 2023). If action is not taken to address this social deficit, then the quality of life of Albertans will diminish disproportionately, poverty will continue to increase, our environment will continue to degrade, and new Canadians will struggle to adapt and succeed (Imagine Canada, 2018; Stauch, 2023).

Negative Network Effect
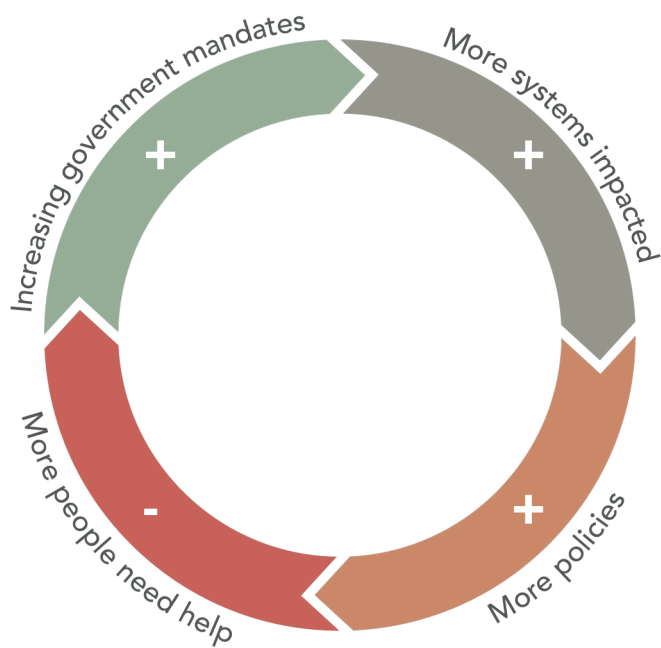
> **Definition of "professionalization":**
>
> *"Professionalization occurs when certain jobs or occupational groups become "professions" — groups that can claim jurisdiction over the knowledge within their area. Lawyers and doctors are classic examples. Both of these groups require extensive training, have formal barriers to entry, and can claim to perform work that those outside of the profession cannot."* (Abbott, 1988, as cited in DeOrnellas, 2018, para. 2)

Research Questions

Before diving into how we might create space for grassroots, community-led approaches in Calgary's larger systems of care, one must first understand what the stakeholders in the system are and how they interact with each other. Since there is no standard definition for grassroots groups and systems of care, this report will first explore what grassroots groups are and how we might define them, then move to the current barriers to integration and how grassroots groups interact with other stakeholders in the larger Calgary systems through analyzing academic and non-academic materials to gain a broader understanding of the systems and complexities that face grassroots groups.

The Methods

Sources for this report were found using multiple methods. Sources comprise of academic and non-academic materials, and an effort was made to find sources with a local context to Calgary, Alberta, Canada, whenever possible. However, this was not always possible due to the lack of research. Furthermore, conversations with individuals with backgrounds relating to grassroots groups helped inform the author.

Due to the constraints of the eight months given in the fellowship to explore this topic, the scope of this report was limited. There is enough information within the Alberta landscape to create a lifetime of dedicated work for grassroots groups and their connections and communities alone, and I have tried to do it justice in the limited time given.

What Are Grassroots Groups and How Do They Interact?

The Calgary Foundation, one of a select few of funders in Calgary that specifically fund grassroots groups, notes that several categories of groups can apply for funding, from non-profit societies and charitable organizations to community associations and informal grassroots groups (Calgary Foundation, n.d.). This report analyzed the definition of a grassroots group from 15 papers and organizational reports (n=total unique definitions) to identify key themes using Braun and Clarke's (2006) semi-systematic literature review framework as a guide. From the information gathered, key themes from those who have defined grassroots groups were social change, place-based, and community-driven. While the themes of autonomy and non-profits did come up in the analysis as well, they are not requirements for a grassroots group to function. Braun and Clarke (2006) define a theme as not being definitively defined and yet up to some discretion of the researcher. This literature review defined a theme as meeting or exceeding a 50% threshold. A detailed breakdown can be seen in Table 1.

Wong et al. (2014) note that "a definition is a formal attempt to answer the question: 'What is it?'" However, how does one attempt to answer this question when there is no one standard definition? For this report, the definition of grassroots groups is as follows:

A community-driven, social change group focused on a specific region or subset of a population.

It is important to note that grassroots groups often define themselves differently due to the lack of a formalized label (unlike a label such as mutual aid organization, social enterprise, or non-profit which has predefined operational models), using terms such as community-led approaches, community organization, community-based hybrid non-profits, mutual aid and many more (Bettencourt, 1996; Hyde, 2000). On the next page there are examples of some of the many types of grassroots groups.

Table 1

Coding Labels	Count in the definitions
Community-Driven	9
Social Change	10
Autonomous	3
Non-profit	4
Place-based	9
n=	11

Persona Maps of Grassroots Groups

Little Libraries

Focus:
Offering books to individuals in the community.

Community Needs to be Met:
- Access to literature that may not be accessible to individuals due to their financial position
- Mental health support through access to resources
- A non-judgemental area to access services without a need to advertise their needs to others.
- A community hub and meeting place that creates ownership throughout the community.

