



GRANTCRAFT
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LEADERSHIP SERIES

From Words to Action

A Practical Philanthropic Guide to
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



By Barbara Chow



Written by Barbara Chow
Edited by Jen Bokoff, Foundation Center
Designed by Betty Saronson, Foundation Center

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This paper is part of the GrantCraft Leadership Series. Resources in this series are not meant to give instructions or prescribe solutions; rather they are intended to spark ideas, stimulate discussion, and suggest possibilities.

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About This Paper

WHY THIS PAPER AND WHO IS THE AUTHOR?

A few years ago, my colleague Jal Mehta wrote a blog post with the provocative headline **“Deeper Learning Has a Race Problem.”**



The “deeper learning” Jal was referring to are the higher order thinking, social emotional, and academic skills that research has documented are critical for economic and civic success in the 21st century. As the program director of a foundation funding deeper learning, this post saddened and frustrated me.

I am currently the Education program director at the Heising Simons Foundation, but before that, I led the Education program at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for an eight-year term.¹ I had always conceived of our work at Hewlett in supporting these vital deeper learning skills as part of a larger equity agenda. Achieving equitable outcomes for students drives me to do this work. I, myself, am a person of color whose early experiences were shaped by an acute sense of my “outsider” identity and my parents’ unwavering faith in the public education system as the path to acceptance.

Jal’s observation coincided with the start of a cycle of deep introspection at the Hewlett Foundation focused on building an inclusive culture. As issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have risen from an implicit assumption to an explicit focus within the Education Program’s work, we embarked on a complicated journey through the minefields of race, privilege, and concepts (like equity) that are not well understood and yet laden with meaning.

In 2016, animated by the desire to do and learn more, I volunteered to co-lead a foundation-wide workgroup focused on grantmaking practices and started to develop a DEI strategy within the Education Program. In April 2017, after I completed my time at Hewlett I was fortunate to become a resident fellow at the Bellagio Center. This Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored opportunity allowed me to focus exclusively on DEI for a month and to take a broader view of the field that extended beyond my education specific focus.

Through this process, I learned a great deal about how experts and other U.S.-based foundations have approached diversity, equity, and inclusion. There is an impressive body of scholarship on this topic, and I have been inspired by the thoughtfulness with which my colleagues in the philanthropic sector have tackled the challenge. However, while most of the literature addresses how foundations can cultivate DEI internally, comparatively less is known about how they are changing their grantmaking practices to reflect a commitment to DEI. My hope is that this compendium of foundation activities to support DEI will add to the growing knowledge base and stimulate some innovative ideas about how best to move forward in this complex arena.

HOW CAN I USE THIS PAPER?

This paper aims to inspire new ideas and thinking by foundations about how DEI can become more integrated in grantmaking practices and a broader foundation ethos. I hope the examples and observations shared here push your thinking and inspire conversation within your organization and among peers that can move from buzzwordy theory to concrete action. The discussion questions at the end are a way to reflect on the text and find relevance and linkages to your own strategies.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

You can be in touch with me by email at barbara@barbarachow.com or on Twitter at [@HFBarbaraChow](https://twitter.com/HFBarbaraChow). The Heising Simons Foundation website hsfoundation.org has more information about my current work and more information on the Hewlett Foundation’s DEI lens can be found [here](#). GrantCraft, a service of Foundation Center, offers resources to help funders be more strategic about their work, and has published this paper as part of its leadership series to encourage conversation about this topic. Explore GrantCraft’s resources at grantcraft.org and on Twitter by following [@grantcraft](https://twitter.com/grantcraft). Other services and tools that Foundation Center offers can be accessed at foundationcenter.org. Finally, the D5 Coalition has compiled a rich set of resources, case studies, and principles, which can be found at d5coalition.org.

Introduction: Why This Matters

It is no secret that the United States is undergoing a rapid demographic transformation that is reshaping our society, our politics, and our culture.

The trends are unambiguous:

- Close to 40 percent of the population is composed of people of color,² a figure that is expected to grow to 50 percent by 2044.³
- The Hispanic/Latino population is one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the country, currently representing 18 percent of the overall population and outpaced only by the Asian-American population, which grew 72 percent between 2000 and 2015.^{4,5}
- These population increases are already contributing to changes in the labor pool. Within the next five years, more than 43 percent of new entrants to the workforce will be people of color.⁶
- Of note, a large share of these demographic changes are the result of family structure, not new immigration; 50 percent of children 0–5 are children of color, compared with 22 percent of adults 66 and older.⁷

But philanthropic investments are neither reflecting these changes nor accounting for issues of historical disadvantage. In 2013, the largest U.S. foundations gave away approximately \$24 billion.⁸ The best data available (which has limitations; see box on the next page) derived from Foundation Center suggests that about 7 percent of those funds are specifically set aside to support ethnic and racial minorities, with smaller fractions funding women and girls, people with disabilities, and LGBT populations.⁹ These funds have been awarded by a set of grantmakers governed by mostly White leaders¹⁰ (92 percent of foundation CEOs and 83 percent of executive staff are White), often to nonprofits that mirror these statistics.¹¹

Meanwhile, income inequality has widened along racial/ethnic fault lines and is threatening to become permanent.

- The median White household had \$111,146 in wealth holdings in 2011, compared to \$7,113 for the median Black household and \$8,348 for the median Latino household.¹²

- Almost 2 out of 3 White adults become part of the middle class by middle age, compared to just 3 out of 10 for Black adults.¹³

These disparities broaden at each life stage, reflecting the cumulative effects of disadvantage.

