

Our Theory of Change

Founded in 1988, Hidden Leaf is a family foundation dedicated to strengthening the connection between inner awareness and collective liberation. We believe that when organizations, leaders, movements, and foundations cultivate inner awareness and tend to the spiritual as well as the strategic, the power we build with others and the changes we engender are deeper, more lasting, and more likely to heal the historical injustices that shape our current relationship to the Earth and to each other.

Hidden Leaf expresses this commitment through long-term, low-barrier grantmaking to organizations committed to transformative change, through aligning our financial investments with our values, and through consciously cultivating our individual and collective awareness.



Invitation to ground

Before you take in our Theory of Change, take a moment to feel your body and your breath. If you are reading this theory of change, you are probably a person who feels meaningfully connected to social change and social justice, conscious of the people around you and the planet that is home to us all.

Take a moment to intentionally reconnect to whatever it is that drives your commitment to justice, equity, transformation, integrity, or any other values that resonate in your life and your work. Pause for however long you need to slow your breathing, check in with your body, and feel your aliveness in this moment.

You are in such powerful company – surrounded, preceded, and succeeded by countless others who share your commitment to people and planet. We are all walking this path together, and we are so grateful to be in community with you.



Current conditions

Two decades into the 21st century, we find ourselves at a critical moment. Power, land, and resources are increasingly concentrated in the hands of few. Habits of extraction and exploitation threaten to undermine our collective future. As authoritarian governments and beliefs gain ground, our democratic institutions are straining under the weight of the climate crisis, economic fallout, mass migration, health crises, and persistent social and economic inequities.

Generations of people-powered movements for justice, liberation, and ecological responsibility have also shaped this moment. Over time, the people in these movements have shared the ability to draw purpose, faith, and fortitude from their ancestors and their values, to imagine a different future, and to build power with those around them.

But change takes time, and movement work can be exhausting. Amidst the pressures we face and the pain and violence all around us, it's easy to lose sight of our purpose, our values, and our power. When we do that, we begin to replicate the habits of extraction and exploitation that we see around us every day.

Unfortunately, those of us in a position to support movements often neglect our own growth, let our own traumas go unexamined, and wind up stuck in the same cycles of exploitation and cynicism that we expect movement leaders to overcome - to the detriment of our relationships and our potential impact. We often demand a great deal in return for our generosity. These demands add up, pushing movement leaders further from their purpose, and leaving little space for the rest, reflection, and presence that truly transformative work requires.

A different way

How do we move from oppressive and extractive structures to expansive and liberatory ones? Along with our movement partners, we believe that it requires us to embrace three concepts: for ourselves, in our institutions, and in our efforts to bring about change.

- **Transformation.** Transformation is more than just deep change. Transformation is change that embodies the world we envision, on the inside and the outside, for the individual and the collective. Driven by spirit, it fundamentally reimagines the oppressive structures we have learned to live with, replacing them with liberatory ones. And crucially, it means committing to our own transformation as we strive to transform the world around us.
- **Interdependence.** At Hidden Leaf, we recognize that our fates, and the fate of our planet, are deeply intertwined. None of us makes change alone, and everything we do – for better or for worse – has a ripple effect. Our awareness of interdependence helps us appreciate the collective dimensions of all that we undertake, and remember the importance of tending to the individual, the collective, and the connection between the two. It reminds us that we must strive to rebuild our relationship to the Earth, on which we all depend for survival. And it clarifies our commitment to our own liberation as an inextricable dimension of our work, since, in the words of Emma Lazarus and Fannie Lou Hamer, “None of us are free until all of us are free.”
- **Practice.** Our commitment to transformative change means that we are committed to practicing the world we seek – through what we say, what we do, and how we relate to others. The movement organizations we support share our commitment to liberatory practice, and our shared understanding of its centrality to change is core to our partnerships. Individual practice helps us understand ourselves and our impact on others; it is how we stay grounded in and accountable to our values, purpose, and vision. Collective practice is how we stay in right relationship with each other and make sure the connection between our vision for the world and how we are showing up in the world stays strong and honest. Both are essential, and without one, the other has limited power.

Our vision

We envision a future of joy, love, justice, and collective liberation.

In this future, we have worked together to liberate ourselves from oppressive structures and repair the damage we have done to each other and to our natural environment. Power and resources are shared equitably, and everyone has the space and support they need to realize their potential, build community, weather hardships, and fulfill their dreams.

People and planet exist in sustainable relationship, and each generation feels love for the Earth and pride in the world they are leaving to their descendants.