Common Objective:
To support their community through access to services that individuals may not be able to access otherwise.

Community Support Group

Focus:
Offer the community the ability to support each other through assorted programming and opportunities.

Community Needs to be Met:
- Early prevention and support for families
- Food supports through participation and community engagement
- Mental health supports through programming
- A community support network
- a non-judgemental area to access services without a need to advertise their needs to others.
- A community hub and meeting place that creates ownership throughout the community.

Common Objective:
To support their community through access to services that individuals may not be able to access otherwise.

Mutual Aid Group

Focus:
Offer different groups the ability to gain support from each other to support their communities further.

Community Needs to be Met:
- Early prevention and support for families
- A community support network
- Ability to refer folks "in-house"
- Increased access to funds through partnerships.

Common Objective:
To support their community through access to services that individuals may not be able to access otherwise.

Through the literature, while there are multiple definitions of the grassroots group, a gap was noted that these definitions were rarely created with the input of any grassroots groups. However, grassroots groups are often self-identified, and this self-inclusion is a key part of the definition and, as such, comes with a certain amount of ambiguity surrounding the question of what a grassroots group is. As noted by the following model of the economy by Pearce (2003), grassroots groups may exist in several areas within the social purpose economy.
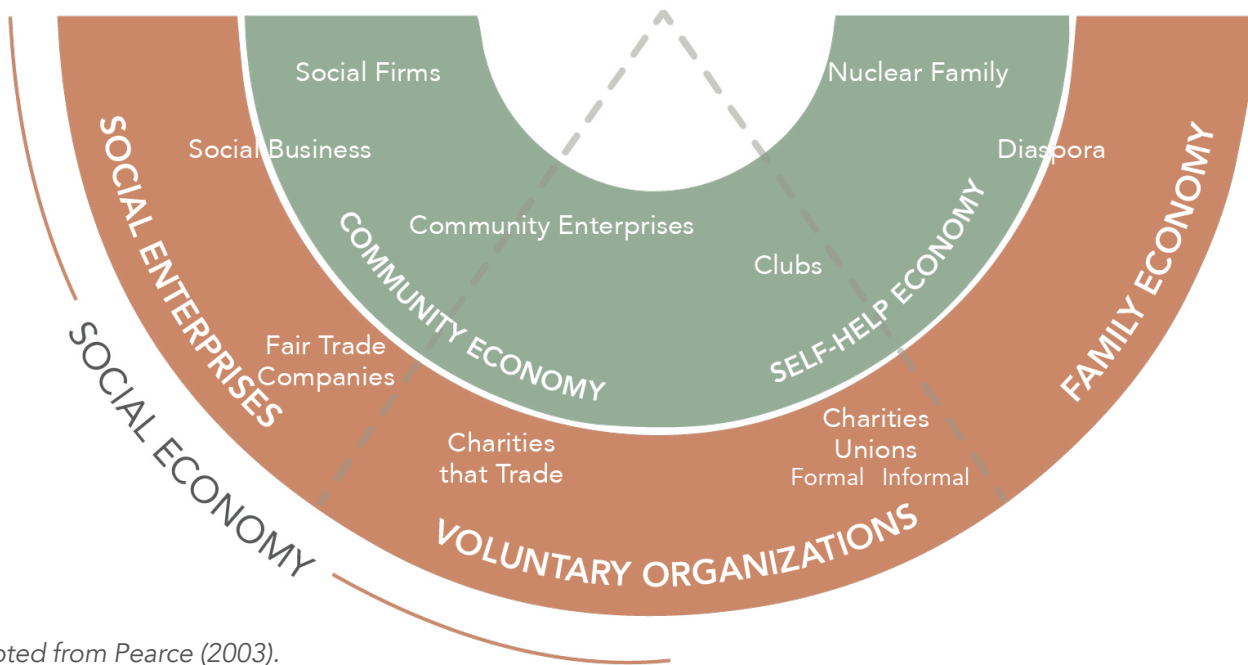
Adapted from Pearce (2003).

Furthermore, several of the analyzed definitions (see Hyde, 2000; Kang, 2015; McWatt & Condren, n.d.; Smith, 1997; Wells & Anasti, 2019) differ from that of the funding guidelines formed by the Calgary Foundation, which, as noted previously, views nonprofits and charitable organizations as no longer being defined as grassroots groups. As noted by Oers et al. (2018), grassroots groups' position outside "the mainstream economy" (as cited in Martin et al., 2015, p. 6). This position outside of the mainstream allows grassroots groups to offer "visions of radical transition pathways and mobilize marginalized values, organizational forms and institutional logics" (Oers et al., 2018, as cited in Martin et al., 2015, p. 6). However, it also reduces the awareness of those groups to larger entities such as funders and municipalities which often are tasked with creating inclusive definitions of grassroots groups. Through conversations with the community and the United Way of Calgary and Area, it is clear that an academically defined definition of a grassroots group does not encapsulate the complexity of where grassroots groups exist within our economy and social spaces. It is so much more than that.

As Susan Brooke, from United Way of Calgary and Area, notes, "Grassroots organizations are complex and formed in response to a wide array of needs and issues in the community. They are a vital component of a robust system of care often addressing both immediate needs and prevention in any community."

