



THE GILL FOUNDATION: TAKING A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO PHILANTHROPY

Founded in 1994 by Tim Gill, the creator of Quark software, the Gill Foundation has a mission “to secure equal opportunity for all people regardless of sexual orientation or gender expression.” The Gill Foundation (including the Gill Operating Foundation), with more than \$250 million in assets, has since become the nation’s largest private foundation focused exclusively on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) civil rights.

Gill Foundation takes a strategic approach to its philanthropy — but the Foundation did not always do its work in such an intentional manner. As former Executive Director Rodger McFarlane observes, “Tim started out being immensely generous in the predictable ways. He gave to wonderful groups that were working on the things we cared about. And then, twenty-six states in four years passed legislation prohibiting gay marriage, completely eliminating an array of rights for our people. And he realized that a bountiful approach was not effective.”

McFarlane was hired in 2004, at the Foundation’s ten-year anniversary. His first order of business was to lead the Gill Foundation through a strategic planning process that aimed to create a comprehensive framework and management tools that would help the Foundation optimize its investments in promoting equality for the lgbt community.

The Foundation began the process by articulating its vision. McFarlane recalls:

“What we did initially was define what an end state looked like in incredibly concrete terms — not something exotic. What does equality mean? What does that look like in terms of physical safety? We need freedom from violence. In terms of economic equality? We need employment nondiscrimination. Are fewer of us getting fired from our jobs? Do we make the same amount of money? We need freedom for free expression. We need freedom for our organizations to grow and flourish... access to all government services and entitlements for our families. Basically, don’t kill me. Don’t fire me. Let me worship in an accepting environment. Let me have equal pay.”

Staff then gathered extensive data about the current state of the lgbt movement to understand better its needs and to determine the Gill Foundation’s most useful role in supporting the movement.

The Foundation, in collaboration with consultants, interviewed more than 50 key figures in the lgbt civil rights movement, analogous movements, philanthropy, and politics; reviewed the relevant literature; analyzed the Gill Foundation’s resources (past and present); and surveyed other foundations funding lgbt issues and organizations. The research findings suggested a number of challenges for the lgbt movement:

1. It lacked a common vision and coherent plan across organizations and funders.
2. It had very little grassroots participation.
3. It had little or no capacity for electoral and legislative work at the state level.
4. It didn’t yet know how to connect with mainstream Americans’ values, emotions, and religious beliefs.
5. Time mattered. The movement and the Gill Foundation had to act immediately.

Based on these findings and an analysis of its own strengths and weaknesses, the Foundation identified six ways it could contribute to the lgbt civil rights movement:

1. Draw funders and leaders to the movement
2. Scale up the movement’s financing
3. Crack the grassroots participation problem
4. Crack the state-based advocacy problem

5. Influence and leverage multi-issue mainstream progressive political thinking

state-based advocacy organizations using a number of strategies. The Center:

6. Figure out how to connect with mainstream voters' values and emotions

- Provides general operating funds to lgbt/allied organizations

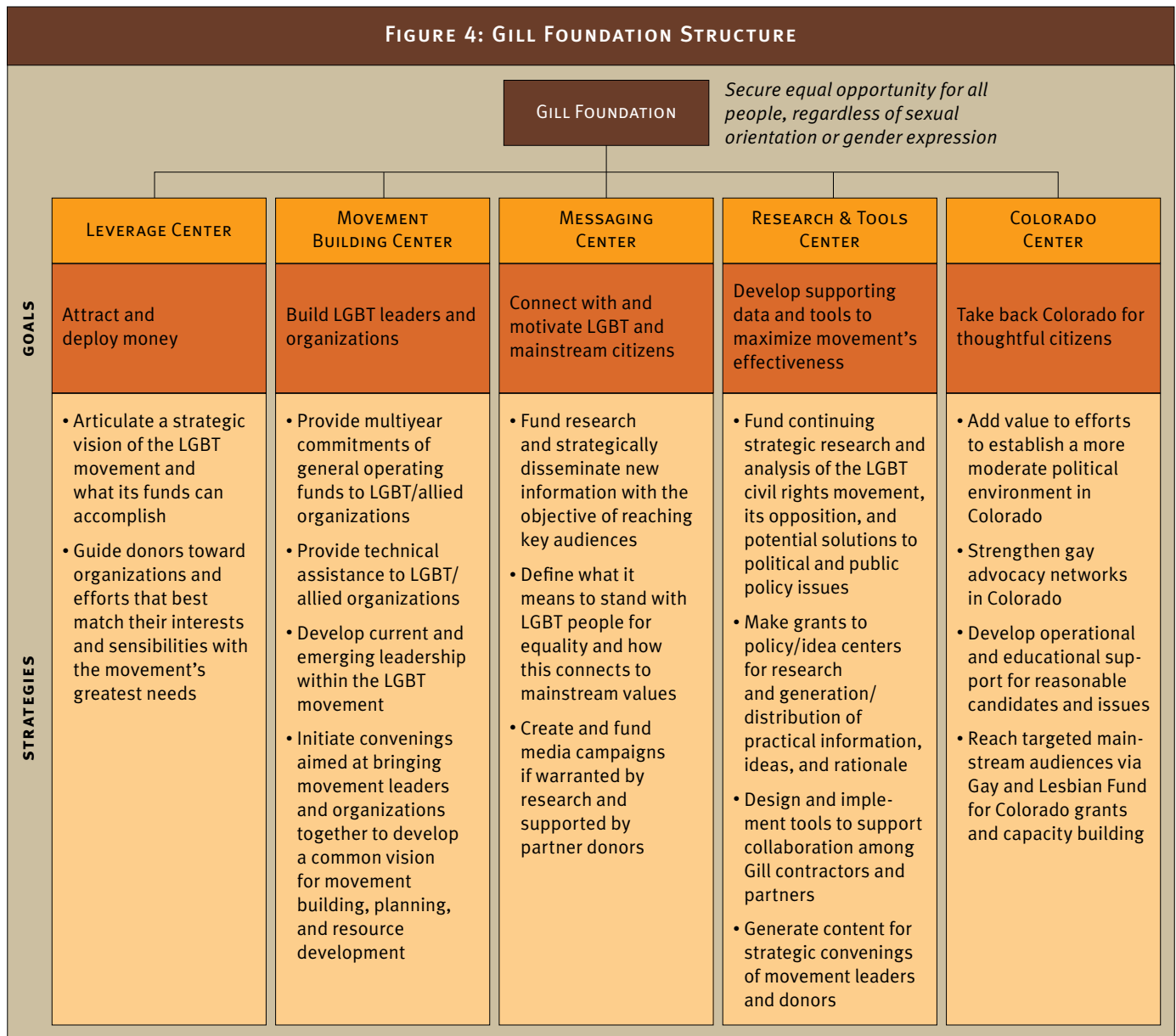
The Foundation then restructured its operation into five centers. Each center has its own goal and set of strategies.

