Community-Driven Philanthropy:

Participation, Partnership and Power

About GEO

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO) is a community of funders committed to transforming philanthropic culture and practice by connecting members to the resources and relationships needed to support thriving nonprofits and communities. With intersectional racial equity as a core commitment, we envision courageous grantmakers working in service of nonprofits and communities to create a just, connected and inclusive society where we can all thrive.

Alongside our membership of more than 6,000 grantmakers at philanthropic organizations of all sizes and types across the globe, we work to lift up the grantmaking practices that matter most to nonprofits and that truly improve philanthropic practice. Our approach is grounded in core values of love, racial equity in practice, community-centered collaboration, and trust and accountability.

GEO serves as a professional home base for grantmakers, offering support and challenges to advance equity. We help grantmakers move from knowledge to action by providing tailored resources, learning opportunities and connections to expand our community of support.

Working with our members, we design conferences focused on exploring the latest challenges, foster peer connections and learning through member networks and craft publications that frame key issues and highlight examples from across the field. Through these means, GEO creates forums for grantmakers to hear from and absorb actionable information and insights from experts across the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors.

GEO is a part of a broader movement of organizations and networks advancing change in philanthropy. Together, we are learning more about what works and applying our knowledge and resources to improve our communities and create lasting, systemic change.

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Community-Driven Philanthropy as an Equity Practice

Community-Driven Philanthropy as an Equity Practice

Introduction

Amid the current social, political and economic climate, many grantmakers are embracing our work with renewed energy and dedication. Conversations within and beyond the philanthropic sector are opening exciting possibilities as individuals and organizations deepen our understanding of the complex operating environment and the potential for long-term, community-driven, multifaceted approaches to creating lasting change. Alongside changemakers across society, institutional philanthropy has a valuable role to play in responding to current conditions in ways that advance a collective vision for thriving communities.

Renewed commitment to building deeper connections, stronger relationships and authentic collaboration are key to identifying innovative solutions to shared challenges. We also see the potential of building long-lasting partnerships between institutional philanthropy and other sectors, including government, business, community-led nonprofits and grassroots leaders. We recognize the importance of expertise and experience from diverse sources, particularly valuing the insights that come from lived experience and community proximity. Prioritizing and deepening connections in these ways requires reflection and honesty about our history as a sector, the current culture of philanthropy and acknowledgment of our contributions — individual, organizational and systemic — to our current state. Through this reflection, we can continue to evolve into a sector that operates collaboratively, guided by a shared vision for advancing racial equity.

This publication focuses on the idea that grantmaking is most equitable and effective when it meaningfully engages and includes a broad and diverse set of voices — including nonprofits, communities and key partners. Philanthropic practice becomes truly transformative when we center the expertise of those closest to the challenges we aim to address. This approach involves nurturing relationships and repairing and fostering trust, particularly with groups whose insights have been historically undervalued and systemically omitted. By elevating these voices as issue experts, key leaders and decision-makers, we unlock new possibilities for effective and equitable grantmaking that resonates with the real needs and aspirations of communities.

Many across our sector have evolved from conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion to a deeper focus on racial equity, racial justice and liberation. Even as our language and understanding of these principles change, the question remains: How can we move through barriers to turn these aspirations into equitable outcomes?

The key lies in nurturing authentic relationships. By doing so, we create important opportunities to work alongside leaders in nonprofits and communities who are consistently confronting and adapting to a rapidly shifting context and challenging social conditions. Hanni Hanson, director of programs at the Compton Foundation, shared, "Investing in leaders who were leading with relationship helped us recognize that not one organization or foundation can ever make the change that we need, which led to us investing in more movement networks, coalitions and spaces for collective learning. Systemic change requires many coordinated strategies, and relationships are the connective tissue that make that possible. Funders must be part of that relational ecosystem." By embracing collaboration with communities, grantmakers can tap into innovative solutions driven by those with proximity to challenges, who offer an analysis of societal conditions that can significantly enhance our grantmaking strategies. This approach not only amplifies the effectiveness of our efforts, but also ensures that our work is deeply rooted in the realities and aspirations of the communities we aim to serve.

