

CRISES AS A CATALYST 2.0

*A Toolkit for Thriving
Through Uncertainty*


OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH RISK

*A guide to help funders, nonprofits, and boards
reframe risk, stay rooted in values, and take
courageous action for community thriving.*

PART II

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As you read through this toolkit and find that it resonates with your experience, you may feel a somatic response to thinking about risk in these crises. We encourage you to find supportive practices to move from activation to regulation, including those shared in our first workbook, [*Thriving Within*](#).

With the interlocking crises of disinvestment, political weaponization, and volatile change, the daily decisions and strategic visions of nonprofit and philanthropic leaders and their boards have been put under a magnifying glass. Their communities, staff, and supporters are asking them to stay true to their missions – and they are constantly calculating the risks at each moment. They often desire to control and protect against external forces and default to the most ‘neutral’ or ‘safe’ response.

However, there is no ‘neutral’ response. Each decision we make is a stance we take. The risks are real AND so are the impacts if we don’t stay true to our values.

At ProInspire, we are swimming in these same waters, working within the social impact sector and navigating the polycrises. We also partner with nonprofit and philanthropic leaders, boards, and organizations and see patterns that ripple across the sector:

NONPROFITS

Some nonprofits that have long championed equity have removed language about equity and the photos and bios of their staff and board from their websites. Individuals certainly don't want to be targeted, but these actions have made them feel like their labor, impact, and even identities have been erased. Affinity groups and DEI Director roles have been canceled, which has created harm for these leaders, many of whom are Black women, who have been carrying the weight of this work. Nonprofits haven't recognized the impact of these decisions on those who often reflect their communities and mission within.

BOARDS

Both nonprofit and foundation boards have shown a tendency to pause and recalibrate their strategy in response to these risks, ultimately withdrawing from active engagement in supporting the mission. Those who are only thinking about their fiduciary responsibility have changed investments to more 'profitable' portfolios to ensure financial sustainability without recognizing they may be investing against the organization's area of focus. Boards may be trying to support sustainability, but that can also mean they are staying silent instead of standing in solidarity.

FUNDERS

In response to risk, some funders are pulling back on their equity work, not just changing their language but also shifting their grantmaking and leaving their nonprofit partners to deal with the aftermath of budget cuts. Others are requiring more documentation in applications or reporting, which is impacting teams already stretched thin. With endowments, access to legal expertise, broad and diversified networks, and other power and resources, funders are uniquely positioned to meet this moment in solidarity with nonprofits and communities, rather than aligning with the external forces contributing to the crises.

Our role in relationship to the risks shapes our perspective of them—and our responsibility to address them. As we've navigated the risks at ProInspire and supported our partners to do the same, these are some practical steps we've taken to stay aligned to mission.



01 IDENTIFY

Identify the risks AND your values. Notice when you feel like something is at stake. Pause and journal. What are the risks in the situation? What are your values and commitments as a leader? Both are likely true — and yet, you may find that you can't reconcile the two. Consider this as a 'polarity' and explore how you can find the 'third way' to minimize the real threats on the risk side and stay steadfast to your mission.

02 EXPAND

Expand your perspective. Without intentionally incorporating multiple perspectives, we can potentially fall into the trap of only seeing risk through our own lens. Identify relationships at all levels to inquire what they see as the risks and consider how you can hold that information alongside your interpretation. You will be able to assess the risk in its full complexity and may even illuminate the shadow-sides of the decisions to find possibilities and new directions.

03 CONSIDER

Consider the self-to-systems impacts. There isn't a right answer, and as we navigate each risk, we may encounter or inadvertently create another. Explore the self-to-systems impacts to find clarity in your decisions: how can you reduce risks for individuals and communities, respond to risks for leaders and organizations, and recognize risks we face in the system?

04 RECOGNIZE

Recognize your responsibility and find courage. Courage is recognizing risk, moving beyond default fear response, and consciously taking action in service of your mission. Reflect on the power and responsibility you have in your role. What are the potential impacts of taking action - or not? To whom are you accountable? Now, make decisions from this place of courage.

