



SPARK
MICROGRANTS



ANNUAL REPORT
2021

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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Dear Friends,

In times of hardship, the thing I am most grateful for is being in community with you. In 2021, we bore witness to the devastating economic and civic impacts of COVID-19 on the world's most vulnerable people. Over 100 million people were forced into extreme poverty, undoing decades of progress.

This has called us into action. We received an unprecedented level of interest from governments, civil society organizations, and philanthropists committed to doing development differently, committed to driving *durable* results for families facing hardship.

Spark believes that a meaningful recovery from COVID-19 must address structural barriers to progress with an approach that is democratic, equitable, and local. This is why we have initiated a new, ambitious growth path to scale Spark's impact across nations.

Most notably, in Rwanda, we launched the \$6 million Advancing Citizen Engagement (ACE) project, our collaboration with the Government of Rwanda, the Government of Japan, the World Bank, and Comic Relief. ACE will pilot a nationwide implementation of the FCAP, strengthen citizen engagement, and improve the lives of 76,000 people across 249 villages, nearly doubling the total number of villages partnered with since Spark's founding.

Spark also launched its mobile-first reporting tool. Building on Spark's core in-person facilitation, it will enable faster deployment of the FCAP and offer an overall better experience to our community partners.

Finally, across all our countries of operation, Spark invested heavily in research to learn how the FCAP supports families during this time of acute hardship. Consistently, we found that the FCAP enables the poorest households to double their meal consumption, improve productive assets so their wealth can grow, and stimulates a sevenfold increase in female civic engagement, enabling more equitable decision making.

It's worth noting that 2021 also marked the centennial of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire. In his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire wrote:

True generosity lies in striving so that these hands – whether of individuals or entire peoples – need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world.

More and more this past year, I kept coming back to our shared vision where families, together, chart their path forward. This is the future to which Spark is committed. And while it may feel, at times, like we are lost at sea with the challenges of the world rising around us, this is a sign that we are in transition – that our destination is actually a sea change: a world where every single one of us will live with dignity and determine our own positive futures.

In gratitude,



Sasha Fisher
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & CO-FOUNDER





ABOUT SPARK MICROGRANTS

Spark believes in the collective power of people. Yet too often, communities facing poverty are sidelined by the very programs meant to uplift them. Spark updates the development model, from prescriptive to community-led, so that every village can define their own future. Spark's key innovation – the Facilitated Collective Action Process, or FCAP – pairs a village planning process with a seed grant to facilitate cooperative solutions to poverty. Research shows that the FCAP results in families doubling the meals they eat and a sevenfold increase in women engaging in leadership roles. More than 80 percent of communities create inclusive village councils that last.

Since 2010, Spark has reached more than 500,000 people in eight countries, including through its flagship program with the Government of Rwanda. Over the next three years, Spark will accelerate its impact by scaling the national program in Rwanda and expanding to two new countries, producing new research on community-led development, and curating a global community of practice. Today, Spark trains partner organizations and works with governments to scale the FCAP as the system of choice to advance social and economic development, improve lives, and secure lasting change. Spark has offices in Kigali, Kampala, and New York and operates in six countries in East and West Africa. It is a 501(c)(3) organization.

506,300

Lives Improved

509

Partnered Communities

8

Countries Sparked

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Spark's Community of Practice (COP) is a collective of partner organizations that implement the FCAP across various countries and contexts.



**Advocates for
Community
Alternatives**



GHANA, LIBERIA, & GUINEA

CECIDE, ACA, and VDF are piloting the FCAP system in one community in the Guinea, four communities in Ghana, and VDF added five new communities in Liberia as part of a pilot that will inform the best approach to engage local government and secure buy-in to scale nationally.



UGANDA

CEFORD and CDC are building resilience in refugees in 17 communities in West Nile, with more in 2022. Meanwhile, the **Bulambuli Local Government** is piloting a new iteration of the FCAP in 10 communities.



RWANDA

The **Government of Rwanda** has integrated the FCAP into village development programs, to boost livelihoods and civic engagement, in 209 villages.



BURUNDI

FVS-Amie des Enfants is supporting 20 new communities in the southern provinces of Makamba and Bururi to lead their own social and economic development, and graduated 26 existing communities.