We are encouraged by the increased energy, focused dialogue and thinking about participation taking place across the sector. This growing interest coincides with a broader cultural shift calling for greater transparency, increased accountability and more inclusive, consensus-based decision-making models that are conscious of how power operates within them and why. Many are craving more resources on how to deepen our relationship with nonprofits, community members and other audiences and engage them to participate more deeply and authentically in our work.

When we are in authentic, trusting and longer-term relationships with nonprofits and communities, together we can make better-informed decisions about where funding is most needed to support communities, engage in community-driven solutions that are more responsive to current conditions and allow those receiving philanthropic dollars to be more adaptive as conditions change. Additionally, moving dollars in accordance with a deep community relationship has the potential to advance a different approach to grantmaking. This shift can help our sector move from centering on relationships that use power and money as tools of oversight and control into relationships that distribute credit, are power aware, and place equal value on expertise and strong relationships with community residents.

This publication presents our latest insights on the topic we are calling *community-driven philanthropy*. Community-driven philanthropy is not merely about increasing the number of people involved in our work, or the degree to which we are in conversation with them, although this is a start. Rather, it is about reimagining the role community plays in philanthropy and centering on those with deep expertise, lived experience and knowledge to shape solutions to the problems we are trying to solve. This work relates to much of the recent philanthropic thinking, writing and organizing, which highlights existing dynamics that exacerbate inequities based on identity or systems of oppression, and dynamics that emphasize opportunities for ground-level changes in how philanthropy operates. Philanthropic structures retain clear value through funding fieldwide collaborations, holding relationships and influence across sectors, and gathering information and nurturing education about the issues central to our work. However, as a society and a sector, our failures and successes are intricately tied. We have often quoted the saying, "If you want to go far, go together." These days, it feels more accurate to acknowledge that when moving toward our vision for a world where all people can thrive, we must get there together, or not at all.

> **"Rather, it is about reimagining the role community plays in philanthropy and centering on those with deep expertise, lived experience and knowledge to shape solutions to the problems we are trying to solve."**

The GEO community is rooted in a commitment to transform philanthropic culture and practice by working together with nonprofit partners and community members to create a just, inclusive and connected society. This is, at least in part, an invitation for grantmakers to listen — and respond — authentically and deeply to nonprofit and community partners. For example, at North Star Fund, former Deputy Director Elz Cuya Jones describes: "Not only do community funding committee members look at the applications and make decisions, they also get together each year to direct North Star Fund in our overall grantmaking strategy. They tell us what our priorities are and design how the grantmaking program should work. They provide feedback on what is working, what is not, what the application process should look like and how to find new grantee partners." By engaging deeply with these stakeholders and working with them to set strategy, shape work and develop process, funders can respond to what is happening in communities and tap into community members' knowledge of the current landscape. We further demonstrate through our actions that our success and effectiveness depend on equitable and just practices, and that communities are key to the design, execution and measurement of progress toward our strategic goals.

The changes required to do participation work with thoughtfulness and integrity can also be transformative for organizational culture and decision-making beyond funding decisions, as illustrated by the grantmaker examples throughout this publication. Participation takes personal and organizational transformation, reflection and self-awareness. The community-driven philanthropy muscles that grantmakers are building are counter to how the formal American philanthropic sector has operated; therefore, this effort requires skill-building, continued practice and deep commitment. The existing structures were not built with participation in mind, so they will need to adapt to meet the needs of a sector that wants to operate in a more community-centered way. Through this work, we offer support and examples that demonstrate how these shifts can be made and important questions to consider for each organization's context.

Defining *Community-Driven Philanthropy*

The field of philanthropy has not settled on a single term for the work we describe in this publication as community-driven philanthropy. Historically, people have used terms like grantee inclusion or stakeholder engagement or community engagement to describe the process of spurring nonprofits and communities to engage in broader philanthropic participation. Community-driven philanthropy is also aligned with and supportive of field-shifting ideas and initiatives such as the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, a movement offering solutions to create power-conscious and equitable grantmaker-nonprofit relationships to change how grantmaking is done and transform philanthropic work. We see this work as related to participatory philanthropy and participatory grantmaking.