The idea that a child's success in life is preordained, shaped by race, ethnicity, gender, class, and geography, is deeply antithetical to our country's founding values of fairness and equality of opportunity. Philanthropy, particularly in education but also across all issue areas, cannot ignore the ingrained patterns of inequality and discrimination that are the setting for all our grantees' work. We will not be able to achieve the broad societal improvements we crave, nor prepare for our country's future, without recognizing and supporting the changing face of America. Equity is fundamental to our economic prosperity. To the extent this is unfamiliar territory, foundation leaders need to immerse themselves in the history of racism and the ways in which it has permeated our laws, policies, and practices.

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They must also chronicle their own private journey through discrimination, unfairness, or inequity and discover the ways that individual bias has affected their decision making. Overall, foundations need a nuanced approach to DEI that doesn't just pay lip service, but considers carefully how their culture and practices contribute to or take away from DEI.

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN HISTORY

Foundation leaders must immerse themselves in the history of racism in the U.S. and the ways in which it has permeated our laws, policies, and practices. Following from the terrible events on June 17, 2015 in Charleston, South Carolina, a reading list known as #Charlestonsyllabus was compiled. The list offers insights on race, race relations, racism, and racial violence and was conceived by Chad Williams, made viral by Kidada Williams, organized by Keisha Blain, and assisted by Melissa Morrone, Ryan Randall, and Cecily Walker. The list of readings and more information on this resource can be found at aaihs.org/resources/charlestonsyllabus.

Even if you think you're aware of the U.S.'s history with race, find at least one resource from this and look at it again with fresh eyes. Consider sharing some of these with your staff and hosting a "book club" of sorts to actively discuss.

DIGGING INTO THE PHILANTHROPY DATA

Determining the extent to which foundation giving benefits specific population groups is challenging given the available data. Grants are coded as serving a specified population group if the foundation has provided a grant description or related information that explicitly specifies a population group as a beneficiary of the grant, or if the recipient organization receiving the grant includes an explicit focus within its stated mission. The amount of funding reported likely under-represents the level of support that foundations intend to benefit specific population groups due to incomplete reported information, such as grant descriptions. In addition, Foundation Center does not code grants based on the demographic characteristics of the recipient communities or their geographic location.

Even with fully-accurate population coding, systematically coding grants for diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives specifically is challenging given the different ways that institutions define this work.

Foundation Center conducts specific deep-dive research on several types of funding. Relevant to this discussion, recent research as part of its BMAfund.org initiative found that support for boys and men of color as a broader population category continued steady growth—\$50.9 million in 2013 and \$62.7 million in 2014. Funding for boys and men of color increased more than six-fold since 2010. The research also showed that most foundation dollars explicitly designated for Black men and boys provided program support (59 percent). A large proportion (41 percent) also supported policy, advocacy, and systems reform. This is significant, given that among overall foundation grantmaking, only 13 percent supported policy, advocacy, and systems reform.

How Should Foundations Define Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?

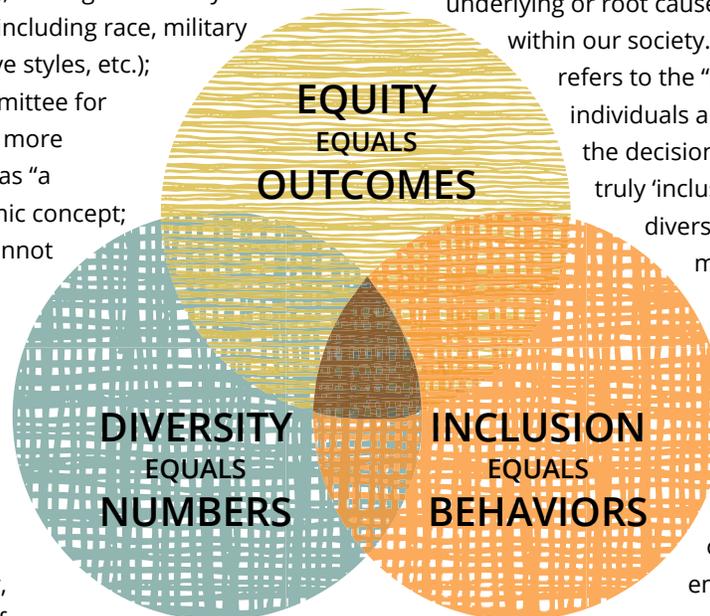
Diversity, equity, and inclusion are highly distinct concepts among those who follow this work closely, but are often jumbled together by those who do not. While not all the nonprofits I spoke with agree on the importance of a common set of definitions (it was the practices and culture that made a difference), at the Hewlett Foundation we began by cataloguing the various ways others have defined these terms.

We did so because we thought we needed to have a clear, shared understanding of what we were trying to achieve, both for ourselves and for our grantees, from the inception. Without this, and given the many ways in which these words have been interpreted, we could easily have assumed we had the same goals, but actually talk past each other. It should also be noted that while these terms have taken on a specific meaning at this point in time within a community of practitioners, the definitions below represent the latest in an ongoing and evolving understanding of these ideas.

Diversity is a particularly broad term with a multitude of definitions that encompass the range of human characteristics. Some organizations, such as the Association for Talent Development (ATD), catalogue as many as 17 distinct types of diversity (including race, military background, thinking/cognitive styles, etc.); others, like the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, are more qualitative, defining diversity as “a nuanced, complex and dynamic concept; true and inclusive diversity cannot be reduced to numbers and measures alone.”¹⁴ Many foundations have chosen to craft their own definitions that can be tailored for their context and history. Nearly all definitions, however, for reasons of historic exclusion, explicitly name race, ethnicity, and gender as core aspects of diversity; many also include disability and sexual orientation.