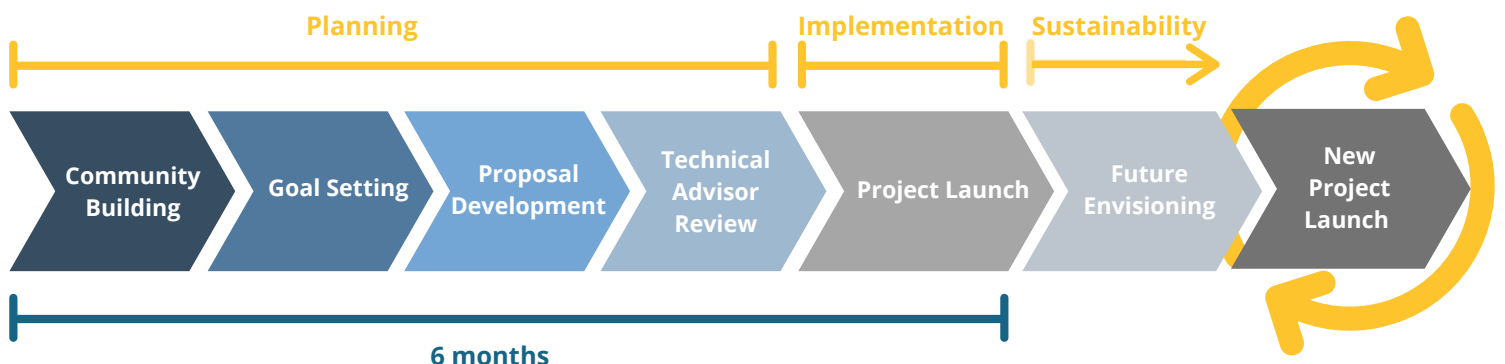


THE FCAP

Spark supports governments and civil society to accelerate equitable economic growth and democratic practice through the Facilitated Collective Action Process (FCAP). The FCAP brings together women and men, young and old, ultra poor and marginalized groups, often for the first time, in a formal setting to develop a village vision and action plan and launch local initiatives together. It enables community control over decisions, plans, and resources and is anchored in democratic principles of participation, transparency, and accountability. The FCAP puts communities in the driver's seat of their own development.

How the FCAP works:

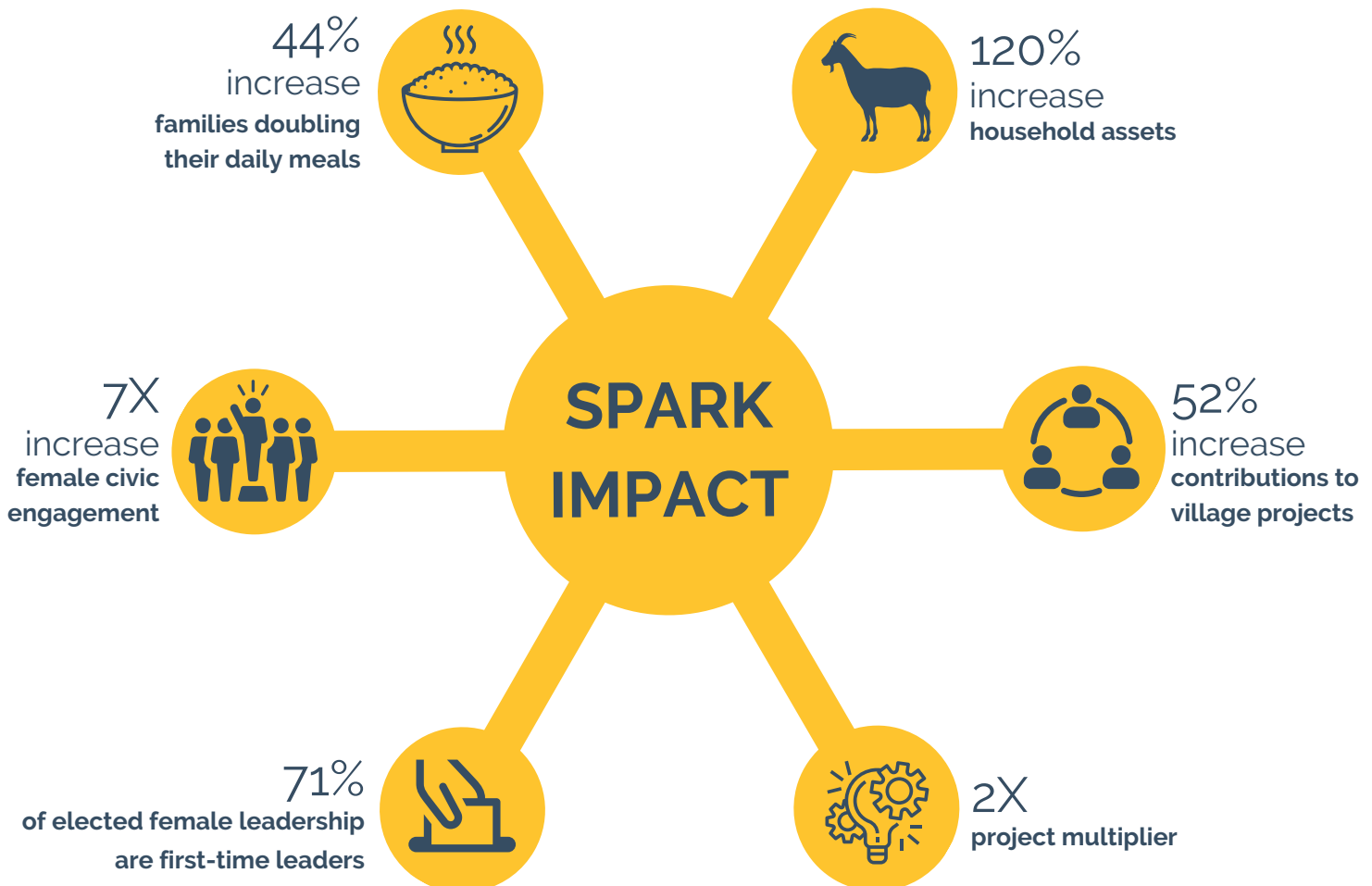
- Each village elects two leaders (under 35 & 50% women) to facilitate weekly meetings.
- Families open a shared savings account and contribute funds on a regular basis.
- Families develop a village action plan, set shared goals and pathways to meet them.
- Every village receives an \$8,000 seed grant to ensure a win after six months.
- Families stay organized, continue to meet regularly, and launch new projects, such as businesses and schools, that reflect their shared vision for a better community.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Driven by the unequal impacts of the pandemic, Spark accelerated its ambitious growth in 2021 to fight poverty, improve lives, and facilitate community-led development. By the close of the year, we engaged almost 250 new communities, conducted over 300 trainings, and doubled our investment in research and innovation. As always, Spark grounded this work in local contexts and adapted it to meet community needs. In Uganda, for example, the Center for Developing Communities (CDC) supports refugee communities. Spark added a trauma-informed component to its trainings to ensure CDC facilitators provided inclusive support to displaced South Sudanese people. Even as Spark projects picked up speed in Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda, we continued to focus on innovating the FCAP system. Spark launched its mobile-first reporting tool with new partners, including the Government of Rwanda. Finally, Spark is investing significant resources in measurement and evaluation, producing new insights into the benefits of the FCAP. We included highlights from these new studies below. While we are far from the end of the pandemic, we also saw communities begin to bounce back this year. Spark remains committed to facilitating the remarkable resilience of people experiencing poverty as we all work for a better future.





PROGRESS AGAINST 2021 GOALS

Demand Building The Governments of Rwanda and Japan, the World Bank, Comic Relief, and Spark Microgrants launched the Advancing Citizen Engagement (ACE) Project in Rwanda. Spark progressed partnerships with the Bulambuli government in Eastern Uganda and FVS-Amie des Enfants in Burundi, while also expanding in the West Nile region in Uganda through a new partnership with a locally-based civil society organization, CDC.