Genesis-built • Friendships •
Opportunities • Community Involvement •
Unity • Synergy • Social-change oriented •
Touchpoints • Rooted • Valuable • Nimble •
Significant • Disempowered • Episodic • Mutual Aid •
Filling gaps • Reciprocity • Claiming space •
Non-traditional • Reactive • Collectivist • DEI •
Multicultural • Kindness • Entrenched • Frugal • Proud •
Problem-solvers • Care • Powerful • Gathering •
Community Hubs • Intersection between public and
private • Real • Integrated • Specific • Co-learning •
Catalyst • Opportunities • Connector • Communication
network • Locally-based organizing • Service

What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Grassroots Groups?

The impacts of grassroots groups can be both positive and negative. Exploring grassroots groups who may focus on detrimental impacts on society, such as the Proud Boys and many others, was deemed outside of the scope of this report. Community-led grassroots groups are not constrained within the formal managerial minutia seen within the formal sectors and larger-scale non-profit organizations (Bettencourt, n.d.). This allows the grassroots groups to focus on meeting the communities' needs and adapt to the changing environment quicker than what may occur in a formalized setting (Bettencourt, n.d.).

However, this lack of accountability due to formalized structures such as funder expectations, governmental oversight, and internal regulations may also lead to potential harm within the community as there is a lack of oversight of community-led, grassroots groups and their associates and members (Causton, 2008). Historically, grassroots groups are reliant on self-funding (such as through community donations or campaigns such as calendar or cookie sales) (Wyman, 1995). Their lack of registered status prevents them from accessing funding that historically has been available to non-profits and charitable organizations.

Without the status or knowledge of funding bodies, such as the United Way of Calgary and Area, grassroots groups are forced to either self-fund through their members, social clubs or religious organization or through fundraising efforts (e.g. targeting individual donors or through product sales) (Wyman, 1995). As demonstrated by the following feedback loop, this lack of ability to gain a continuous funding cycle further perpetuates a vicious cycle.
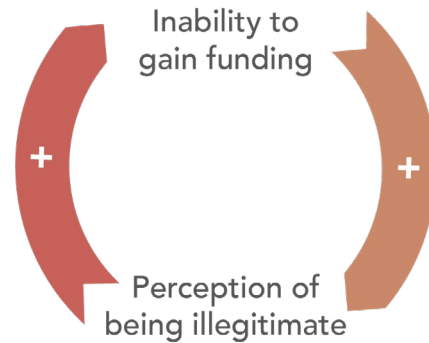
To navigate past the previously noted feedback loop and depending on the legitimacy of the grassroots groups, many groups need help to qualify for the funding that may be advantageous to the group to build capacity (Bettencourt, n.d.). This can be through partnerships with charities or more established non-profit groups, which may come with the partnerships' power dynamics and interpersonal dilemmas due to reporting measures, as shown in the following feedback loop. Furthermore, many grassroots groups can face much exclusion because they represent a group often excluded in society, which can lead to limited available resources and a lack of available research.

As of 2023, charitable organizations are permitted to provide grants to non-qualified donees so long as there is a public benefit and the donee is aligned with the charitable purpose of the grantor (Canada Revenue Agency, 2022). These provisions, while still in the draft phase, offer a solution to charities and grassroots group funding partnerships that, if applied with thought to power structures and inclusion, should act to enable more funding access to grassroots groups that may not be registered as one of the ten organizational options available to become a qualified donee (Canada Revenue Agency, 2011).

