

# Reframing Philanthropy

A guide to principles-based philanthropy and bridge building based on GHR Foundation's work to increase community agency and address complex problems





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What if philanthropy viewed its work through a radically different lens, one that aligned more closely with a set of values rather than a set of metrics?

Could funders and organizations accomplish more if the dynamic of their relationship changed?

**Here's what GHR learned.**

# Build Bridges and Amplify People's Limitless Potential for Good

In 2016, during a particularly tumultuous and divisive time, Pope Francis called on the world's citizens to “build bridges, not walls.” As a committed and hope-fueled funder, GHR Foundation was eager to answer the call. We were also curious: What would bridge building mean for our programming? What does it look like in practice?

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**“Take each other by the hand. This is the plan for life: Make bridges. Human bridges.”**

—Pope Francis

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Bridge building is not a bigger check or a new focus area. Rather, we believe that bridge building is a radically new — and more effective — way to address urgent global issues. As a funder and partner, we believe that bridge building can create and maintain stronger connections between people and issue areas. It can lead to more creative and sustainable solutions.

We tested this approach through BridgeBuilder®, a three-year initiative to build and repair the connections among

people, organizations, issues and beliefs. From 2017 to 2019, we sourced ideas from nonprofit organizations and social innovators, then worked alongside them to learn how to create meaningful, sustainable and community-led change.

BridgeBuilder projects operated by using a shared set of principles. These principles guided the work, not just proposed activities or measures of output.



**Build bridges,  
not walls.**

A principles-based approach to philanthropy creates **the right conditions for bridge building** to take root and generate impact.



# Lead With Love, and Engage in Meaningful Ways

What happened? We undertook a principles-based approach and prioritized our work differently. We listened to local input. We measured progress in a new way and refocused decision-making. We elevated processes and voices — the “how” and the “who” — of projects in our discussions as well as BridgeBuilder principles.

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As a result, our partners and our relationships have thrived. BridgeBuilder principles gave our partners the support they needed to develop more nuanced, effective, multifaceted solutions. Through principles-based evaluation, grantees gained the freedom, flexibility and space to do their best bridging work.

Based on our experience, we believe that bridge building and principles-based philanthropy are imperative to addressing global issues. We need bridges to truly

understand urgent and complex needs, develop deeply rooted solutions and create sustainable change. A principles-based approach to philanthropy creates the right conditions for bridge building to take root and generate impact.

Now, we invite you to consider how you can engage in philanthropy in new and meaningful ways. To help, we have documented our experience developing guiding principles and conducting principles-based evaluations. This report is a starting place,

an executive-level overview of our efforts and lessons learned. (Comprehensive details are available in two related reports that our evaluation firm, Inspire to Change, created.)

We encourage you to explore — and seriously consider — how principles-based bridge building could lead to transformations in the communities you serve. How might you find new ways to build more bridges?

# Reimagine What's Possible When Communities Lead Change

Are philanthropists really “measuring what matters”? Philanthropy and partnership are critical, but GHR recognizes that traditional program implementation and measurement methods can impede progress, particularly in complex and dynamic settings. Programs and initiatives tend to be designed far away from the communities in which they are implemented, which limits their responsiveness and effectiveness.

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Inspired by Pope Francis' call to “build bridges, not walls,” GHR believed that stronger connections between people and issues could lead to more meaningful and sustainable responses. We believed in inclusion, not isolation, and that solutions needed to incorporate many voices and perspectives. We believed we could increase our impact by focusing on how we worked, not just what work got done.

To test our theory, GHR designed BridgeBuilder as a way to experiment, learn and grow through a new type of engagement.

In BridgeBuilder, GHR recast our role in philanthropic solutions — not as a funder or program expert but as a partner and connector. We decided to invest in relationships that enable community-led change rather than specific solutions. We wanted to eliminate divisions among people, organizations, issues and beliefs. We thought this approach could offer more

resources, connection and time for communities to create their own effective pathways forward. In 2017, GHR extended the first of three open calls for grants: the BridgeBuilder Challenge. Working with OpenIDEO, GHR invited organizations to submit big ideas that could advance peace, increase prosperity or preserve our planet. We received more than 1,300 ideas from 185 countries during the three-year period and awarded more than \$3 million to five “Top Ideas” each year of the project.