Organizational Advancement As the year came to a close, Spark raised over \$6M, and ended the year with 11 months of cash on hand. Spark secured its largest commitments to date, from the World Bank and Comic Relief. Spark also invested in key strategic hires, including Global Managing Director Lalit Kumar and Rwanda Policy Director Louise Umutoni.



Learnings and Standards The Impact Team published an internally-led evaluation analyzing how the FCAP affects livelihoods and social cohesion over time by looking at a variety of data sets across Spark's operations in Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi. In December, Spark launched an external evaluation of the ACE Project led by Innovations for Poverty Action. These investments reflect Spark's commitment to evidence-informed project design and implementation.



Program Excellence With the expansion in 2021 of its new, mobile-first FCAP tool, CommCare, Spark is now increasingly able to make faster, evidence-based adjustments to its operations that reduce costs, improve outcomes, and provide greater responsiveness to communities and their needs.



RWANDA

In September, the Government of Rwanda, the Government of Japan, the World Bank, UK-based charity Comic Relief, and Spark Microgrants launched the Advancing Citizen Engagement (ACE) Project. Because the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic fall heaviest on rural communities, the \$6 million ACE Project will specifically support small businesses in rural areas, improving livelihoods for around 76,000 people in 249 villages. ACE will also train and support government officials to engage citizens in local development planning and increase uptake of social programs.



SPOTLIGHT | Valentine (SEDO)

Valentine is a socio-economic development officer (SEDO) in Rwanda. She studied human science in secondary school and, for the last 13 years, has supported local village development efforts and worked to connect communities to government services. One of the many SEDO partners that Spark partners with in Rwanda, she tells us she's inspired by the change she facilitates in communities.

IN HER WORDS

The FCAP meetings change mindsets. The meetings help open up new possibilities in the villages. They are just as important as the grant. The meetings also help ensure greater ownership. Village projects sustain because of goal setting and planning.

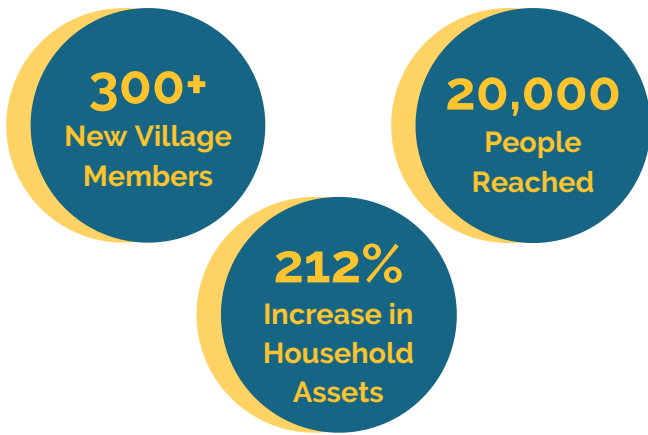


UGANDA



SUPPORTING REFUGEES

The West Nile region of Uganda is home to over 1.5 million South Sudanese refugees. Refugee and host families alike face food insecurity and limited economic opportunity. In 2018, Spark partnered with Community Empowerment for Rural Development (CEFORD), a local nonprofit, on an FCAP pilot that supported nearly 2,000 families in 12 villages. These communities launched agriculture and livestock businesses and set up community savings accounts. As Spark winds down its engagement with CEFORD, it is deepening its support of the refugee community through a new partnership with the Center for Developing Communities (CDC), a local civil society organization. In 2021, Spark trained CDC on its community-led approach and launched the FCAP with five new communities. Spark also worked with CDC to incorporate trauma-informed programming into this version of the FCAP. This focus on quality projects that are adapted for refugee needs will support communities as they work together to chart a better future.



GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

In 2021, Spark partnered with the Government of Uganda to support local development initiatives. Spark's first program in Uganda began with five communities in the Bulambuli district in 2011. Villages used their grants to finance a variety of projects: health centers, village savings and loan groups, and dairy farming, among others. Based on that success, the Bulambuli government asked Spark to pilot a modified FCAP that integrated with its development initiatives. In response, Spark launched a new pilot in ten villages that explores the range of benefits produced by the FCAP based on grant size. To support the government's effectiveness, Spark conducted extensive training sessions with Bulambuli representatives on all aspects of the FCAP. Modules covered training methodologies, community meeting processes, data collection and evaluation, and more. All ten communities have received their grants and launched their projects.