What is a System of Care, and how do Grassroots Groups Fit into Systems of Care?
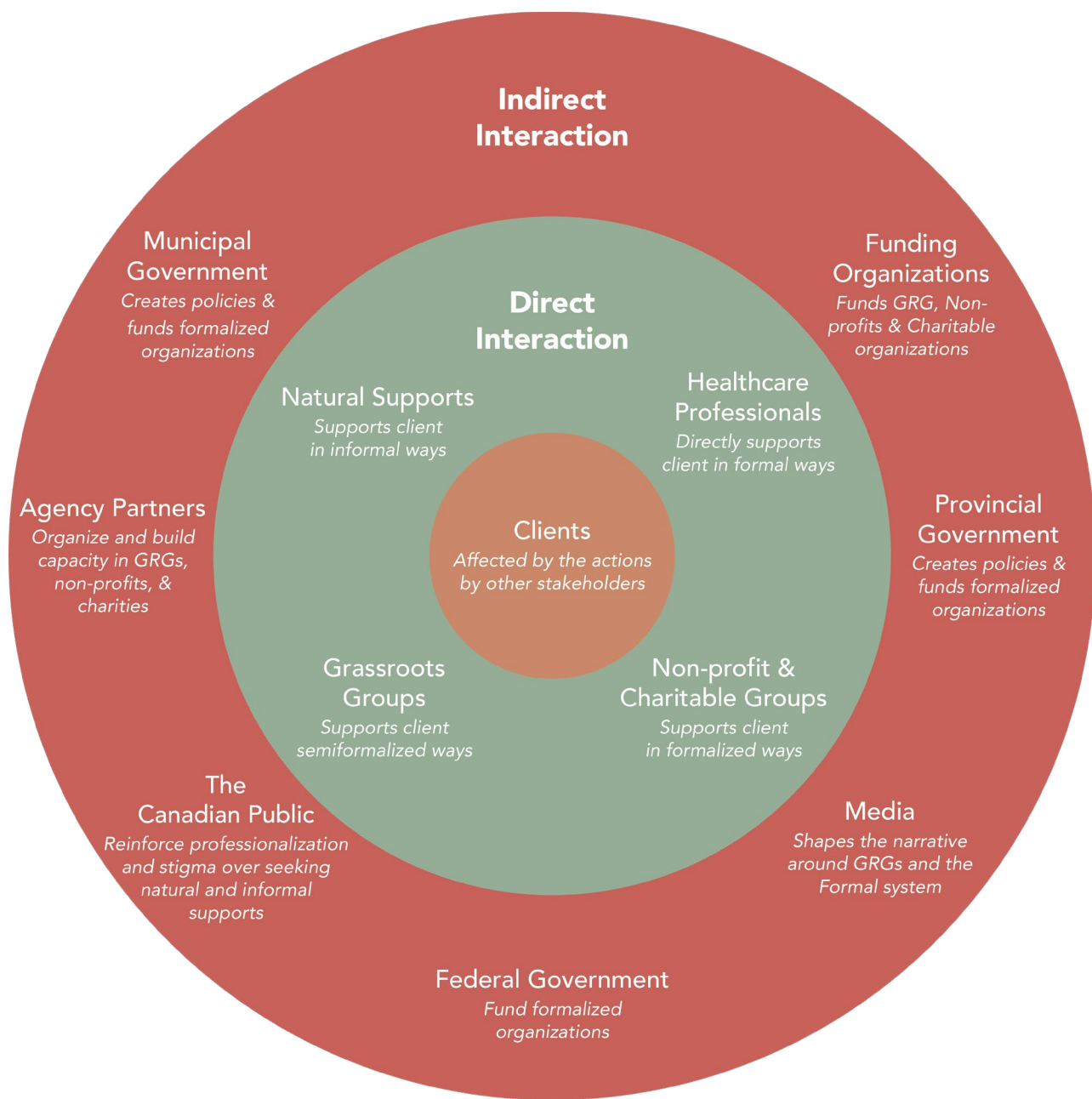
Systems of Care are much more defined than grassroots groups and fully embody our formal structures of care in food security, health, mental health, youth services, and many others. Hodges et al. (2007) define a system of care as the following:

> A system of care incorporates a broad, flexible array of services and supports for a defined population(s) that is organized into a coordinated network, integrates service planning and service coordination and management across multiple levels, is culturally and linguistically competent, builds meaningful partnerships with families and youth at service delivery, management, and policy levels, and has supportive management and policy infrastructure (p. 9).

This definition shows how the system of care encapsulates the formal system through governmental services, non-profit services and charitable organizations. Many authors noted that there is a comprehensive formal support network for individuals seeking aid (North Carolina Collaborative for Children, Youth and Families, n.d.). North Carolina Collaborative for Children, Youth and Families (n.d.) notes that a system of care is a "way of working together…to achieve the desired outcome" ("What is a System of Care" section). Many of these services and supports are often in the community and can be organized into a coordinated network (Stroul et al., 2010). However, grassroots groups are often not shown in the process or play more active roles in the journey than what is sometimes shown by the formal system that may be occurring for an individual.

Within systems of care in Calgary, grassroots groups are often utilized by individuals where the formalized system of care may not meet the needs required by that individual for many reasons. The more extensive formal system generally does not acknowledge this 'non-professionalized' support structure. As such, systems of care in Calgary operate as two almost entirely separate systems. As such, the 'system' fails to see the utility of grassroots groups in aiding individuals and does not fully encapsulate the support and services that all Albertans may require.

In a "professionalized" client-focused system, the following figure acts as a stakeholder map of grassroots groups that are thought to be engaged in the more extensive system of care. The power dynamic between funders and fundees and the relationships that need to be adapted to promote accountability to shift and enhance organizational improvement is well-researched by academics such as Mayhew (2012), Tassie et al. (1996), and Padanyi and Gainer (2003). Grassroots groups need financial and human resources, as shown through literature such as Alston-O'Connor and Houwer (2016) and Zimmer et al. (2020), with many grassroots groups without the experience or capacity to be able to seek funding and human resources properly. Mayhew (2012) notes that funding relationships can bring together those with similar missions and values yet divergent programming (e.g. bringing two organizations focused on aiding seniors to create a well-rounded program offering for seniors in a local area). Those distinct organizations' relationships can be further managed and fostered (Mayhew, 2012). The power dynamics between grassroots groups and funding organizations can also be applied to relations with government bodies through their multifaceted roles as funders, mediators, policymakers and legal oversight bodies (Padanyi & Gainer, 2003). The relationship between agency partners, the media, the public and grassroots groups is not well-researched (Padanyi & Gainer, 2003). Organizations' reputations and interactions between stakeholders other than funders in the system of care have been shown to influence performance and enhance it in the right situations (Padanyi & Gainer, 2003).