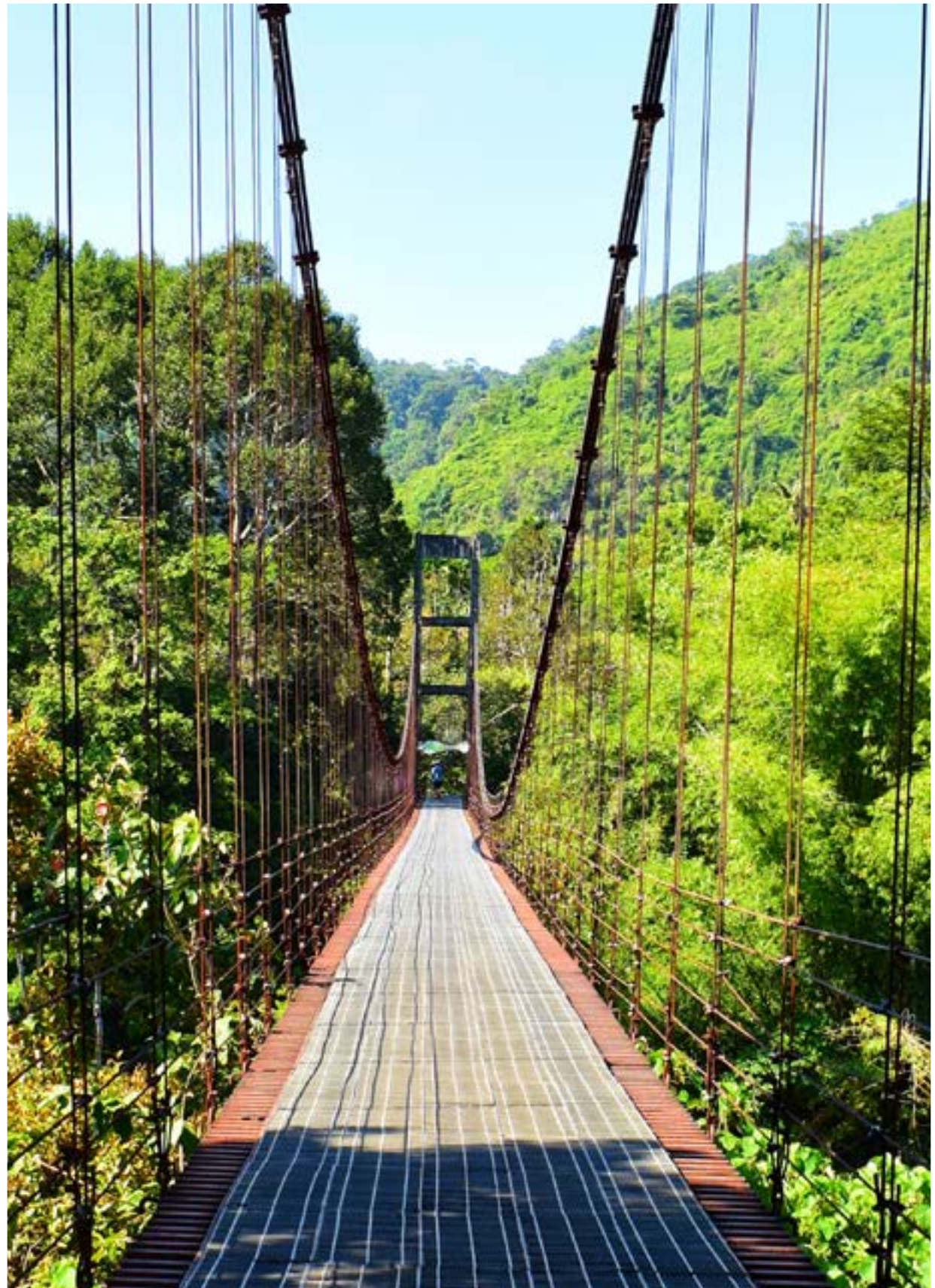


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**“We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and for the world.”**