The definitions I have found most useful come from the D5 Coalition,¹⁵ in part because they are specific, are vivid, and represent a consensus among key leaders of the foundation community. Here, diversity is defined broadly to include various elements of human difference, including race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and gender. Nuanced definitions of diversity also recognize the intersectional nature of identity and the complex and cumulative ways in which different forms of discrimination (based upon these attributes) combine, overlap, and intersect.¹⁶ Diversity is differentiated from the idea of “equity,” which involves the promotion of “justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes and distribution of resources by institutions or systems.” Tackling equity “requires an understanding of the underlying or root causes of outcome disparities within our society.” The third concept, “inclusion,” refers to the “degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate fully in the decision-making processes, while a truly ‘inclusive’ group is necessarily diverse, a ‘diverse’ group may not be ‘inclusive.’”¹⁷

A succinct way of describing these different concepts is that “diversity is a number, equity is an outcome, inclusion is a behavior.” All three are critical if an organization is to truly embrace a just framework.



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Where Should Foundations Begin?

Certainly, there is no right way to begin this work, although nearly all those experienced with this topic suggest that there is a strong relationship between the internal work that foundations must embark on and their external grantmaking practices. Asking grantees to submit organizational demographic data, undertake cultural competency training, or achieve a certain demographic profile may appear hypocritical and intrusive if the foundation does not undertake the same activities and present the same information.

For this reason, many foundations start their journey from a place of self-reflection, looking hard at their own organizational profile, dynamics, and culture. Certainly, this was the experience I had at the Hewlett Foundation, where small-group conversations, facilitated by staff trained for this purpose, initiated a two-year period of introspection designed to help individuals open up, share their personal experiences, learn together, and bring their most authentic selves and voices to the job. These conversations were highly illuminating. For example, we learned that some members of the staff felt uncomfortable speaking up in large-group meetings because they did not have the advanced degrees or broad experiences that others brought with them. With the broader team bearing witness to these learnings, we all became sensitized to these issues and accountable for shifting practice. We learned there is an arc to this learning; as Larry Kramer indicated in a recent blog post¹⁸: “Internal conversations among staff have edged from reserved to challenging to the beginnings of understanding and acceptance.”

As I've spoken with other foundations engaged in similar journeys, I have found that many “flat” institutions harbor a certain unspoken hierarchy that make it difficult for all voices to be equally heard. Lack of inclusivity is problematic on many levels. Not only does it weaken the organization itself, it is also extremely difficult to authentically embrace a DEI perspective without experiencing these practices oneself.

Alongside these internal conversations, programs were experimenting with a variety of different grantmaking practices to bring a greater DEI lens to their work. Several other foundations with whom I spoke followed a similar journey—some starting internally, some externally, but all

highlighting the interplay between grantmaking practices and internal conversations about DEI.

While this may seem a little navel gazing, ensuring that the foundation itself has the organizational culture, competency, and profile to take on DEI activities is perhaps the most crucial step a foundation can take. After all, grantmaking is more art than science, and specific grant choices are the result of hundreds of micro-decisions about strategy, the capacity of specific nonprofits, etc., that reflect the orientation of the grantmakers, both as individuals who carry within them a certain level of implicit bias and as officers within an institution that may reinforce (or diminish) these beliefs. Embedding a DEI lens within the regular thinking and practice of foundation staff at all levels is an essential precursor to meaningful change.

Fortunately, much has been written about how foundations can better source, recruit, and train program staff and leadership to reflect the country's changing demographics. There are many excellent articles about the paths that DEI may take through a foundation.¹⁹ In particular, the D5 coalition, a group formed by the philanthropic sector specifically to address this topic, has significantly advanced our understanding of how best to champion and adopt a DEI lens within a foundation.

D5 STATE OF THE WORK REPORT

ACTION STEP

The D5 coalition was a five-year initiative launched in 2010. Their final State of the Work report offers important data, stories, and learning for philanthropy leadership. Read the report [here](#).

WHAT ARE THE BEST FOUNDATION PRACTICES TO SUPPORT DEI?

As indicated previously, perhaps the most important foundation practice to support DEI is ensuring that the individuals who comprise the foundation staff are themselves knowledgeable about the nuances and history of DEI, from academic, societal, and foundation perspectives, and embody the changing demographics of the country. Moving in this direction may be a heavy lift, and the D5 coalition has developed a wonderful action guide that is full of resources, examples, and models that detail effective practices and key actors in this journey.²⁰ They helpfully catalogued everything into lifecycle stages of this work, including making the case, crafting policy, implementing operational practice, implementing programmatic practice, and monitoring for accountability. One of my favorite resources I discovered through this guide is the Akonadi Foundation's 2007 Strategic Plan: Movement Building for Racial Justice, because it is a concrete example of the kind of visioning that is possible.

In addition, even as the internal change process begins to work its way through foundation norms and culture, there are a set of externally facing grantmaking practices that foundations could consider to ensure that these concepts take meaningful hold in daily work.

I divide these practices into three broad categories: supporting existing grantees, selecting new ones, and considering strategic pivots with a greater equity focus.

Supporting Existing Grantees

Many established foundations have high grant renewal rates. These foundations pride themselves on being steady, long-term partners, supporting grantees with high levels of general operating support.

For the most part, these are considered effective grantmaking practices. Grantees need to be able to rely on continued, patient philanthropic capital if they are to build capacity and plan for impact.