Indirect Interaction

Direct Interaction

Municipal Government
Creates policies & funds formalized organizations

Funding Organizations
Funds GRG, Non-profits & Charitable organizations

Natural Supports
Supports client in informal ways

Healthcare Professionals
Directly supports client in formal ways

Clients
Affected by the actions by other stakeholders

Agency Partners
Organize and build capacity in GRGs, non-profits, & charities

Provincial Government
Creates policies & funds formalized organizations

Grassroots Groups
Supports client semiformalized ways

Non-profit & Charitable Groups
Supports client in formalized ways

The Canadian Public
Reinforce professionalization and stigma over seeking natural and informal supports

Media
Shapes the narrative around GRGs and the Formal system

Federal Government
Fund formalized organizations

However, this is not the case for a grassroots group forward approach, which centers the individual from the community (not a "client") as the focus of care and the seat of power. Furthermore, the language changes from that of a client, which is highly prescriptive, to that of a community member or person, which acknowledges the individual as more than just an item moving through the process.

How do Grassroots Groups Fit into the System of Care?

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, grassroots groups emerged to serve their communities and support each other (Edwards, 2021). We also saw a recognition of the importance and impact that grassroots groups had on clients seeking care. This recognition was encapsulated in the granting structures of large funding bodies such as the United Way of Calgary, the Calgary Foundation and the City of Calgary Family Support Services. Based on a scan of funding agencies supporting the broader system of care, Calgary Foundation is the only funder that explicitly funds grassroots groups in Calgary. The Calgary Foundation broadened the scope of many of its grassroots grants to allow for more timely granting of funding and acknowledge the changing environment in which grassroots groups existed. "[The Calgary Foundation] will accept costs associated with virtual community gatherings and local response activities that help neighbours help neighbours as well as, where possible, in-person activities and events" (Calgary Foundation, n.d., "What is Stepping Stones" section). This acknowledgement of "neighbours helping neighbours" (Calgary Foundation, n.d., "What is Stepping Stones" section) has started the move from the ever-growing push towards a fully professionalized system back to that of our roots, where people help each other and communities band together to create a life worth admiring. With the coming changes to the funding to non-qualified donees, it is hoped that funders will be able to follow the Calgary Foundation's lead in funding those who may not qualify as a charity.

A grassroots stakeholder approach is focused on the power of not only the funders, governments and professionalized stakeholders but also the power of their community—unlike the previously noted professionalized, "client-focused" stakeholder map. Every interaction between stakeholders involves power dynamics, political plays, and pushes for agendas. Zimmer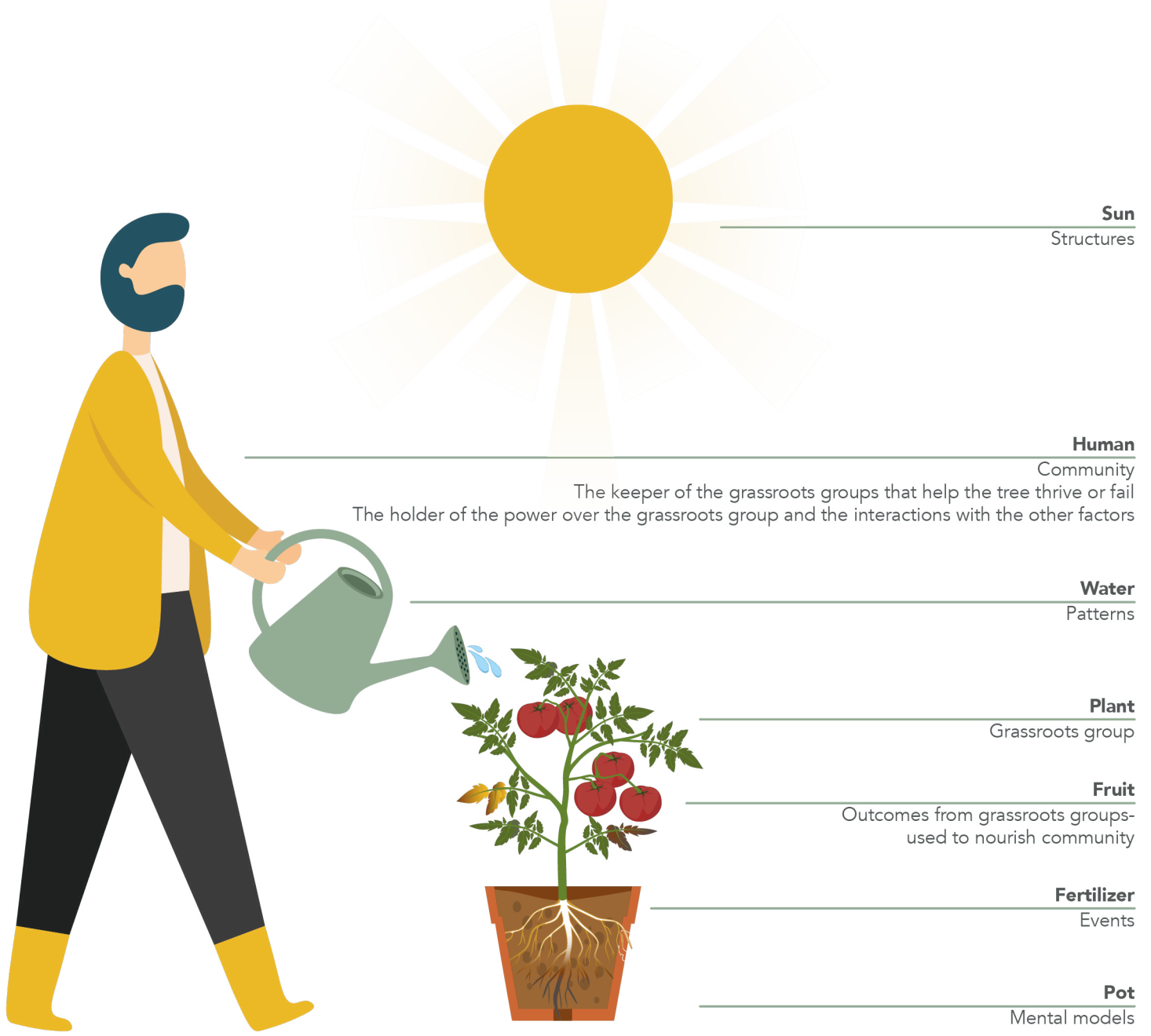 et al. (2020) noted power imbalances and a lack of dialogue between funders and fundee groups. However, it is not only just this funder/fundee relationship that holds power over grassroots groups. The community also forces accountability for the grassroots group due to the nature of serving the community and the required buy-in from the community for the grassroots group to thrive and survive. As shown through the diagram below, the sphere of influence from the community comes from not only the community members but also the volunteers that assist in the operations of the grassroots group. This model contradicts the normalized idea of a top-down, prescriptive organizational model that was explored earlier in the report.