—Pope Francis

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# BridgeBuilder Top Ideas

## 2017

### **Peace Direct**

**Ethical Gold Mining as a Pathway to Peace**

Democratic Republic of Congo

### **BioCarbon Engineering**

**Tree-Planting Drones for Restoring Mangroves and Livelihoods**

Myanmar

### **LIFT Chicago**

**LIFTing Up and Empowering Families on Chicago's South Side**

Chicago, IL, United States

### **Local Youth Corner**

**Creative Skills for Peace Among Youth Violent Offenders**

Cameroon

### **NaTakallam**

**Connecting Displaced Persons with Arabic Language Learners Around the World**

Global

## 2018

### **This is My Backyard**

**Equipping Indigenous Peoples with Mobile Technology to Protect Land Rights**

Kenya

### **Found in Translation**

**Empowering Bilingual Women as Medical Interpreters to Fight Healthcare Disparities**

Boston, MA, United States

### **Producers Direct**

**Unleashing the Potential of Rural Youth to Drive Sustainable Small-Scale Agriculture**

East Africa

### **War Child Canada**

**Investing in Young Peace-Building Entrepreneurs in South Sudan via Cash Transfers and Start-Up Grants**

South Sudan

### **My Choices Foundation**

**Facilitating Women-Led Community Transformation for Families Facing Domestic Violence**

India

## 2019

### **Top Manta**

**Activating a Migrant-Led Streetwear Movement for Opportunity and Solidarity**

Spain

### **Five One Labs**

**Incubating the Post-Conflict Potential of Youth- and Women-Founded Start-Ups**

Iraq

### **SAMA for All**

**Transforming Cultural Exchanges by Training Newcomers as Art Interpreters**

France

### **FaithAction**

**Reimagining the I.D. Card to Foster Trust and Safety Among New Neighbors**

United States

### **Talent Beyond Boundaries**

**Unlocking Global Pathways to International Employment and Safety for Refugees**

MENA & Australia & Canada



# Finding GHR's Pole Star Principles

As part of the process, BridgeBuilder grantees helped GHR uncover guiding principles that we could use to assess our philanthropic work, regardless of geographic location, the social change issue or the scope or scale of the project. These guiding principles became the “Pole Star” for every decision and interaction and the basis of BridgeBuilder program evaluations.

Over three years, an evaluation team from Inspire to Change, LLC, and the BridgeBuilder cohorts added, deleted and modified principle statements based on interviews, workshops, workbook exercises and other evidence. The extensive data was collected and analyzed using qualitative data software.

The final framework consisted of one overarching principle and four guiding principles. Each guiding principle was supported by two operating principles, which described specific actions that embody the guiding principles.

Even though BridgeBuilder partners implemented different projects with different goals in diverse geographies, common themes existed. The guiding principles resonated across the global bridge builders and their communities.

# BridgeBuilder Principles 2020

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	OPERATING PRINCIPLE
<b>Amplify people's limitless potential for good.</b>	<b>Bridge.</b> Build bridges at the intersection of prosperity, peace, respect for creation and protection of our environment. <b>Protect.</b> Protect human dignity by going beyond meeting basic needs to meeting the need for joy, hope and belonging.
<b>Lead with love by engaging in meaningful ways.</b>	<b>Meet.</b> Meet people where they are — geographically, socially and culturally. <b>Build.</b> Build and strengthen authentic, respectful, trust-based, caring relationships.
<b>Reimagine what's possible when communities lead change.</b>	<b>Root.</b> Root solutions in the context, cultures, knowledge, wisdom, needs and aspirations of partner communities. <b>Journey.</b> Walk alongside partners and communities to help them implement their own solutions.
<b>Partner boldly for sustainable change.</b>	<b>Challenge.</b> Challenge power structures. Increase people's ownership of their bodies, communities, data, technologies, religions, lands, cultures and languages. <b>Promote.</b> Promote pathways that move our world in a more equitable and just direction, locally and globally.
<b>Navigate and adapt to address urgent needs.</b>	<b>Learn.</b> Welcome and embrace new understandings that emerge as relationships deepen, new information is revealed and conditions change. <b>Adapt.</b> Use the BridgeBuilder principles to guide decision-making and action in the face of complexity and uncertainty.

# Partner Boldly for Sustainable Change

The BridgeBuilder approach “flipped the script” on traditional philanthropic development and became a means for GHR and its partners to:

- Meet more than just the basic needs of partner organizations and their constituents.
- Lead with love in an urgent and responsive way, meeting people where they are.
- Walk alongside partners and root solutions in the community.
- Become more flexible and adaptable to changing conditions while staying true to principles.
- Engage with communities in a meaningful way, based on personal relationships and context.
- Disrupt oppressive narratives and redistribute power.
- Balance revolution with evolution to create more equitable and just systems.

Effective bridge building required a different relationship with partners, a different way of defining success and a different kind of evaluation: principles-based evaluation.