However, this practice is problematic from a DEI perspective in a number of ways. Historical inequities favor certain kinds of organizations, helping them become stronger and more effective. In turn, foundation strategies become linked to a set of high-performing organizations that may not be particularly diverse. Put differently, the known universe is what informs grantmaking strategies. It is often bereft of the types of knowledge that groups not already in the loop can surface.

So, how does a foundation balance commitment to its existing grantees and a DEI perspective? The answer in part lies in supporting those nonprofits already funded by the foundation that are interested in becoming more diverse and inclusive. There are several ways of doing this.

BUILD GRANTEE CAPACITY

A critical first step in exploring DEI with existing grantees is supporting their efforts to incorporate DEI into their own operations. Many of our grantees at Hewlett were intensely interested in and supportive of DEI but needed consultant support, communities of practice, and other ways of continuing to improve their organizational routines. This is challenging and uncomfortable work, and nonprofit CEOs

often find themselves isolated and uncertain about how best to proceed. “You want a safe space, where you can try things out and say things that you may not even mean,” one nonprofit CEO said to me. “These are treacherous waters. When a funder is there, that won’t happen.” “This is one of the hardest journeys I’ve been on,” said another. “Foundations need to push but should refrain from a formulaic response on diversity.”

Specific actions to build capacity:

- Offer targeted grants to build the organizational capacity to support DEI. As we followed the old adage that we should “put our money where our mouth is,” this was one of the early steps that our program took as we began to incorporate a DEI lens into our grantmaking.²¹ This work is ongoing, with many lessons learned²² and unanswered questions. Others, including the Meyer Memorial Trust²³ and the Packard Foundation²⁴, have done so as well. Common activities include support for staff recruitment and training (including funding for search consultants who specialize in diversity recruitment), integrating DEI into strategic plans, and funding an independent review through a “diversity audit” that may for example, provide feedback to a grantee about how they are perceived by key stakeholder groups and suggest an action plan if needed. While all of this can be helpful, “just make certain that the DEI activities and the use of a consultant aren’t considered a side or separate effort,” cautions one nonprofit leader. “It must be integrated into the ongoing culture of the organization if it is to have a lasting effect.”

A critical first step in exploring DEI with existing grantees is supporting their efforts to incorporate DEI into their own operations.

Both foundations and grantees often work with outside consultants to support their DEI work. But, when starting out, foundations and grantees may be at a loss to find a consultant who is a good fit for the organization. Factors such as work and communication style, familiarity with the work, and personality alignment

with leadership are important to note in finding a cultural fit; without it, the effort may not be sticky. “The first time we hired a consultant, they started out with a very basic presentation on DEI issues. We’ve been talking about issues of race for 30 years so this was not a useful starting place for us,” said one nonprofit. Other nonprofits suggested they would value a Yelp-like crowdsourced tool for DEI consultants. Helping grantees get off on the right foot early saves time and money. For those just starting out, the New Schools Venture fund has a nice list of DEI consultants.²⁵ At Hewlett, we relied upon Keecha Harris & Associates to help jumpstart our capacity-building program.

One note of caution: Taking on DEI is a difficult and tricky task. It takes a healthy and stable organization to examine itself and weather some of the unexpected backlash and challenges that highly personal conversations about race and identity can bring about. If an organization is in the midst of a leadership change, is struggling financially, or is otherwise not in a strong position, a DEI focus may not be appropriate.

- Allow time for DEI practice to become established and effective. We and our nonprofit colleagues have found that the journey toward greater diversity and inclusion is not linear. Although there is no established timeline, it almost certainly will not happen overnight or even over a few years. In this work, staff will need to get comfortable being uncomfortable. That’s a culture shift that will take a while for an organization to process. One common indicator of an inclusive culture is a staff survey that measures the degree to which all staff feel included in decision making. The results sometimes take a dip downward after DEI efforts are underway. “It gets worse before it gets better,” one grantee reported after a two-year DEI initiative. “DEI is a challenge. We will make mistakes. In our organization, the white people began to feel devalued after we started this work.” This nonprofit leader went on to say, “Foundations are so focused on metrics, it is scary to say that a staff measure of inclusivity dropped by 10 percent in one year. It’s important to engage and use metrics in a way that lets people share honestly and not worry about collecting the metrics.”
- Learn together. Some foundations have funded groups of grantees to attend conferences that focus on DEI issues (such as Facing Race²⁶). This helps to create

a learning cohort and exposes grantees to broad and wide-ranging viewpoints. Others have created professional learning communities to provide technical assistance and peer support to nonprofits focused on educational equity.²⁷ Foundations have supported and joined book clubs that provide a common point of reference and a jumping-off point for group discussion.

ASK ABOUT DEI IN GRANT RENEWAL PROPOSALS

A second key step is to include questions about how issues of DEI affect grantees' thinking and plans in renewal proposals. This is particularly important for grantmaking strategies that include a significant human services focus, such as education or health. Equity is about the fundamental structural barriers that impede the realization of fair and just outcomes. It is about root cause and systemic change; patterns of inequality, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination that are deeply ingrained in our history, norms, rules, and culture. It cannot be divorced from the communities and context that give rise to it and cannot be sustainably resolved without engagement from those affected.

Equity is about the fundamental structural barriers that impede the realization of fair and just outcomes.