With community-driven philanthropy, we find common ground with grantmaking practices that shift financial and governing power to nonprofits and communities, many of which GEO has advocated for throughout the organization's history. These practices include multiyear general operating support, enterprise capital, funding nonprofit endowments and community board representation. Organizing inside the philanthropic sector to make grantmaking practice and philanthropy work better for historically overlooked communities has a long history and includes entities such as The Funding Exchange and Neighborhood Funders Group. Outside of organized philanthropy, many communities of color have long practiced forms of informal philanthropy that use participatory practices to move money and other resources based on relationship and community care.[1] Throughout this publication, we examine how community-driven philanthropy principles can deepen the effectiveness of grantmaking organizations and assess what it takes to operationalize and live into principles that may challenge our notions of institutional philanthropy's role.

Nonprofit partners have expressed to GEO their frustration with phrases like "grantee inclusion," which reinforce power dynamics and define nonprofits by their relationship to a funder.[2] By definition, *inclusion* suggests that grantees are in (at best) a secondary position — being invited into spaces — rather than being centered in grantmaking work. In addition, language that does not extend to both nonprofits and community members does not reflect the entirety of what and who we are discussing here.

We suggest expanding our perception and definition of what *community* means. Most commonly, the term refers to specific geographic locations whose residents and workers directly benefit from the work that nonprofits do. In the case of community-driven philanthropy, however, *community* also refers to the people who may benefit from or are impacted by grantmakers' decisions. For example, grantmakers that focus on achieving systems-level change, or on moving an issue over multiple geographies, can think of their *community* as

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1. Lisa Durán, "Caring for Each Other: Philanthropy in Communities of Color." Grassroots Fundraising Journal September/October (2001): 4–7. https://coco-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/20_5_PhilCommOfColor.pdf.
2. Aerial Reese, "Findings from GEO's Language Survey." Grantmakers for Effective Organizations: Perspectives, 2018. Available at https://www.geofunders.org/about-us/perspectives/111.

the people affected by their work. Whether those people live in a neighborhood, city or region anywhere in the world, they can be part of our defined community — and they should be driving our work to the extent that it affects their lives. As organizations build out and live into their community-driven philanthropy practice, it is important to spend time thinking through what *community* means in specific contexts. For example, grantmakers may reflect on the following questions related to their grantmaking efforts:

- What do we mean when we use the term *community*?
- What types of communities can these frameworks be applied to?
- When are we talking about nonprofits, philanthropic peers, geographic communities, fully virtual communities or ideological groupings?
- Who has historically been included, and how are we moving into a "we" that is expansive in a way that does not ignore difference or assume sameness?
- How are we talking about identity?
- What is the relationship between individuals and community? Will individuals shift in and out of this community over their lifetime and how does that influence what we need to consider?

In a 2018 survey of grantmakers and nonprofits, GEO asked respondents to weigh in on how they would classify these concepts. While the responses included a range of terms from participatory *philanthropy* to partnership, most respondents indicated that we should refer to this work as *community-driven philanthropy*.

Grantmakers in the GEO community gather at GEO's 2023 Learning Conference in Washington, DC.

Photo by Carolina Kroon.

As a result of this inquiry, we are using the language of *community-driven philanthropy* and *participation* based on the belief that communities, as the ultimate recipients of our investments and the drivers of social change, should be constant participants in philanthropy and the nonprofits that serve them. True participation recognizes that our community is not just nonprofit leaders or community activists or those working on a particular issue, but instead, it is all people. True participation also includes the ability to contribute to, inform and sometimes decide strategy, funding priorities, investments and learning priorities. No matter which tactics we use to partner with nonprofits and communities, community should be at the center of our work.

> **"True participation recognizes that our community is not just nonprofit leaders or community activists or those working on a particular issue, but instead, it is all people. True participation also includes the ability to contribute to, inform and sometimes decide strategy, funding priorities, investments and learning priorities."**

From this perspective, communities are participants in the same way that we are all participants in the work, contributing to a larger whole. Our vision for this work is about moving beyond notions that divide us and hinder our ability to find shared purpose and take action. This vision requires us to shift out of "power over" mindsets into approaches and methods that are more collective and affirming for all. It also involves reconsidering how philanthropic dollars and other institutional resources are deployed. Are we acknowledging and appreciating community power and leadership? Or are we making assumptions about what does or does not exist within communities in the absence of long-standing, open and trusting relationships?