What guides us

The road to this future may be long, but we are already on it. The commitments below define the world we seek, and guide how we show up in this moment – for us and for our movement partners:

- **Seeking justice.** All we do at Hidden Leaf we do for the sake of justice, since reconciling the world we have with the world we envision requires justice for people and for planet. Like our partners, we envision a just transition from our current systems – which rely on extraction and exploitation to function – to systems that center ecological health, regenerative economies, and wellbeing for all. Within our wider commitment to justice, we place a particular emphasis on racial justice, since racialized oppression is the source of some of humanity’s deepest wounds, and since racial and ethnic identity continue to exert an overwhelming influence on who has access to power, resources, and wellbeing.
- **Centering spirit.** Being spirit-centered means that we value deep forms of feeling, knowing, and connecting with ourselves, with others, and with the Earth. Spirit is often conflated with organized religion, but the truth is that spirit is a force that predates religion, and that knows no difference between the sacred and the secular. When we are spirit-centered, we – feel grounded in the totality of who we are – physically and emotionally, as well as intellectually – and we are able to connect to the wholeness of all those around us. Exploring this connection restores our individual and collective humanity; social and environmental justice arise naturally from this place.
- **Sharing power.** We understand power in many dimensions – as a force of both oppression and liberation, as a resource that exists within each of us, and as a shaper of the world around us. Power is an inevitable part of life, and awareness of power is what makes honest partnership possible in a world where resources and agency are distributed unevenly. For Hidden Leaf, a commitment to power-sharing means accelerating the distribution of the capital we steward, grounding our grantmaking in trusting and equitable partnerships, and sharing decision-making with the communities whose leadership and visions our work seeks to center.

Our role

We all have a role to play in bringing about a future built on love and justice – starting with how we show up today. At Hidden Leaf, we believe that investing in social and environmental justice movements to deepen their practice so that they can grow their power is the best way for us to steward our capital while honoring our family's values, all in the pursuit of that future.

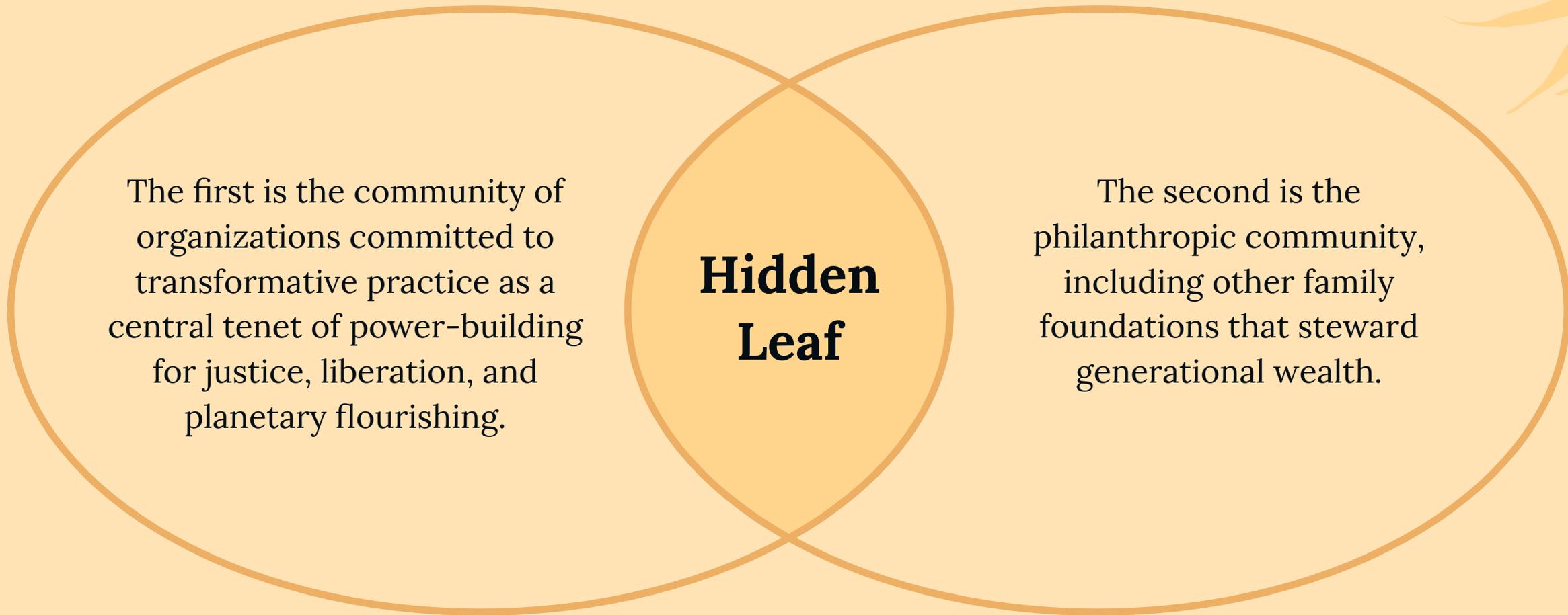
For us, making that investment with integrity looks like aligning our grantmaking practices with our values, building and maintaining honest relationships with the organizations we support and with our peers in philanthropy, using all the financial tools at our disposal to redistribute our accumulated wealth, and staying in deep reflective practice ourselves.

The slides that follow lay out the details of our approach.



Our two communities

As a family foundation committed to transformative practice, Hidden Leaf sits in two communities.



The first is the community of organizations committed to transformative practice as a central tenet of power-building for justice, liberation, and planetary flourishing.

