

Emerging insights from accompanying social-change organizations through transition

CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

Across the social sector, organizations are navigating profound change — funding contractions, leadership turnover, shifting mandates, and systemic pressure to adapt. Many are making high-stakes decisions without the time, information, or trusted spaces needed to act with clarity and confidence.



Civic Strength Partners (CSP) was established to accompany mission-driven organizations through these moments — not by offering prescriptions, but by creating structure, facilitation, and trusted connection. This short learning brief shares what we are observing in our early stage of work. It is written for funders and partners who want to understand *how transitions are unfolding in practice* and *what supports are proving most effective*. These insights are not conclusions, but signals — patterns emerging from the ground that can inform future collaboration and investment.

WHO WE'RE WORKING WITH

Since March, CSP has connected with over 200 organizations interested in mergers, strategic partnerships, or other transformations, with more than 15 pairs of organizations currently working towards solutions. We're built on transparency of our approach and confidentiality in our work. We're keen to share insights into organizational journeys, so when individual transitions and transformations are nearing completion and we have permission, we'll release case studies and showcase the hard work these organizations are undertaking.



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Early engagements and research across geographies and organizational types reveal consistent patterns:

- Decisions being made without the full picture. Under pressure, organizations act before alignment, data, or relationships are in place.
- Human dynamics are undervalued. Change plans often overlook trust, shifting identities and beliefs, behavior change, and emotion — the real levers of endurance.
- Fragmented systems. Expertise and infrastructure exist, but they rarely connect, and are hard to find, creating duplication and fatigue.
- Adaptation is misunderstood. Change is too often treated as failure rather than evidence of resilience.

These realities have shaped how CSP works — and the lessons we are surfacing.

EMERGING LESSONS

The following are eight pillars that are guiding our practice with organizations and conversations with funders and partners.

1

Start Early: Accompaniment Matters Most Upstream

Support is most effective when leadership engages at the outset — to re-anchor vision, set intentions, and build trust.

What's Different: CSP engages before decisions are set, using structured exploration and sense-making.

Why It Matters: Upstream engagement prevents costly mid-stream misalignment and enables strategic, not reactive, change.



2

Balance Structure and Emergence

CSP provides light but steady scaffolding: enough structure to hold, while leaving room for creativity and adaptation.

What's Different: Blends rigor with flexibility - a balance rarely found in traditional consulting models.

Why It Matters: In volatile contexts, overly rigid systems break; adaptive ones evolve.

3

Clarity and Care Over Pressure

Decisions made under duress often compromise purpose and values.

What's Different: CSP creates time and facilitation for grounded, values-aligned decision-making.

Why It Matters: Slowing down allows alignment of purpose and data - the foundation for long-term resilience.



4

Trust, Not Over-Consultation

Endless consultation can dilute energy; trust and shared alignment allow teams to move quickly, learn, and adapt.

What's Different: CSP emphasizes transparency and accountability over process overload.

Why It Matters: Trust converts dialogue into decisive action when resources are constrained.

5

Transitions Aren't Always Loss

Sometimes the most responsible choice is to wind down or uncover creativity in mergers, preserving dignity and legacy.

What's Different: CSP normalizes closure as a legitimate, strategic outcome and opens possibilities for different approaches, reestablishing agency and choice with each organization.

Why It Matters: Recognizing closure as success protects community trust and sector memory.

6

The Space In-Between Is Fertile

The liminal stage between certainty and the unknown can be a generative phase for re-imagining.

What's Different: CSP designs accompaniment around this “messy middle” instead of rushing past it.

Why It Matters: Transitions are opportunities for innovation and partnership - if funded and held with care.

7

Collective Leadership Is Key

Sustainable transitions rely on systems that distribute leadership, build shared accountability, and keep purpose anchored beyond individuals.

What's Different: CSP engages boards, executives, and teams together.

Why It Matters: Collective leadership ensures continuity and embeds learning across the organization.

8

Nature as a Guide

Natural cycles remind us that transition is part of renewal.

What's Different: CSP uses natural pacing - seasons, cycles, pauses - to design humane processes.

Why It Matters: Linear growth models no longer fit; cyclical approaches sustain people and purpose.



WHY THIS LEARNING MATTERS NOW

The upheaval facing civil society is structural, not temporary. Funding volatility, workforce fatigue, and geopolitical uncertainty are reshaping how organizations survive and serve.

CSP's early learning underscores four essentials for a resilient and adaptive social sector, built for the future:

- **Time** — to make informed, values-aligned decisions instead of reacting under pressure.
- **Trust** — to sustain mission and values within collaborations and courage through uncertainty.
- **Systems** — that connect rather than fragment, enabling shared capacity across the ecosystem.
- **Transformation** — as a continuous practice of renewal, where organizations evolve well with integrity, built for the future, not just enduring change.

Re-imagining resilience means investing in these conditions, not only in projects or outputs.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR CSP

Our next phase focuses on strengthening the structures that make accompaniment scalable and shared:

- **Intake & Referral Processes:** Establishing consistent, evidence-based ways to match organizations with the right expertise early, within and outside CSP.
- **Cohorts, Workshops, Deep Dives, & Resources:** Designing spaces for reflection and co-creation — where individual organizations find clarity for their path forward, build sustainable networks, and collective learning informs scalable approaches. For those on a different pathway, we're building resources for additional support.
- **Communications & Partnership Networks:** Building the connective infrastructure that links funders, practitioners, and technical experts into one collaborative ecosystem with easily identifiable entry points for organizations in need.

Each of these steps reinforces CSP's core commitment: upstream engagement, relational depth, and systemic connection.

Join Us

CSP's model is still evolving — and intentionally so. We invite funders, practitioners, and networks to engage in this shared learning agenda: exchanging insights, testing approaches, and strengthening the collective capacity for thoughtful, purpose-aligned change. Together, we can ensure that the missions and communities that matter most not only survive this moment — they transform through it.