Even as we use this language to describe a philanthropic sector that can shift the way it operates to work differently with community, we recognize the limits of language. Our hope is that, no matter what specific term grantmakers use, we keep our focus on principles of equity that analyze oppressive systems with a historical perspective, aiming to close gaps and inequities with discipline, context and rigor.

Community-driven philanthropy is a powerful approach to closing gaps, but it is further strengthened when paired with a racial equity analysis that considers the history of the issues we approach, the root causes of the conditions we experience today and how those systems can be changed to create equitable results that support unconditional thriving, despite one's race or other identity markers. As outlined in Reimagining Capacity Building: Navigating Culture, Systems and Power, GEO recognizes that, like funders, many nonprofit organizations struggle to put communities at the center of their work. When we, as grantmakers, explore what it means to be community-driven, we may discover that some of our current nonprofit partners do not share this ethos, or struggle to put it into practice. As grantmakers, we need to be mindful of where we can shift our funding to groups that share our values around community and racial equity, and where we can fund our current partners' capacity-building efforts to support their becoming more centered in community and racial equity. As we work toward defining what we mean by *community* and how we measure participation, it is worth paying attention to this dynamic and being more intentional and explicit with language by avoiding interchangeable use of the terms *nonprofits* and *communities*.

The following is a list of other common terms and definitions that organizations are using to describe this work:

- *Participatory philanthropy* covers a wide range of institutional and individual activities, such as integrating feedback from nonprofits into grant guidelines and developing strategy, inviting members of your community to serve on the funders' boards, and leveraging crowdfunding and giving circles.[3]
- *Participatory grantmaking* narrows the focus to how grant decisions are made, by whom and for whom. Some see participatory grantmaking as one of many types of participatory philanthropy. Others think it is distinctive because it moves decision-making about money — which many see as the epitome of power — to the people most affected by the issues that grantmakers are trying to address.
- *Community philanthropy* happens when communities mobilize capital of various kinds (financial, civic, social, human, political and intellectual) toward the goal of improving residents' lives. Key components are building and deploying local assets (financial and otherwise); developing capacity for long-term leadership, infrastructure, relationships and knowledge; and strengthening community trust and social capital through local governance and transparency.

Language is never perfect, but we feel that community-driven philanthropy is the best descriptor for the end goal of this work, which is to engage communities and nonprofits as active and equal participants in our work as grantmakers.

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[3] Cynthia Gibson, "Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come?" Ford Foundation, 2017. Available at https://www.fordfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/participatory_grantmaking-lmv7.pdf

Centering Community in Philanthropy’s Transformation

It is worth restating that community-driven philanthropy is not about increasing the number of people involved in our work, but about tapping into the fullest array of possibilities and increasing philanthropic effectiveness. Community-driven philanthropy responds to community leaders’ calls for increased transparency and accountability by offering open and collaborative paths while preparing philanthropic institutions to engage in new ways. Historically, when communities have been engaged, the engagement was too often extractive — focused on superficial action or used to control access to philanthropic dollars. Community-driven philanthropy invites us to adopt practices that are more aligned with racial equity and more effectively operate across differences, formal power, positions and organizational silos. Engaging with nonprofits, communities and experts outside the philanthropic sector may feel uncomfortable, even for those who have been practicing participatory methods for years. However, it is through this discomfort that we can learn, push ourselves and grow.

Additional Resources

Advancing Participation in Philanthropy Tool (APPT)
A self-assessment for grantmakers that identifies areas for deeper participatory process inside the organization, across its functional areas and departments.

Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking
In this guide, Grantcraft, a program of Candid, explores how funders can engage in participatory grantmaking and cede decision-making power about funding decisions to the very communities they aim to serve.

Participatory Grantmaking: Has Its Time Come?
Written by Cynthia Gibson, Ph.D., and supported by the Ford Foundation, this publication calls on funders to cede power and control in service of trusting relationships that lead to transformative change. Gibson highlights examples of grantmakers practicing participatory philanthropy to demonstrate the transformative power of inclusion and collaborative decision-making.

Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit
Developed by Fund for Shared Insight, this resource offers guidance for grantmakers to implement participatory approaches into their grantmaking.

Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice is a complete self-assessment toolkit from NCRP designed to determine how well foundations are building, sharing and wielding power and how to identify ways to transform your programs and operations for lasting, equitable impact.

Sharing Power with Communities: A Field Guide
This resource from Community Wealth Partners offers practical principles and models for moving along a spectrum of community ownership and power sharing.

As a field, we have generations of history and missteps to overcome, and the stark disparities laid bare by the global pandemic are akin to open wounds in our communities, within our nonprofit partners and inside our own organizations. Unless and until these power and resource disparities are honestly acknowledged and attended to, and new ways of working are created, true healing and transformative change will remain out of reach.

GEO's 2017 field study revealed that many grantmakers already recognized the need to make important changes on this front. Forty-five percent of grantmakers saw diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as central or essential to the mission of their organization, with another 39 percent indicating that DEI was relevant to their work. In addition, 43 percent of grantmakers had adopted a specific focus on race or ethnicity in communities that have experienced oppression or discrimination.

Since that time, the context within which philanthropy is operating has greatly changed. In its report, Foundations Respond to Crisis: Toward Equity, the Center for Effective Philanthropy found that, of the funders that had signed the Council on Foundation's Covid-19 Action Pledge: "Leaders at over 80 percent of foundations said they are making changes that incorporate racial equity into their grantmaking or programmatic strategies. About two-thirds described dedicating time to learning and reflecting about racial equity at their foundation, yet slightly less than half reported making changes to internal practices."[4]

Reflection and learning are positive first steps but fall short if not coupled with action to change culture and practices in pursuit of community-centered racial justice. Saying that culture change can be tough is certainly an understatement, but there have been bright spots in the years since this report. In a survey of grantees and foundations, The Center for Effective Philanthropy found grantmaking practices with broad community support, such as general operating support and reduced reporting requirements, that have been sustained since 2020.[5] However, we have also seen that progress can be slow, dissonance can stoke inside and outside of organizations, and rapid retrenchment may occur. It is unclear whether the slowing or sometimes outright reversal of recent equity commitments are driven by concern for political backlash or weariness driven by internal organizational conditions.[6] However, it is clear that many organizations are not sure how to advance the change they seek. Fortunately, the same rationale and approaches that prepare organizations to be in deep, authentic relationships with communities can also help advance internal change. Cultivating openness to ideas from unexpected sources, awareness and appreciation of different types of power, decision-making methods that consider who will be most affected, and cultures of communication and feedback, are all as relevant to shifting internal culture and sustaining change as they are to practicing principles of community-driven philanthropy.

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[4] Ellie Buteau and Naomi Orensten, "Foundations Respond to Crisis: Toward Equity? The Second in a Series of Three Reports." Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2020. Available at https://cep.org/report/foundations-respond-to-crisis2/.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

Connecting the internal and external is important because things can get stuck if that step is missed. Despite years of reflection and learning, a large mismatch persists between what philanthropy is talking about and what philanthropy is funding. In their 2021 report, Mismatched: Philanthropy's Response to the Call for Racial Justice, the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity outlined how funding for racial equity and racial justice is a minuscule portion of overall funding.[7] And within that landscape, funding for racial justice, grassroots organization and movement-oriented work is even lower. In part, this demonstrates a disconnect between aspirations toward more equitable grantmaking and the reality that many organizations have not yet addressed — that their internal and external systems and processes were not designed with equitable grantmaking in mind.

This mismatch can be partly explained by identifying the foundational principles operating in the philanthropic sector. GEO's 2021 publication, Reimagining Capacity Building: Navigating Culture, Systems and Power, explored how embedding racial equity into our capacity-building efforts requires attention to the roles played by power, culture and systems in the design and implementation of those initiatives. We should also be approaching community engagement and participation initiatives with the same analytical framework. Without clarity about who inequitable systems impact and how, our ability to implement community-driven philanthropy and build strong community relationships will be limited and shallower than is necessary for the most effective work.