As program officers review renewal proposals, it may be helpful to include questions specifically focused on how a proposed grant advances DEI, even if DEI targets are not the explicit grant purpose. Though these questions may not be appropriate for all grantmaking strategies, they could serve as useful prompts to raise with grantees during the renewal process:

- What population groups will benefit from or be burdened by your proposal? What are the strategies for advancing racial equity or mitigating unintended consequences?²⁸
- To what extent do you include the same kinds of people in the planning of your project as those you are serving?²⁹
- How does your thinking about racial equity inform how you develop and implement programs?³⁰

EMBED DEI IN STAFF INTERACTIONS

Foundation staff – everyone from C-suite leaders to program staff to grants managers to assistants – signal the importance of foundation values in a variety of ways, including through site visits, regular check-ins, and grantee meetings. Being conscious of the often unintentional ways in which these interactions convey privilege and concern (or lack thereof) of DEI values is worth some forethought. For example, when planning an annual grantee meeting, it is helpful to be intentional about who is in the room and who isn't, who is facilitating the meeting, and the cost/benefit tradeoff for grantees (what will they gain from the meeting and what can they share?). The choice of venue and location can also signal concern about DEI issues; e.g., the setting you choose may inadvertently convey the impression of status and privilege, or signal what populations you care about.

Here are a few ideas to spark a dialogue about individual program officer/grantee interactions:

- Consider inviting a broader range of grantee staff to foundation/grantee meetings (look beyond the CEO and development director)
- Look for cues about who is leading the discussion and the extent to which diverse voices participate in the conversation
- Ask about community participation in the nonprofit's activities

For large events:

- Pay attention to the venue and location
- Include speakers who discuss equity issues
- Be mindful of who is invited to participate in panel presentations and keynote speeches, and ensure there is diverse representation

COLLECT DISAGGREGATED DATA

Data disaggregated by diversity characteristics can drive conversations and insights. More on this later, but the collection of demographic data on a grantee organization is an important first step in better understanding how the nonprofit may or may not reflect the community it serves. Many foundations use these data as a means of tracking their own progress on DEI issues or for learning purposes,

i.e., taking stock of the composition of their current grantee pool. Some have taken this further, deploying the data as a grantee selection tool and sometimes to exert influence over staffing and board decisions made by the nonprofit. One way that this has found expression is through “diversity concern letters,” which underscore foundation concerns about the makeup of an organization and/or its leadership. For example, the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation in North Carolina lays out a detailed board-approved policy and process addressing grantee diversity for nonprofit boards, insisting that they represent the communities they are intended to serve.³¹

I must admit that I have mixed feelings about this idea. On the one hand, it is my understanding that these diversity concern letters have elicited change in the nonprofit sector, resulting in more diverse grantee organizations. And without a specific provocation, it is possible that nonprofits will move too slowly, given the inherent challenges of taking on a DEI initiative. On the other hand, I’m not convinced that nonprofits who hire people of color or recruit new board members under the threat of funding cut-offs or who see DEI as a compliance or accountability requirement will meaningfully advance its core tenets. I worry about the potential for backlash or “tokenism” and whether the

nonprofit will give meaningful voice and authority to those individuals who may have joined the organization under these circumstances. Ideally, grantees come to this work authentically and enthusiastically, and many have. But if diversity is not a priority, selective use of grantee concern letters, particularly those that focus on board leadership, can elevate this as an urgent matter.

The journey toward greater diversity and inclusion is not linear.

Working with existing grantees will likely comprise a significant share of a foundation’s daily work. Given the state of the nonprofit sector, which itself lacks diversity, it is particularly important for foundations to find ways to strengthen their grantees’ commitment to and understanding of DEI. In my experience, this is not a hard sell. In fact, the nonprofits with whom I worked were well ahead of the foundation community in their embrace of DEI. Providing the encouragement and financial resources felt like the easy part.

New Grantee Identification and Selection

Foundations often live in “bubbles” that are circumscribed by the relationships they have built up over time and the preexisting networks that they are part of. Truly advancing a DEI agenda is likely to require opening the doors to new entrants, including those who are grassroots, community-based, or well established and focused on intersectional work, and seeing those new entrants as part of your theory of change.

These organizations may bring with them a different sensibility and unique insights about what is important and how social change takes place. They likely will not look and feel like organizations that are already existing in a given portfolio.

So how can foundations open doors to new grantees?

REMOVE BARRIERS FOR SMALL ORGANIZATIONS

Although they are often put in place for good and sensible reasons, the idiosyncratic nature of foundation practices can serve as a significant impediment to nonprofits seeking foundation funding. Vu Le with Nonprofit AF has called this phenomenon a “Frankenstein approach” to fundraising, likening the nonprofit’s experience to the kludging together of a variety of mismatched funding sources to somehow cover basic operating expenses.³² While the practices noted below may fall under the general category of “good grantmaking,” they are likely to be particularly beneficial from a DEI perspective, as they could open the door to a broader range of potential grantees.

Actions foundations could take to address this include:

- Reevaluate risk tolerance and broaden eligibility. For example, some foundations have a practice of limiting a grant to a certain percentage of the grantee’s overall budget. While there are IRS limitations on how much a foundation can support a nonprofit without “tipping” it into a different tax category, expanding allowable levels could increase the potential grantee pool. This, along

with increasing support for overhead or considering general operating support grants, may be particularly helpful for small, community-based organizations.