BURUNDI

In 2021, building on three years of success in which they co-facilitated the FCAP in 27 communities in Burundi, Spark and FVS-Amie des Enfants (formerly FVS-AMADE) launched a pilot with 20 new FCAP partnerships. Spanning 18 communities and two cooperative groups, Spark collaborated with FVS to design and implement the project, which created cooperatives of representatives from savings groups to facilitate the FCAP in new communities. The goal is to create space for communities that would not otherwise meet to learn from one another.

Ten communities have chosen a project and received their grant, and the other half receive will their grant in early 2022. Two cooperatives from an earlier partnership have entered the post-implementation phase, in which they will review their success with the initial project and begin planning for the next. These developments are promising, and the variation in phases provides a more robust research base. Spark's Impact Team conducted community evaluations at the end of the year to begin assembling a greater understanding of the FCAP's impact. Through the FCAP, Spark and FVS are putting communities at the core of development.



SPOTLIGHT | Anne (Cooperative)

Anne is a member of the Dushigikire Abana cooperative in Bujumbura province. Comprised of 22 savings groups, her cooperative first met in early 2021 and quickly identified food insecurity as their most pressing issue. They chose cow rearing as their project and purchased calves with their microgrant. While they raise the cows to sell, they are using the manure produced as fertilizer to ramp up crop production. It's working: their crop yields have grown dramatically, and they now plant beans, corn, and other vegetables. Anne's own bean harvest has flourished. Last year, she grew about 20 kg of beans each season. She expects nearly 400 kg in her next harvest.

IN HER WORDS

Before the cooperative, I only really knew my neighbors. When the FCAP gathered us together, we all met savings group members from other areas. We started working together, and we became friends.



20
New
Community
Partners

94%
People Take
Civic Action
Together

150%
Increase in
Household
Assets



RESEARCH >>> IMPACT

"I feel free among community members now... women are valued."

As Spark has grown, it has invested significant resources to better understand the impact of the FCAP system on communities. In mid-2020, Spark's Impact team revised its approach to measuring impact and began evaluating communities on an annual basis to better understand the long-term effects of the FCAP, particularly after the initial grant-funded project has completed.

At the end of 2021, the Impact Team published initial findings using this new model. (The above quote is from a woman in the Gatwa community in Rwanda.) The evaluations analyzed how the FCAP affects livelihoods and social cohesion over time by looking at a variety of data sets across Spark's operations in Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi. While the full report will be published later this year, we've included a sneak peek at some of its key findings below.

LIVELIHOODS



In Burundi, the average value of a **family's assets increased from \$100 to almost \$250.**

In Uganda, refugee assets **more than doubled.**

SOCIAL COHESION

In Rwanda, community members reported a **30% increase in community acceptance.**

In Uganda, communities saw a **41% increase in social cohesion.**

In Burundi, **participation in community projects increased from 52% to 88%.**



GENDER EQUITY



Across all countries, **women gained a 17% increase in income.**

Household decision making power and independence also significantly improved.

In Uganda, the average **savings of women increased from \$10 to \$85.**



FINANCIALS

Confirmed Income

Foundations	\$5,676,357
Individuals	\$233,781
Corporations & Law Firms	\$139,760
Total Income	\$6,049,899