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7. Malkia Cyril, Lyle Matthew Kan, Ben Francisco Maulbeck, and Lori Villarosa, "Mismatched: Philanthropy's Response to the Call for Racial Justice." Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, 2021. Available at https://racialequity.org/mismatched/.

Defining ***Racial Equity***

Our intersectional racial equity work focuses on closing the measurable and consistent gaps based on race and other marginalized identity aspects that affect peoples' ability to thrive. Race Forward defines racial equity as both an outcome and a process.[8] As an outcome, we achieve racial equity when race no longer determines people's socioeconomic outcomes — when everyone has what they need to thrive, no matter their identity.

As a process, we apply a racial equity lens when those most affected by structural racial inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of institutional policies and practices that impact their lives.

Racial equity analysis provides a nuanced understanding to our work and the systems in which we operate. From a technical perspective, it allows for troubleshooting, strategy development and visioning on a structural level. Relationally, it positions groups of individuals to leverage limited resources for greater impact (e.g., coordinate, collaborate and learn together), to mitigate assumptions and maximize participation.

Race Forward describes the results of achieving racial equity:

- All people, especially people of color, own, design and make decisions within the systems that affect their lives.
- We acknowledge and take responsibility for past and current inequities and provide all people, especially those most affected by racial inequities, the infrastructure they need to thrive, and everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system.[9]

Racial inequity is a constant throughline that affects all aspects of our communities, from economic opportunity and education to the arts, health, environmental sustainability and more. Addressing historical inequities requires grantmakers to explore collective action and embrace the power of community collaboration. This approach disrupts traditional power dynamics that may unintentionally exclude vital voices. By cultivating our abilities to listen deeply and learn continuously, we create space for those most affected by systemic issues to guide our work. Communities are invaluable partners in imagining what is possible and dreaming about how the world can change to serve everyone's needs. When we limit ourselves to power structures that separate us from community, we cut off sources of creativity, community agency and visionary partnership. Through intentional relationship building at both organizational and individual levels, we can seek to meaningfully engage community members and nonprofit partners as key leaders and decision-makers. Over time, this will build trust and strengthen relationships in ways that create new possibilities and more equitable outcomes.