- Simplify the grant application process.³³
 - Lessen the burden: Try it yourself (or ask a grantee) and see how long it takes to submit the grant application. If it takes more than 10 to 15 hours, consider modifying the requirements. Minimize requirements for letters of intent that are not grant proposals.
 - Provide technical assistance, including “preliminary reviews of grant application drafts to ensure that applicants are on the right track and are investing their time efficiently in the grant application process.³⁴”
 - Give smaller, less established organizations more time to submit their applications, i.e., two additional weeks.
 - Broaden how applications may be submitted (consider online applications).
 - Consider adopting a common application, one that is shared by many grantmakers, usually in a given geography.
 - Don’t ask for information that you don’t actually look at in making decisions.
 - Limit jargon.
- Translate grant guidelines into multiple languages and ensure that the process to apply is transparent and accessible. Consider accepting grant proposals in multiple languages. Consider the needs of community-

based groups when deciding when and where to hold information sessions for grant RFPs. For example, the Akonadi Foundation holds its sessions not only in their offices but also at the local public library and youth centers.

- Consider compensation for certain applicants. Arabella Advisors' hope and grace fund provides stipends on the order of \$25-50/hour to selected organizations that submit complete grant applications but are not selected.³⁵ This could widen the pool of applicants that apply.
- Open the grant process. Many foundations do not accept unsolicited proposals. While this theoretically saves both the foundation and prospective grantees time, it also limits grantmaking to a predetermined set of nonprofits and relies heavily on relationships and social capital that many small nonprofits (including those who are minority-led) may not possess. This does not mean that all grantmaking needs to be done through an open process. Some foundations have created limited opportunities for unsolicited letters of intent tied to specific initiatives and/or discrete periods within their funding cycles.
- Also consider "open calls," i.e., allow minority-led organizations to make presentations about their work to the foundation as a way of familiarizing the foundation with their core activities.
- Rate your foundation's grant practices using Vu Le's FLAIL Index (Funding Logistics Aggravation, Incomprehensibility, and Laughability).³⁶
- Target outreach to marginalized communities.
- Increase transparency and accountability practices, which supports DEI by providing information to potential grantees about grant priorities and helps them decide which foundations they should engage with.

BROADEN PROGRAM OFFICER NETWORKS

While these processes can help to open foundations to a broader pool of applicants, grantmaking and fundraising remains a relationship business. Hiring program officers with community-based networks, with a pre-existing commitment to social justice, and/or from the significant pool of professional organizations focused on issues of civil rights and intersectionality is certainly an important

way for foundations to engage a more diverse community. Encouraging program officers to hear from and affiliate with diverse groups can also be helpful. Other ideas:

- Develop peer mentoring relationships with staff from foundations with at least two years of experience in funding in racial equity, social justice, and/or intersectional strategies.
- Join identity-based philanthropy affinity groups to seek exposure to diverse viewpoints.
- Review and consider funding the community partners of a long-time trusted grantee or the grantees of another foundation with similar interests but a strong equity lens.
- Participate as listeners and learners in conferences led by people of color, i.e., Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Asian-Serving Institutions, and Native American-Serving, Nontribal Institutions for higher education funders.
- Invite minority-led non-grantees to participate in grantee convenings as a way of introducing them to a foundation's priorities (and pay for their travel and time).

Truly advancing a DEI agenda is likely to require opening the doors to new entrants and seeing those new entrants as part of your theory of change.

CREATE SPECIAL GRANT INITIATIVES

Some foundations have created targeted grant programs to address DEI. The McArthur Foundation in combination with several other Chicago-based foundations established the Chicago Fund for Safe and Peaceful Communities, a rapid-response fund in reaction to the spike in violence in Chicago in 2016.³⁷ The fund supported grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000 to grassroots community-based groups, awarded based on a short proposal.

Similarly, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation sponsored a "New Connections" program designed to increase the diversity of perspectives that inform the foundation by supporting career development for early career researchers from backgrounds that are historically disadvantaged or underrepresented in research disciplines.³⁸

Other funders have created dedicated identity-based initiatives, such as the Gates Foundation’s program Women and Girls at the Center of Development with the goal of “reaching and empowering the most vulnerable women and girls to improve health and development—including economic—outcomes as well as gender equality.”³⁹ Focusing on a particular research sector, the Heising Simons Foundation has supported efforts to increase the percentage of women in physics and astronomy.⁴⁰ Taking a slightly different tack, George Soros’ Open Society Foundation supported an initiative focused on Black Male Achievement, aimed in part at increasing support from the philanthropic sector.⁴¹ Other foundations such as the Kellogg Foundation and the Ford Foundation have made diversity, equity, and inclusion not a sideline or “special grant initiative,” but the center of their work.⁴²

Program staff may review the proposals through their own lens of implicit bias. Self-review of and team conversation about those biases and how they may be influencing review is essential.

Still others have created internal matching funds, designed to incentivize program officers to step outside their usual boundaries and support new (and potentially riskier) organizations.

BUILD A LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

As indicated earlier, the nonprofit sector is not particularly diverse. It is therefore not surprising that foundation grantees are not diverse. One way some foundations have tackled this is to build targeted leadership pipelines—focused on recruiting and supporting leaders of color and strengthening those organizations that serve low-income communities. An example of this is the Community Leadership Project supported by the Hewlett, Irvine, and Packard foundations in 2009, which provided support for 60 community-based organizations via several re-grantors with the goal of advancing resilient leadership, adaptive capacity, and financial stability.⁴³ A mid-stream evaluation of the project by SPR Associates suggested moderate success, with the re-grantors reporting that 29 percent of

their community-based organizations were “success stories” (i.e., they demonstrated greater revenue diversification and strengthened board development).⁴⁴

Fellowship programs, such as the Ron McKinley Philanthropy Fellowship supported by the Bush Foundation, are another approach that foundations take. In this example, young people from communities underrepresented in leadership positions in philanthropy are matched with foundations in Minnesota, where they work for three years. The aim is for them to then take on leadership roles in the nonprofit sector.