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The second is the philanthropic community, including other family foundations that steward generational wealth.

We approach both sets of relationships with a spirit of curiosity, learning, and trust. This means staying rooted in an analysis of how power flows, acknowledging and sharing the power and resources we hold, and striving always to bring our practices into closer alignment with our values and beliefs.

As a movement partner

At Hidden Leaf, we believe that reflective, centered, spiritually grounded people make for strong, long-term leaders with expansive and enactable visions. We also believe that change requires more than individual leaders – it requires movements united for collective action, centering the leadership and the wisdom of people whose communities have felt injustice most keenly. As a foundation committed to justice, we believe it is our job to support movements in ways that facilitate rather than complicate their work. This means allowing them space to dream, experiment, rest, practice, and grow their power in ways that align with their visions and their values.

The movement organizations we support are at the center of our work. We take our lead from the field – in setting priorities and in shaping our analysis – and we strive to show up as supportive, critical thought partners. More than any particular issue or strategy, staying in principled relationship with our grantees, and learning and growing alongside them, anchors our own commitment to justice and liberation.

As a movement partner

In order to maximize the impact of our resources, we have chosen to make deep, long-term investments in a small number of movement organizations, most with annual budgets in the \$1M-\$3M range.

Collectively, these organizations are:

- Building political, economic, and cultural power and deepening environmental justice for the sake of a more just and liberatory future for people and for the planet
- Practicing the world they seek by cultivating reflective, liberatory practices and cultures as a core element of their work and their identities
- Led by and/or centering people of color
- Explicitly prioritizing racial justice and a commitment to Just Transition
- Committed to deepening democratic practice in the world and in their own organizational structures
- In deep relationship with others
- Based in the United States or Indigenous territories therein

Most of these organizations work directly to build power with and for grassroots communities. Some function as intermediaries, creating opportunities for social and environmental justice leaders to connect to their purpose, clarify their values, and deepen their practices. Both kinds of work are essential to bringing about the world we envision. We believe that these organizations are anchoring movements for justice and liberation to the deepest reaches of what is possible in our lifetimes and for generations to come. By investing in them, we hope to grow the space for transformative practice in all of our movements for change.

As a foundation

Hidden Leaf was founded in a spirit of generosity. Our founder, David Brown, gave generously throughout his lifetime, and when he passed, he endowed Hidden Leaf with 90 percent of what he owned. This decision flowed from his commitment to mindfulness and presence – he envisioned a place where his family could come together to sit in conscious relationship to wealth and to the world. David’s daughters worked closely with him to develop that legacy, and continue to dedicate their time to carrying on Hidden Leaf’s commitment to growing space for inner awareness in social justice and environmental work.

Now, over 30 years into our life as a foundation, we have come to recognize that beyond our grantmaking, our willingness to steward the generational wealth of our family in alignment with our values is also a core element of our commitment to transformation. Among other things, our collective practice has allowed us to become more conscious of the connections between the financial success of families like ours and the dispossession, oppression, and exploitation of the Indigenous communities and people of color whose ancestral land and generational labor made the accumulation of that wealth possible.

This consciousness, alongside the awareness that more is being asked of us in this moment in history, has opened the door to new ways of investing and sharing our wealth that favor healing, repair, and regeneration.



As a foundation

In recent years, we have taken several steps to deepen and accelerate our commitment to sharing and reinvesting our wealth in alignment with our values:

- We have worked for over a decade to divest our endowment from vehicles that perpetuate exploitation and extraction in favor of investments that contribute to building a new, restorative, and regenerative economy
- From 2022 to 2027, we are dedicating 8% of our endowment to our programs, rather than the legally required 5%
- Beyond grantmaking, we make direct investments in movement infrastructure, providing resources for land and real estate acquisitions, venture and cooperative development, economic incubators, and community-led revolving loan funds.
- In an effort to rematriate some of the land on which our family has made its home for generations – land that sustained generations of Indigenous people before us – we have begun to make reparations via asset transfers and payment of land taxes, and are exploring how to deepen those commitments.



As a foundation

Finally, in addition to our grantmaking and investments, we are committed to practicing transformation in our governance structures and with our peers in social justice philanthropy. This work is an expression of our commitment to power-sharing, and a recognition that we cannot grow democratic practices in the world without growing them within our own walls and across the philanthropic community. For example:

- We have have invited movement leaders into our governance structures and grantmaking decisions.
- We actively engage in organizing our peers and welcome being organized by movement and philanthropic leaders. We strive to use our platform and access to open new doors and possibilities for the movements we support, to co-invest with other foundations when possible, and to partner with affinity groups and other donor organizers. We are proud members of the Solidaire Network and Justice Funders, philanthropic networks that seek to bend the arc of philanthropy toward justice.

Through all of our actions, Hidden Leaf aims be a bold and visible experiment in liberatory philanthropy, and part of that commitment means telling our own story in hopes that it will inspire others to turn their gaze inward. We offer this Theory of Change in that spirit, and we welcome your company and your partnership on this shared journey!