Expenses

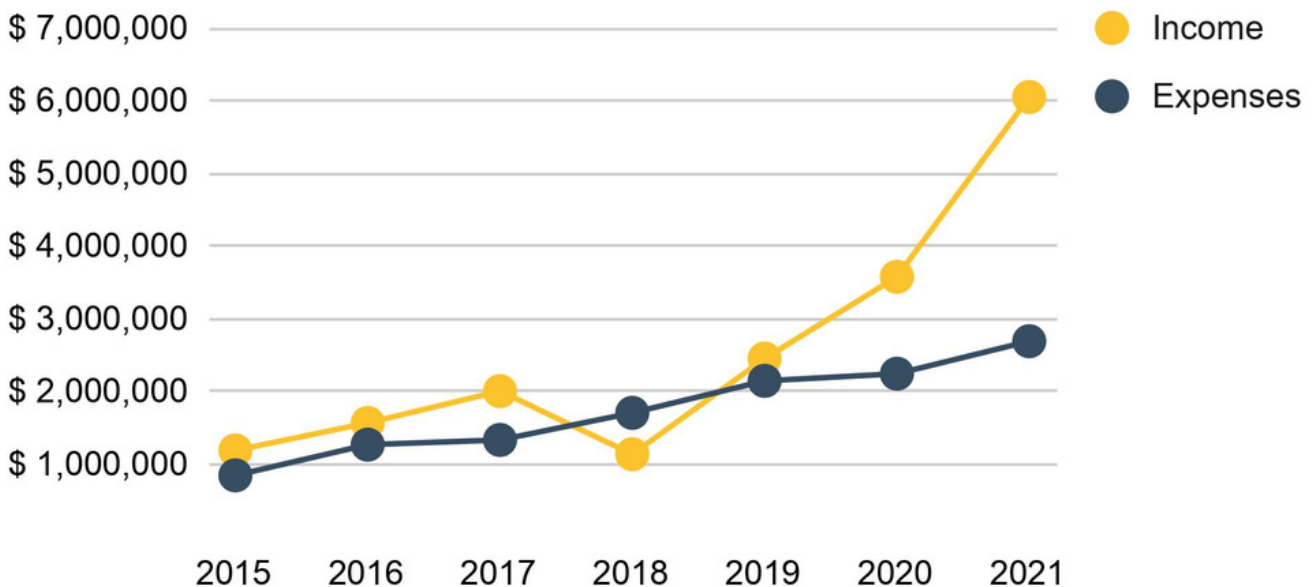
Microgrants	\$281,493
Program Expenses	\$222,475
Personnel Costs	\$905,401
Research & Development	\$98,061
Operating Expenses	\$1,175,997
Total Expenses	\$2,683,427

Net Income	\$3,366,472
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Financial statements are provisional as of May 1, 2022.

REVENUE & EXPENSES

Income and Expenses





PARTNERS

VISIONARIES

\$100,000+

Child Relief International
Comic Relief
Imago Dei Fund
Japanese Social Development Fund
Lucille Foundation
Peery Foundation
Pilot House Philanthropy
Segal Family Foundation
Woodcock Foundation
World Centric

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

\$10,000 - \$100,000

Amol Jain
Anthony Massaro
Anonymous
Bylo Chacon Foundation
Chris Schiavetta
Dan Lufkin
David Cock Foundation
Joseph Frumkin
Julia Morgan Fund
Marcy Engel
Marr-Munning Trust
Martin & Kirsten Segal
Maureen White
Peter Sherris
Ripple Foundation
Sall Family Foundation
Sandra Wijnberg
Stavros Niarchos Foundation
Vista Hermosa Foundation
Weiss Asset Management

SPARK ADVOCATES

UNDER \$10,000

Aaron Yassin
Alex Amouyel
Alexandra Fisher
Amanda Waite
Amazon Smile
Amy Joelson

Arthur Gray
Brad Turpie
Caitlin Hamill
Carlos Aponte
Charlotte Triefus
Christopher Anderson
Claudia Wornum
Community Foundation of Western
Massachusetts
Daniel Baum
Daniel Casanova
Daniel Pincus
Danielle Raso
Elizabeth Mckenna
Elliot Margolies
FUMCOG
GlobeMed
James Meeks
Jason Lynn
Jeffrey Pascoe
Jenny Panella
Joanne Levin
John Cullison
John Hammel Strauss
Jonathan Jackson
Jonathan Nzayikorera
Joseph Frumkin
Julia Morgan Fund
Kurt King
Louis Thompson
Mark Lewittes
Mark Rosen
Matthew Forti
Nancy Lublin
Neal Lesh
Network for Good
Pay Pal Giving Fund
Rowena Luk
Sally Hayman
Sarah Graizbord
Scott Daniels
Scott Zemser
Stacey Faella
Stephen & Judith Ellenburg
Stephen Holmgren
Suzanne Joelson
Thompson-Lewis Charitable Fund
Zachary Richner



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