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**“You must decide  
in life: Either I  
will make bridges or  
I will make walls.”**

—Pope Francis

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## How, not What

Principles-focused developmental evaluation asks to what extent decisions are adhering to principles. It asks in what ways the principles are meaningful, useful and adaptable as well as how they contribute to the desired results.

Unlike traditional evaluations, which often overemphasize measurable outcomes, best practices and timelines, a principles-focused evaluation approach allows for a diversity

of responses and the ability to adapt solutions to the local context. Guiding principles provide direction without prescribing a solution. Funders and grantees have a clear, shared purpose but more latitude on how to achieve their goals.

By adopting a principles-focused developmental evaluation process, GHR shifted its attention onto the process — not the outcome — of each engagement.

# Traditional Versus BridgeBuilding Work



## TRADITIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORK

VS.



## BRIDGE BUILDING WORK

Professionals

Who leads?

Community leads or co-leads

Plan-Do-Study-Act

How are solutions developed?

Plan-Act-Learn-Adapt

Problems to solve

How is the work conceptualized?

Possibilities to realize and amplify

Time-limited and finite

What is the timeline for the work?

Complex and ongoing

Standardized procedures

How are decisions made?

Principles-based

Professionals/program leaders decide

How is success defined?

Communities in which the work occurs decide

Monitoring and evaluation

How is success evaluated?

Creative evaluation and engagement

Separate and objective

How is evaluation positioned?

Embedded and connected



# Navigate and Adapt to Address Urgent Needs



So, what did we learn? Through the BridgeBuilder initiative, GHR found five essential qualities of “good bridges.” By building strong bridges and using a principles-based approach, philanthropists and nonprofits can:

- **Meet more than just basic needs. Bridges protect human dignity and fulfill people’s needs for joy, hope and belonging.**
- **Balance being systematic and responsive. Bridges lead people toward a long-term vision without losing sight of current context or short-term challenges.**
- **Be responsive to individual vs. system needs. Bridge builders challenge large social ecosystems by creating partnerships with individuals, one on one, to promote just and equitable systems.**
- **Manage the tension between being revolutionary and being evolutionary. Bridges create both radical and incremental change. Bridge builders work within existing systems to meet their communities’ needs today as they prepare bold actions for the future.**
- **Put personal values into visible action. Bridges provide an outlet for people to express and live their deeply held values and to incorporate their perspectives and experiences into their work.**

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BridgeBuilder was able to unlock creative and productive solutions because its guiding principles were useful, adaptable and meaningful. The initiative supported sustainable results because it created time and space for BridgeBuilder grantees to engage in useful practices that addressed urgent needs. Consider the following examples:

- On-the-ground learning was assumed, so BridgeBuilder grantees were more open to adapting plans as they reached greater understanding.
- There was more time in schedules for deep listening, data collection and reflection.
- BridgeBuilder participants actively sought diverse opinions.
- Budgets, timelines and activities were more flexible because the primary focus was on a clear, compelling purpose, not predetermined evaluation questions, methods or deliverables.

BridgeBuilder’s guiding principles also helped define the relationship between grantees and GHR as the funder. They held each party accountable. GHR accepted its role to walk alongside partner agencies and communities as they implemented their own solutions. Being rooted in the community helped BridgeBuilder grantees and GHR find new ways to affect change and improve lives.

# Examples of BridgeBuilder's Guiding Principles in Action



**BridgeBuilder grantees went beyond meeting basic needs.** LIFT Chicago used a multigenerational, in-community ambassador approach to increase access to early childhood education. The organization described how the principles helped it meet the basic needs of parents in the community as well as the human needs for joy and hope. Two partners, NaTakallam and Talent Beyond Boundaries, found unique ways to connect refugees and displaced people with income-generating opportunities that were self-sustaining and provided a sense of dignity and purpose. As bridge builders, these organizations met a critical community need, amplified people's potential and protected human dignity.



**BridgeBuilder grantees listened more deeply and learned on the go.** BridgeBuilder organizations must continuously balance planning and flexibility. My Choices Foundation, a partner in India, created a bridge-building project to end domestic violence and empower women. My Choices historically worked with women and children, but it learned that it wouldn't be able to change societal norms without engaging men — an audience it had never considered. The agency understood that “[w]e will only be able to have a clear picture after we step out and start meeting people in the community.”