More broadly, Fund the People is a new campaign established to promote investment in the nonprofit workforce, with a specific lens on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Its recently released toolkit provides useful resources covering making the case for building leadership pipelines and then doing so, and also offers case studies from foundations who have built talent investment into what they do.⁴⁵

REVIEW GRANT PROPOSALS WITH A DEI LENS

Finally, in the same way that a DEI lens can be placed on the grant renewal proposals of current grantees, it is important to ensure that it extends to new grantees. All the questions described earlier apply in these cases—with an understanding that program staff may review the proposals through their own lens of implicit bias. Self-review of and team conversation about those biases and how they may be influencing review is essential. In addition, as part of the review process (for both new and existing grantees), ensuring that affected communities are part of the decision-making process is essential. One creative idea is to design an advisory board that includes both grantees and beneficiaries.⁴⁶

Unless issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion have been central to a foundation’s strategy from the beginning, there is a good likelihood that foundations interested in adopting a DEI lens to their work will need to expand their grantee pools and make some changes to their selection processes. In sum, one nonprofit leader noted dryly that he had observed increased interest in “helping rich organizations become more brown,” but posed the provocative question about why foundations were not also helping “brown organizations become more rich.”

Strategic Pivots

Funding existing and new grantees is the bread and butter of foundation work. Sourcing nonprofit organizations, soliciting and reviewing proposals, conducting due diligence, and ensuring compliance with grant and legal processes is in the job description of almost all program officers of independent foundations.

But of course, this work does not occur in isolation. In almost all cases, it is driven by strategies, theories of change that connect high-level goals and outcomes with specific grant activities.⁴⁷

Independent foundations can exercise an almost unlimited number of choices when it comes to strategy. They can work locally, nationally, or internationally, on a specific topic or population or more broadly. They can choose topics that lend themselves to a DEI lens or they can work in areas where a DEI perspective may be important but is not necessarily the driving issue. Although they must adhere to certain payout and reporting requirements and refrain from political activity, including lobbying, from a strategy and effectiveness perspective they are largely free to do as they please.

For those foundations in pursuit of DEI goals, it is possible to achieve them without significantly changing their grantmaking strategies. This would have the greatest chance of success if the strategies were derived with equity in mind from the beginning and with a genuine embrace of the belief that diversity and inclusion bring more creative and expansive thinking that leads to deeper impact. For foundations who are at an early stage in their strategy development, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has developed an excellent guide for advancing race equity and inclusion that begins with an understanding of the principles and concludes with a call for continuous evaluation, monitoring, and adaptation.⁴⁸

However, many foundations adopt DEI principles mid-stream, while also advancing their existing strategies. For example, the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund is in the middle of reconsidering its education grantmaking with a greater equity lens. In this case, they are continuing to work within schools but will add a new focus on some of the more systemic issues that limit education achievement, including the “barriers outside schools that undermine kids and undermine communities.”

Others have decided that a focus on equity will require an entirely new strategy. Driven by the long-time CEO of the foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust embarked on a several-year “learning journey” focused on self-reflection, examination of the demographic profile of its grantees, and a deeper understanding of the local context. This led to a decision to discontinue their existing grant programs in 2015 and develop new funding priorities in collaboration with affected communities.⁴⁹



If foundations want to go beyond their rhetoric, they will need to examine not only who they work with and how, but also what they choose to work on.



In my education work, for example, we pushed hard on system-level changes to increase educational excellence. The difficulty is that given well documented existing inequities, raising the overall level and quality of the K-12 system in the United States--while important--has the potential to exacerbate achievement gaps. As we pivoted our strategy using an equity lens we realized that we would need to refocus that work on building capacity to close those gaps, but the strategies to do so (for example, a focus on improving instruction in low-income communities) would be quite different from those leveled at improving educational excellence (better standards and better measures).

If foundations want to go beyond the rhetoric, they will need to seriously examine not only who they work with and how they work, but also what they choose to work on.

How Should Foundations Measure Progress?

Measuring DEI progress is one of the most challenging aspects of this work—which is not a reason not to do it. There are measures of inclusivity, such as staff surveys, but these are necessarily self-reported. Equity is a more complex concept that is far more difficult to gauge and attribute to foundation-specific activities.

Partly because it is the simplest to collect and because it provides a useful starting point, D5 and many others have advocated strongly for the collection of diversity data, specifically the demographic data of grantee organizations. Foundation Center's Glasspockets initiative has also included collection of demographic data as a transparency indicator. Finally, D5 assembled a comprehensive chart of indicators that a foundation could use as a checklist to assess its overall DEI progress.⁵⁰

Data collection for diversity characteristics is a controversial topic.⁵¹ Some argue that it is burdensome and not particularly useful. I have spoken with program officers from foundations who have had this requirement in place for many years who indicated that they “don't really look at it.” Others started but discontinued the practice for much the same reason. Foundation officers worry that data collection will be burdensome for grantees who may not have the systems and procedures in place to report the information. They fret that data collection could over-signal the importance of DEI even if this is not the driving force behind their work. They worry that it begs the question—can nonprofits meaningfully serve communities of color even if they themselves are not diverse?

The flip side of this argument is that it is difficult to develop a baseline understanding of where a foundation stands on DEI if it does not collect comprehensive and standardized data about its grantee organizations. Equity advocates argue forcefully that nonprofits serving communities of color must themselves embody those attributes in their own staff. Collecting disaggregated data is a starting point—its use, misuse, or nonuse is up to the foundation.