BRIGHT SPOTS ACROSS THE SECTOR

We know we can't remove risk in these crises and we don't want to be reactive to them. What we can do is anchor in our values, analyze the choices we have in their full complexity, prioritize what matters most in our mission, and respond with agency. Even though the decisions aren't easier to make nor absent of impact, moving through this process with transparency is just as important as the end result. Across the sector, we've seen leaders embody practices that do just that:

NONPROFITS

Leaders who value collaboration, for example, have engaged staff to decide the language on their website or invited personal choice whether to display their bios. Nonprofits that have an influence strategy in their mission have prepared safety plans prior to posting statements, including the likelihood and potential impact of the risk and what they will do if the risk becomes realized. Aligning with values may take more time, but it lessens the sense of urgency and ultimately unites the team in the process. *See Workbook 3*

BOARDS

Boards that act as co-conspirators demonstrate trust in leadership and an understanding of their role to support the organization beyond their fiduciary oversight role. Board members who reflect on their own connection to the mission have proactively aligned their personal contributions. Boards contribute to sustainability by clearing the path for leaders through storytelling and actively stewarding the narrative and strategy of the organization. *See Workbook 4*

FUNDERS

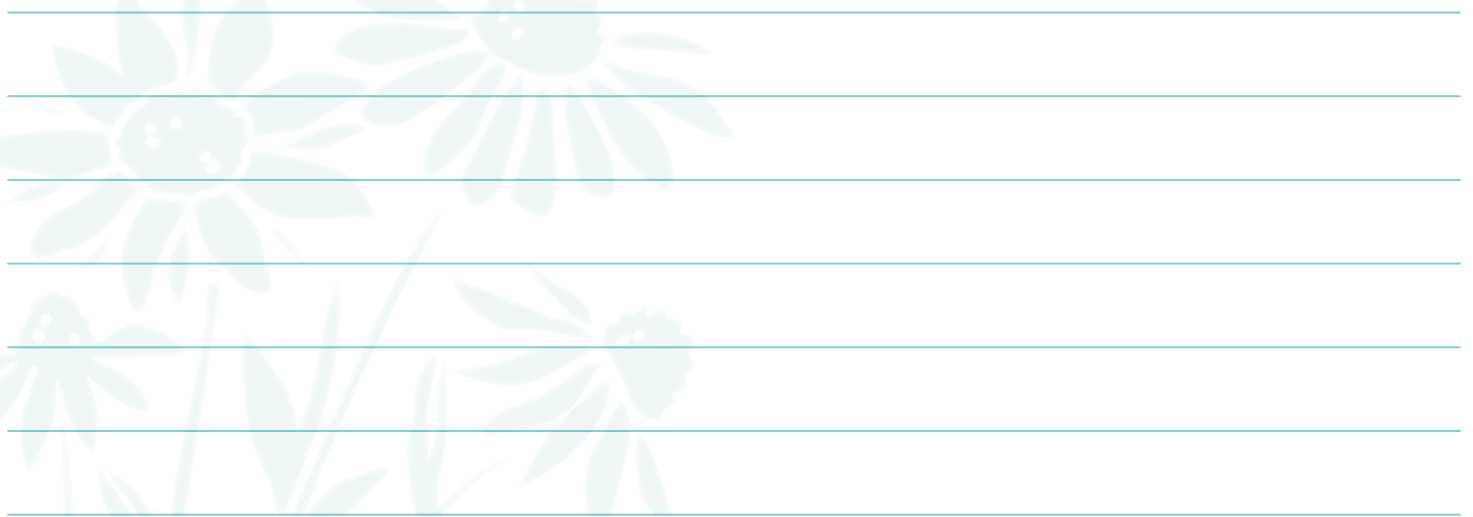
Foundations that have recognized their power have adjusted terms on grant agreements or reduced reporting requirements. Some funders have deepened their engagement and solidarity with the community through co-creation and trust-based philanthropy. Creative courage allows funders to move beyond the perceived constraints in the system and recognize the opportunity to enact change. *See Workbook 5*

Just as we are transforming crises into a catalyst for change, we can use each encounter with risk as a choice point to deepen our commitments. As you remain rooted in your values, you reclaim your power to thrive through uncertainty – finding abundance, solidarity, and creativity in the moment.

Now take a moment to pause. What are you noticing in your breath and body now? You are an active agent in the change and your leadership through the risks can support your work and communities. And, you are not alone. Find support within your community, and invest in those relationships with support from our second workbook, [Thriving Together](#).

REFLECTION SPACE

Notice what surfaces from this guide and capture what feels most important to carry forward.



A reflection space consisting of seven horizontal teal lines. The background features a faint, light teal floral pattern with several large, stylized flowers and leaves.