**Bridge building required healing, which was deeply personal.** Bridging requires deep introspection and expansive empathy. Local Youth Corner Cameroon connected people who were exiting prison with mentors, who eventually connected them to employment. The partner realized, however, that many of its constituents were not ready for mentors. They needed time to transition back into the community, and rushing the process weakened or undermined their attempts to create a connection.



**Deeply rooted solutions had the capacity to continue.** Drones were central to the work of BioCarbon Engineering, a partner in Myanmar. As the partnership developed, community members expressed a desire to learn how to use the drones. That reaction enabled the community to continue planting after the grant had concluded. It created an employment opportunity for young people who otherwise may have moved to a more urban location for work.

The 15 BridgeBuilder organizations applied the initiative's guiding principles differently but still experienced positive, lasting effects. BridgeBuilder's guiding principles led them toward the best bridging work possible.



**Engagements were more meaningful because BridgeBuilder organizations met community members where they were.**

Situations are often more nuanced or complex than they appear in grant proposals. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Peace Direct found that miners vastly underestimated the number of children who worked in unsafe minding conditions rather than attending school. The partner needed to be on the ground to see that children had not been reported in any official way and to alter its response to match the situation.

**BridgeBuilder grantees challenged power structures to address complex problems.**

In Boston, Found in Translation was able to change a hiring requirement for a national certification, which was expensive to take and offered only in English. Those factors deterred some highly qualified candidates from entering the labor force, which was experiencing a shortage of certified candidates. Found in Translation said, "After they took this requirement away, they hired one of our amazing superstar alumni. And as soon as she got in the door, she started advocating for her peers."

**BridgeBuilder organizations worked with, not for, communities.**

Producers Direct worked in a grassroots way to strengthen a network of smallholder farmers in East Africa. The partner said, "Our model is delivered by farmers, for farmers, and provides opportunities for smallholders — including women and youth — to transform their farms into sustainable businesses."

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guiding  
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# An Invitation

By reimagining the traditional philanthropic process and development norms, the BridgeBuilder Challenge enabled new ways to do transformative philanthropic work.

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You can find these reports and start your journey at [GHRfoundation.org/bridgebuilder](https://GHRfoundation.org/bridgebuilder)

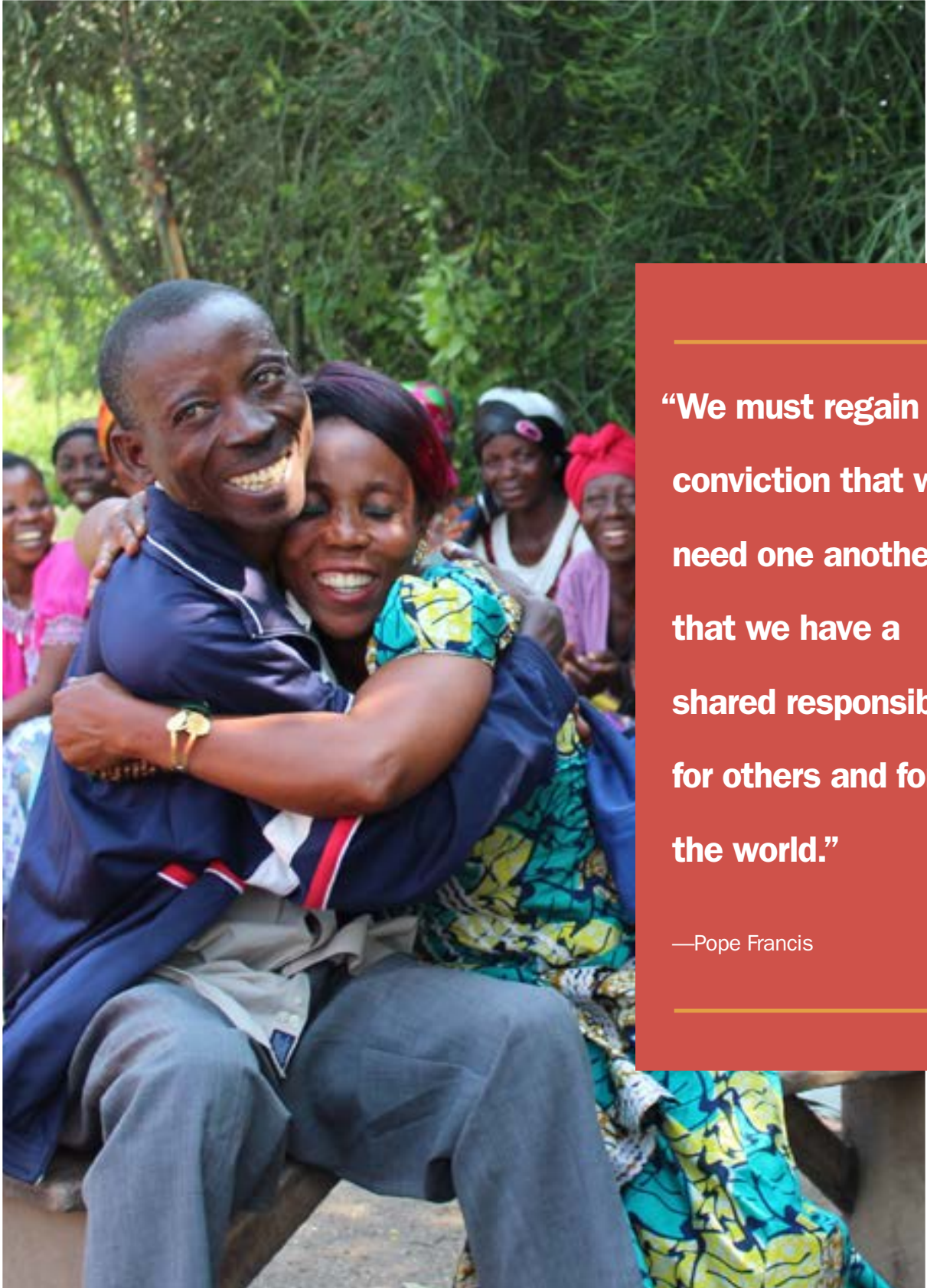
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In their evaluations, BridgeBuilder grantees said that the guiding principles were effective, even essential, in helping them progress toward their intended results. In fact, they have applied the BridgeBuilder approach to their own work and with other funders. The impact will continue beyond any evaluation cycles or program deadlines because bridge building is foundational to who they are and what they do.