Fiduciary Accountability

Community Accountability

Funders (government, charity, philanthropy, etc)

Community (client, advisory)

Grassroots Group

Staff (if applicable)

Volunteers

The Challenge: What is the Relationship Between Grassroots Groups and the Larger System of Care?

Grassroots groups struggle to be integrated into Calgary's professionalized system of care in a way that allows them space in the system without being absorbed by the formal system. What creates this societal power dynamic of exclusion? There is little awareness of what grassroots groups exist and how they can support clients. This impacts not only the funding that Grassroots groups can get but also whom they can help and the capacity building they can do. These impacts are caused by a lack of knowledge, understanding and lack of support from the professional system to give grassroots groups space. This is changing with the inductions of Bill C-19 and the Canada Revenue Agency charitable funding legislation, where charities are permitted to provide grants to non-qualified donees so long as there is a public benefit and the donee is aligned with the charitable purpose of the grantor (Canada Revenue Agency, 2022).

Many in the professional system unintentionally benefit from this exclusion, forcing individuals to seek professional help or fly under the wire. As explored through the graphic on the next page, no one force is moving against the empowerment and inclusion of grassroots groups. To further encapsulate the picture of grassroots groups, it can be told through the story of a tomato plant, as seen on the next page. The themes such as patterns, events, and mental models are represented as the factors needed for a plant to thrive and create a holistic picture of what the system is out of balance. Through the visual diagram of the tree on the next page, we can explore not only the layers, such as events, structures, patterns, and mental models that affect grassroots groups, but also the impacts of too much or too little of those layers, as mentioned earlier.

Sun
Structures

Human
Community
The keeper of the grassroots groups that help the tree thrive or fail
The holder of the power over the grassroots group and the interactions with the other factors

Water
Patterns

Plant
Grassroots group

Fruit
Outcomes from grassroots groups-
used to nourish community

Fertilizer
Events

Pot
Mental models

Cracks in the pot

Roots grow out of the pot in two ways:
• The roots dry up and die, causing the plant to suffer.
  • The grassroots group tries to change the mental models and is unsuccessful.
•The roots take hold and thrive despite less-than-ideal conditions.
  • The grassroots group thrives despite the mental model and its barriers.
    • However, it is still more challenging work than if they were in the ideal environment.

Dry leaf

Due to too much sun and or not enough water
• Too much forced conformity to fit into the system
• The grassroots group is unwilling to conform to become "professionalized" or partner with groups that are extractive in nature