If a foundation decides to begin collecting demographic data, the first step is to ensure that they are doing so

in accordance with federal and state laws and privacy restrictions.⁵² Next, the foundation should decide which aspects of diversity they'd like further information on. They will need to make a multitude of decisions, including:

- What aspects of diversity (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, age) will be included?
- What are the geographic boundaries of the data collection (e.g., for those foundations with international reach, is the Global South part of the catchment area?)
- What levels of organizational hierarchy should be captured? One common construct is:
 - Board
 - Senior staff, including the CEO
 - Other staff

Others have also made a distinction between administrative and program staff.

- Should data collection apply broadly or should there be thresholds, i.e., only grants above a certain level or excluding one-time grants?
- Should the foundation compensate grantees for the data collection?
- At what stage in the grant process should the data be collected, i.e., pre-proposal, proposal, reporting?
- Should data collection be voluntary or mandatory?
- How/will the data be used for decision-making purposes? Here it will be particularly important to consult with legal counsel, as there are some restrictions on how data can be used for grantee selection purposes.

- How should the data be aggregated and evaluated? Should the foundation set any sort of explicit or implicit target for grantee organizations, e.g., “the board or staff should mirror the communities it serves”? Or should this be evaluated at a program/strategy level, e.g., the portfolio of grants should reflect diversity?
- Should the foundation collect the data on their own or use a third-party vendor? For example, GuideStar partnered with the D5 Coalition on a data collection tool.⁵³

There will also be tricky questions to navigate about what constitutes a “diverse organization.” While diversity is not an on/off switch, as foundations aggregate data across their grantmaking they may need some sort of rule of thumb to assess progress. For example, one potential threshold is comparing grantee demographics with the U.S. population as a whole—62 percent of the U.S. population is White (non-Hispanic/Latino) and 49 percent is male—to see if the organization (or portfolio of grants) is more or less diverse than the broader population on these dimensions. This is problematic on many fronts, as local populations may not mirror the national statistics, the nonprofit pool itself does not reflect these numbers, and there are widespread differences by area of interest (e.g., education, environment, arts, etc.). But it does at least provide a defensible benchmark for comparison purposes.

Apart from data collection, another way that foundations have measured progress is through “diversity audits.” In this case, the term “diversity audit” refers to a (usually third-party) review of a foundation’s diversity and inclusion practices. Perhaps the best-known example of this is the California Endowment’s Diversity and Inclusivity Audit Report Card.⁵⁴ The audit, which is conducted every two or three years, represents an attempt by the foundation to hold itself accountable to its values around diversity, equity, and inclusion and addresses both internally and externally oriented strategies.

CONCLUSION

Diversity, equity, and inclusion have become “hot-button” topics within the philanthropic community. The polarized political debate over the past year, several summers of racially charged incidents, and the actions and language of the new political order in Washington, DC, have heightened awareness and concern. Fortunately, there is a wealth of information, well-documented case examples, and thoughtful colleagues who are willing to share their experiences, creating a rich knowledge base that will form the foundation for improvement. Having immersed myself in this topic (albeit for a brief time), I am convinced that the know-how exists for philanthropies to support the social sector becoming more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. It is a matter not of technical knowledge but of interest, will, and time.

I’ll conclude by dwelling a little on this last point. I’m confident that interest in DEI is strong and the will is coming. But somehow when this translates to the substantial allocation of time and energy that a strong focus on DEI will certainly entail, I worry that good intentions will give way to the daily grind of foundation business. I have found most foundations to be hard-working and leanly staffed, frenetically juggling board meetings, strategic planning, and grant reviews, all while maintaining strong ties to their fields and their grantees. Foundation officers are busy people and the idea of adding complex DEI considerations to an already taxing workload may feel overwhelming.

My message to my colleagues (and myself) is that this is worth the time. If we are to have the positive impact that we seek, we will need to slow down, take the time to garner community input, accept unsolicited proposals (particularly from organizations with a focus on equity but with whom we are not familiar), open ourselves up to new and different networks, and work through the discomfort and multifaceted world of personal identity. In the near term this may impede our sense of progress, but over the long term I am confident that it will lead to greater and more sustained and equitable impact.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Use the following questions to reflect on how DEI plays out in your work. First reflect personally; then, host a conversation within your foundation.

First, think about DEI broadly:

- What experiences have you had that define your relationship with diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- In what issue areas have you seen racism affect attitudes, policy, and/or practice?
- What jumps out to you from a historical perspective as important to acknowledge and learn from?
- Did any of the facts in the Introduction section surprise you?

Now, think about your foundation's current state:

- How well does your staffing and board composition reflect the communities your foundation aims to serve?
- What attitudes do you notice among staff and board members related to diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- How does diversity, equity, and inclusion factor into your foundation's requests for and analysis of proposals?
- Is your foundation building the capacity of your existing grantees to be more mindful of diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- What is your foundation communicating about diversity, equity, and inclusion through your meetings, website, and other visible materials?
- How willing are foundation staff to talk about uncomfortable topics?

Finally, think ahead to your foundation's future:

- How would capacity building, new grantee identification and selection, and strategic pivots related to diversity, equity, and inclusion improve your foundation's work towards its mission?
- What specific ideas from this paper for strengthening your foundation's approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion appeal to you personally? Why?
- Which do you think would be most appealing to C-suite staff at your foundation? To others?
- What are challenges that you anticipate to pursuing those approaches?
- If all remains the same with how diversity, equity, and inclusion are (or are not) integrated into your foundation's approach, what may be lost?

Endnotes

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