- The GHR BridgeBuilder® Challenge 2017-2020: Principles Case Study. A detailed account of how we identified and refined our guiding principles and embedded them into global projects.
- The GHR BridgeBuilder® Challenge 2017-2020: Evaluation and Advocacy Report. A three-part report on how we applied principles-focused evaluation.

For those ready to dive deeper into bridge building and principles-based philanthropy, our efforts are explained more comprehensively in two related reports:

We invite you to learn more about building bridges. We welcome questions and conversations from individuals, nonprofits, philanthropists and others who want to adopt this innovative approach to philanthropy.



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—Pope Francis

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# About the Facilitator and Partners



**GHR Foundation** is a hope-fueled global funder that exists to be of service to people and their limitless potential for good. In collaboration with partners and communities around the world, we reimagine what's possible to accelerate progress on global development and family strengthening, education, Alzheimer's disease, racial equity and more. In 2020, GHR awarded more than \$50 million in grants.

[GHRfoundation.org/contact](https://GHRfoundation.org/contact)



## Key Partners

BridgeBuilder was an innovative, three-year GHR Foundation initiative, built on the important work of Inspire to Change, LCC, and OpenIDEO. Their contributions will have lasting impact on communities around the globe and provide an exemplary model for those who pursue principles-based bridge-building work in the future:



**Inspire to Change** is a principles-driven team of coaches, researchers, evaluators and social change leaders based in Minneapolis. As our evaluation partner, Inspire to Change helped develop, refine and evolve the BridgeBuilder initiative's guiding principles, which were foundational to our work.

[www.inspire-to-change.org](http://www.inspire-to-change.org)



**OpenIDEO** facilitates challenge programs to bring people together to create a better world. OpenIDEO connected GHR Foundation to more than a thousand community-driven ideas to solve complex problems around the world. OpenIDEO's guidance and expertise also helped bring the top bridge-building ideas to life.

[www.openideo.com](http://www.openideo.com)

## Acknowledgements

BridgeBuilder is driven by its guiding principles. For those, we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our Challenge cohorts. We appreciate how generously they shared their experiences, feedback and time. Thank you:

- BioCarbon Engineering (now Dendra Systems)
- FaithAction
- Five One Labs
- Found in Translation
- LIFT Chicago
- Local Youth Corner
- My Choices Foundation
- NaTakallam
- Peace Direct
- Producers Direct
- SAMA for All
- Talent Beyond Boundaries
- This is My Backyard
- Top Manta
- War Child Canada

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