Droopy leaf

Due to too much water or not enough fertilizer
• Losing the grassroots feeling due to conforming to the "professionalized" system - also causes "root rot".
• Too much beginning funding but insufficient long-term or sustainable funding - also causes "root rot".
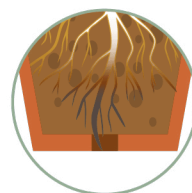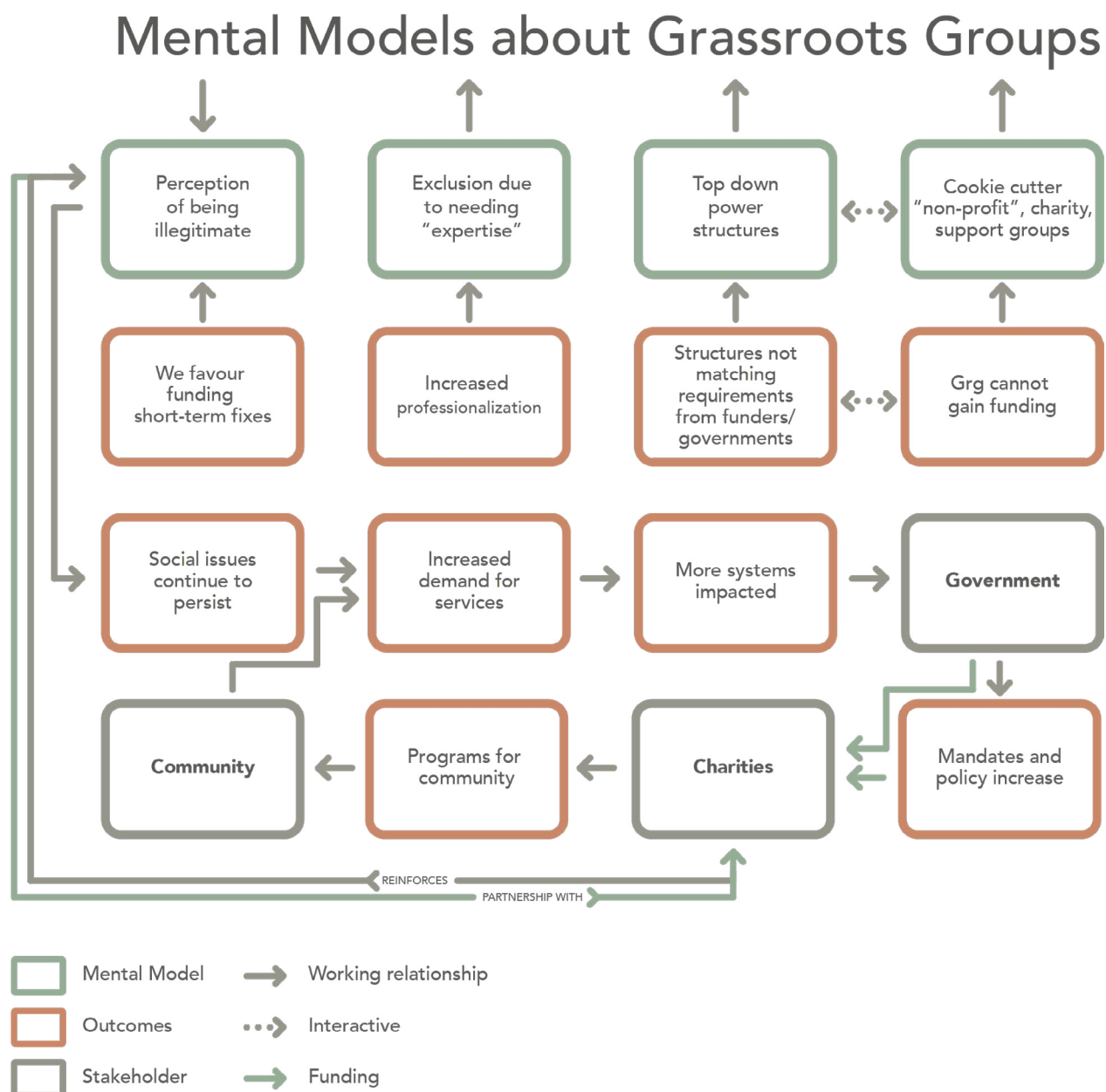
Mouldy roots (root rot)

Due to too much water; see above

How do Our Mental Models of Grassroots Groups affect Their Function?

Our mental models about grassroots groups have a profound impact on the ways we interact with and perceive grassroots groups. These mental models also affect how grassroots groups function. While the mental models that inform decision-making and the day-to-day operations of grassroots groups and their communities may not always be front of mind, they inform many areas within the outcomes of grassroots groups as well as funding and capacity building. Our mental models around the legitimacy of grassroots groups and the idea of a professionalized society—or the push for groups to claim jurisdiction over the knowledge and space in an area or field (Abbott, 1988, as cited in DeOrnellas, 2018)—impacts funding opportunities for grassroots groups and the ability for grassroots groups to grow. There is a movement that grassroots groups should not become professionalized as some see it as the "start of submission to a system that repeatedly disempowers and controls" (Babu Pant, 2017, para. 4).

Mental Models about Grassroots Groups

Legend:
- Mental Model — Working relationship
- Outcomes — Interactive
- Stakeholder — Funding

What are the Forces of Change Pushing for More Space for Grassroots Groups?

Grassroots groups are a large part of the system of care that support individuals through whatever challenges they may face, from food support to cultural support over isolation (See Umoja Community Mosaic). Banding together to support one another and solve community problems is an integral part of the human condition. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw more support than ever, with neighbours helping neighbours and community groups fill the gaps in the formal system (Edwards, 2021).

What are Some Opportunities?

With the draft Canada Revenue Agency provision permitting charitable organizations to provide grants to non-qualified donees now in effect, there is an opportunity to address the existing funding gaps for grassroots groups (see Canada Revenue Agency, 2022). The ability to fund "non-qualified donees" creates a step forward to cracking the professionalization mental model that currently forces grassroots groups to change to fit a pre-defined organizational structure and function. However, this also creates an opportunity for funders and agency partners to test the use of different philanthropy and decision-making principles that focus on trust and cooperation.