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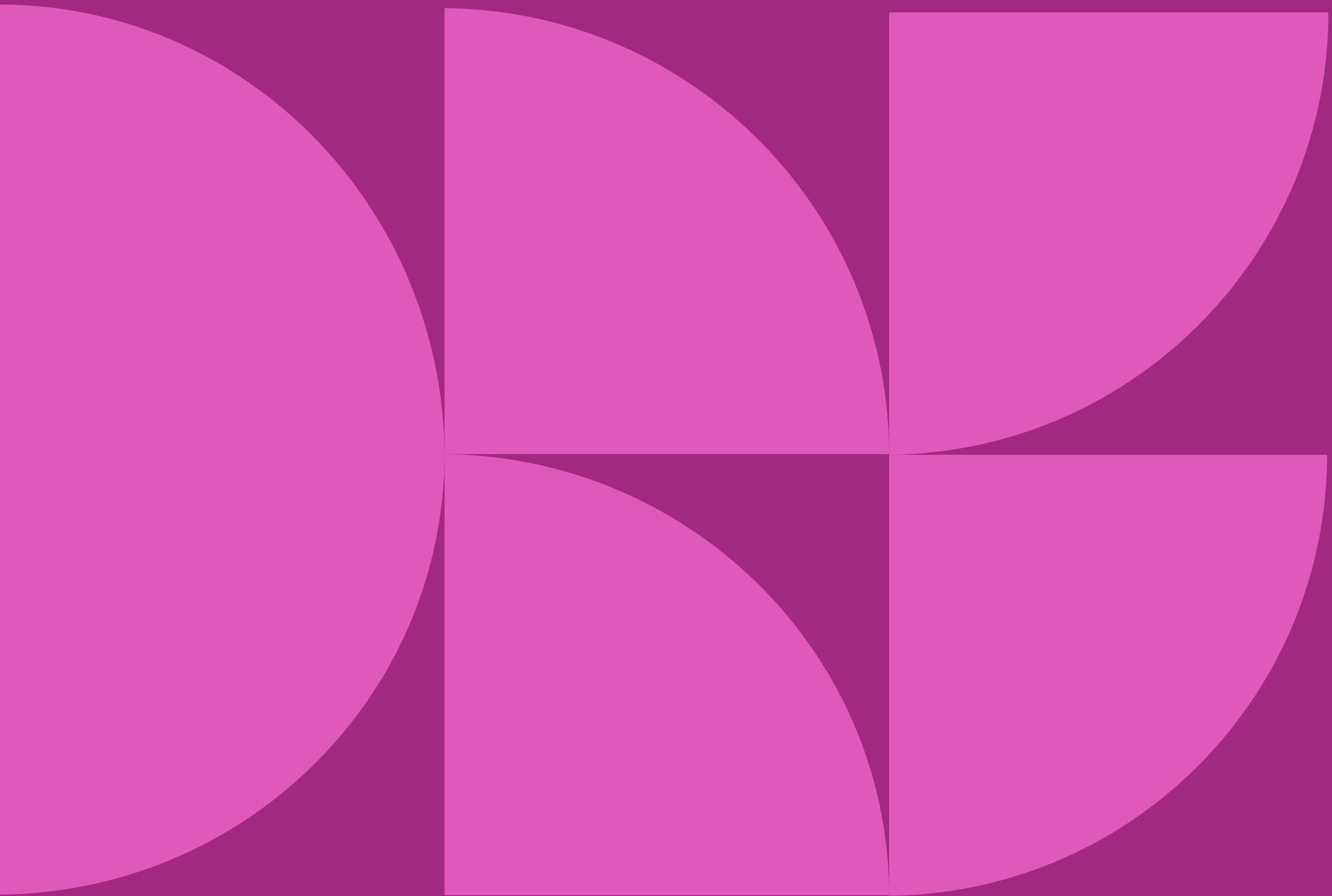
8. Race Forward, "What is Racial Equity?" 2023. Available at https://www.raceforward.org/about/what-is-racial-equity-key-concepts.
9. Ibid.

This publication explores the implications, challenges, benefits and transformational practices involved in adopting community-driven philanthropy. We meet our most audacious goals by deepening our ability to partner with the many people and organizations in our communities — known and unknown to us — who are developing ideas for change, organizing complex social networks for mobilization and are deeply invested in attaining the highest quality of life for the people who make up our communities. Throughout the publication, we examine key elements for shifting into a more community-driven stance. In each section, we share grantmaker examples, further readings and resources to support grantmakers in their efforts to shift power, embrace participatory practices and change the way we learn together in support of community-driven philanthropy.

Participation and Power in Philanthropy



Participation and Power in Philanthropy

Before diving into practicing community-driven philanthropy, it is valuable to reflect on our organization's understanding of who "community" is and what activities are defined as "participation." Throughout this publication, we offer insights and questions to guide this reflection. Community-driven philanthropy seeks to elevate the role that community has historically played in traditional philanthropy.

By examining the historical context of philanthropy, we can better understand the practices and structures that exist and how they came to be. GEO's 2015 publication, The Source Codes of Foundation Culture, explored how foundation culture has been shaped by banking, academic and corporate cultures. Predictably, this history led to philanthropic structures that prioritize oversight and return on investment and hold narrow views of what knowledge and expertise look like. Even when applied to charitable endeavors, many of these practices were not designed to analyze existing power structures or incorporate diverse community voices and expertise. This collective history requires us to consider the specific, contextual history that a grantmaker has with a community. Before examining how we want power to flow in a relationship, we must know both how power has historically flowed in that relationship and what has changed inside an organization that will lead to a different result than before.

Even with this history, the philanthropic landscape is shifting, thanks to the organizing work of many inside and outside the sector who recognize the potential of community-centered approaches. These shifts highlight exciting opportunities for grantmakers committed to forging innovative paths. Calls for racial equity, culture change and power redistribution — many happening over decades — are leading organizations to explore alternative paths and consider how race and other facets of oppression, power and decision-making work in the sector, and what a more equitable future requires.