- Provides general operating support and capacity-building grants to state-based organizations, which are usually smaller and need more support

COO Katherine Peck oversees the Gill Foundation's Movement Building Center, which works to build goals substantially stronger relationships among, and understanding of, lgbt movement organizations and leaders. This Center targets both national and

- Initiates convenings aimed at bringing movement leaders and organizations together to develop a common vision for movement building, planning, and resource development

FIGURE 4: GILL FOUNDATION STRUCTURE



The Movement Building Center also works to develop current and emerging leadership within the lgbt movement. Implementation of this goal has not yet occurred because the Foundation is working with other funders to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy. As Peck notes, the process of developing these goals and strategies was almost exclusively external in its orientation. "A lot of foundations are doing these things. But in our case, [the strategies] tie directly to findings from our analysis of the movement and a set of goals and objectives that were created from those findings, and then action steps that flow from those."

Once the goals and strategies were determined, the next step was to establish a set of interim targets that would help gauge progress toward those goals and the effectiveness of the strategies used to reach them. One key to assessment is having clear goals, asserts McFarlane. "Do you have employment nondiscrimination in the following states? Are you advancing employment nondiscrimination at the federal level? Are we reducing the incidence of violence against lesbian and gay people? Are we making advances in the recognition of our relationships? These are very, very specific things that either happen, or they don't," he explains.

Another component of successful assessment for the Gill Foundation is its Board of Directors' insistence on measurement as a component of the Foundation's operation. "My boss is a mathematician. The treasurer is a former partner at Goldman Sachs, [so] we have quantifiable metrics," McFarlane notes. "I mean, excruciating, relentless metrics attached to every goal. These are yes or no questions that anyone can understand. Simply put, did we or did we not achieve second parent adoption in Colorado? Did we or did we

not protect marriage in Massachusetts? Did we or did we not raise \$80 million for the movement?"

McFarlane admits that the Gill Foundation's transition into its new strategic way of operating involved some difficult changes for staff, but he also acknowledges the importance of staff commitment to strategy. "People are very clear about what we're doing and are very clear about what their role is, and that was not true when I got here," he says.

Gill Foundation uses a written strategic plan to communicate its efforts and to hold its staff accountable. "When you've constantly got to go back and say, 'OK. What are you doing to achieve your written plan?' You are constantly mindful that it's out there. When my staff members are presenting something to me or pitching a proposal to me, I say, 'OK. How does this fit into your overall strategy?'" says Peck.

Saying "no" to potential grantees is difficult for all foundations, but according to McFarlane, part of the challenge of having a strategy is sticking to the plan and not making exceptions. He elaborates, "I can think of a hundred examples of where we turned something down that was very close to my heart. And I think every foundation officer will be familiar with that feeling.... There is an unlimited amount of injustice and suffering out there that I cannot mitigate.... We are rationing resources. So part of the demand of this job is keeping this relentless focus on exactly what we said we're trying to do, and staying there, because there are so many appealing, urgent, necessary things that we could fund. And, like I said before, time is critical. We need to act now."

Additional information and a video that complement this case study are available at www.straten.effectivephilanthrov.org.