Trust-based Philanthropy: "Trust-based philanthropy is an approach to giving that addresses the inherent power imbalances between funders, nonprofits and the commu- nities they serve (Trust Based Philanthropy, 2021). At its core, trust- based philanthropy is about redistributing power—systemically, organiza- tionally and interpersonally—in service of a healthier and more equitable nonprofit ecosystem. There are six grantmaking practices associated with trust-based philanthropy (Trust Based Philanthropy, 2021):
  1. Give multi-year, unrestricted funded
  2. Do the homework
  3. Simplify and streamline paperwork
  4. Be transparent and responsive
  5. Solicit and act on feedback
  6. Offer support beyond the check"
  7. (Powell et al., 2023, p. 2).

Participation: "The redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in decisions that affect their futures." (Evans, 2015, p. 5)

Participatory Philanthrophy: "Participatory practice in philanthropy is a way of actively engaging communities in decision making, of valuing people on the ground, as subject matter experts, as practitioners of the funded work, and as the end beneficiaries of services. As a practice, participatory philanthropy has emerged from grassroots activism and assumes that better decisions will be made because of the knowledge and information contributed by communities and end-users. It is a response to, and a deconstruction of the power imbalance that exists within philanthropy and an unpacking of the privilege that funders and philanthropists experience." (Evans, 2015, p. 5)

Applying trust-based and participatory philanthropy as a granting process is not new, and the idea of community engagement has long been around before companies like Kickstarter created their crowd-funding trends. There have also been global calls to shift funding practices for "donors and funders to remodel their traditional practices to more effectively support grassroots organisations and sustainable social impact" (Catalyst 2030, n.d., para. 1). There are several calls to action from Catalyst 2030 (n.d., para. 2):

• Give multi-year, unrestricted funding
• Invest in capacity building
• Fund networks
• Create transformative rather than transactional relationships
• Build and share power
• Be transparent and responsive
• Simplify and streamline paperwork
• Offer support beyond the check
• Collaborate with other funders
• Embrace a systems mindset in your grant making

However, it seems that the use of the power from the community has not engendered the same following from the institutional philanthropic community. Participatory philanthropy focuses on community-minded generosity by opening up opportunities for individuals outside the funding sphere to non-grantmakers. This idea of participatory philanthropy originated from grassroots activism as a response to the desire to deconstruct privilege and power imbalances within the funder/fundee experience (Evans, 2015). Participatory philanthropy allows everyone to have a seat at the table and creates a space where those with lived experiences validate and promote mutual accountability (Evans, 2015). As shown through the following gaps and levers of change diagram, the opportunities to affect change in the system are plentiful but require those in the historical seats of power, such as funders, to take the first step. While this discussion has been primarily focused on funding, the change to focusing on participatory granting and decision making wholly encompasses the opportunities that can be created once we face the mental models that are currently being held. Once we see grassroots groups as legitimate without forcing structural changes, we then will enable the ability to create spaces for advocacy and inclusion on many of our city-wide strategies.

Gap	Lever(s) of Change
Lack of consistent funding	Offering longer-term funding through funding organizations, such as the Calgary Foundation or United Way of Calgary, to grassroots groups that have shown success with interim funding.
Lack of funding for grassroots groups that do not force a change in structure	Integrating trust-based philanthropy or participatory grant-making and focusing on a shift in the metrics for funding through a focus on qualitative reporting versus quantitative and data-based return on investment reports.
View of illegitimacy	By changing our mental models around how we fund and support community groups, we would then, as a result, create the legitimacy within the funding sector that grassroots groups struggle with currently and, as such, create a positive feedback loop that reverses the current relationship.
Top-down power structures currently in place do not fit with many grassroots groups' organizational structures.	The acceptance of other organizational structures can be normalized through trust-based philanthropy and participatory decision-making. However, this requires a funding group to take the first step to be able to accept what is different from the current status quo.
Lack of support due to the communities that grassroots groups serve (e.g. minorities)	This gap is that of a more extensive societal discussion that must be had surrounding the views on minority groups in Canada which include tackling the colonial power structures and systemic exclusion that are throughout our entire society.

Conclusion

Calgary has an incredible opportunity to become a leader in offering full-circle support for our community. Through the integration of trust-based philanthropy and participatory decision-making, among other possibilities, grassroots groups can be given the space and place to transform their communities and make society more extraordinary. Calgary has always been known for our volunteer spirit; it is time for us to show that we are capable of much more. The world needs more empowered grassroots movements to solve the complex problems we face.

> **"We can only see a short distance ahead, but we can see plenty there that needs to be done."**
> - Alan Turing, as cited in GoodReads, n.d.

To you, dear reader, I offer a challenge: Claim your space and your power. Show the world that we started from the community and must continue to ensure that the community is at the center of everything we do. Challenge yourself to shift the mental models that you hold and ask questions. Without this, we will continue down this vicious cycle that we are in, so take the next step and look to the future, as plenty needs to be done.

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