Central to this transformation is a nuanced understanding of *power*. To fully understand and define the concepts of *community* and *participation*, we must analyze the underlying power dynamics, starting with fundamental questions about who defines which people we engage and how we invite their participation. Power is often equated with control over others, but considering power in a community-driven philanthropy context allows us to consider power that is more nuanced and collective. In *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, Martin Luther King, Jr. described power as "the ability to achieve purpose" and linked it inextricably with justice, noting also that it was "the strength required to bring about social, political or economic changes."[10] In *The Power Manual: How to Master Complex Power Dynamics*, Cyndi Suarez describes two types of power: supremacist power that seeks to dominate and control, and liberatory power that seeks possibility and abundance.[11]

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[10] Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Random House: Bantam Books, 1968).

When we link these ways of understanding power, we can consider: What possibilities open when we embrace liberatory power? How can we harness this power to drive changes that bring us closer to our vision of equitable communities? This reframing invites us to explore the transformative potential of community-driven philanthropy, focusing on collective strength and shared purpose to create meaningful, lasting change.

Talking About Money and Power

Money remains an important factor in discussions about power within philanthropy. Traditionally viewed through a Western, white-dominant cultural lens, power has been imbued with a common set of assumptions, belief systems, social norms, customs, codes, values, narratives, behavioral preferences, and rules and rituals that often discourage open conversations about money, power, who has it and why. However, by challenging this norm and embracing transparency — whether in sharing salary information or discussing institutional endowments —we create opportunities for meaningful change. Conducting a power analysis — defining what power is, who holds it and how it operates — unpacks the implicit values and rules that govern our interactions and can transform how we experience participation in philanthropy.

Money and power are often conflated, based on the assumption that those with money have power and those without money do not. Yet, the truth is more nuanced. This understanding of power fails to consider other forms of power. Social and relational power — the influence we wield, share or cede in relationships and as collective groups — play a significant role that is often overlooked in traditional power analyses. Analyzing the full spectrum of power, including people, relationships, movements and narratives, reveals rich opportunities for positive social change. If we rush to simplify our understanding of power, we miss the opportunity to engage a collective approach that recognizes and appreciates the fullness of the social change work that is happening in our communities.

While philanthropy's power is often discussed in terms of influence, connections and investments, there is value in shifting our focus from a grantmaker-centric view to one that centers on the mission and our role within the broader social change ecosystem. Shifting this perspective opens exciting possibilities: What could be achieved if we entrust communities with the power that philanthropy currently wields — be it through grantmaking programs, investment strategies, convening abilities or influential relationships?

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11. Cyndi Suarez, *The Power Manual: How to Master Complex Power Dynamics*. (British Columbia, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2018).

This transformation can take various forms, shaped by factors such as community history, community-based organizations' strengths, government capacities, foundation strategies and organizational commitment to community-led practices. Regardless of the approach, using a racial equity analysis — one that is historically informed, responsive to community needs, collective minded and focused on closing equity gaps — offers potential for positive change.

Part of rethinking what power looks like is recognizing and amplifying the existing power in communities that may be overlooked or undervalued, especially when viewed through a deficit-based lens. As Trabian Shorters and the BMe Community have demonstrated, asset framing — defining people by their aspirations and contributions rather than their challenges — can transform how we perceive and engage with communities.[12]

Power Moves, from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), offers practical tools for grantmakers to address power dynamics, center communities and practice greater transparency. This journey of reflection and transformation may involve navigating different opinions about the path forward. There are no right answers, and individuals within your organization may have different perspectives. When we fail to analyze and reflect on power, we risk decisions that increase disparities or ignore the historical realities of oppression.

Consider these questions to reflect on power in your context:

- How does your organization define and distribute power? What opportunities exist to make this process more inclusive?
- Who holds power in your organization — traditionally, culturally, formally and in practice?
- What forms of power are most celebrated, sought after or acknowledged in your organization and by whom?
- How do you identify and recognize the power that exists outside your organization or outside philanthropy? What untapped community strengths could you further empower?
- Where does power reside in the communities and issues you focus on? How does this align with your aspirations for equitable change?
- In what ways do your current practices reinforce existing power structures? What innovative approaches could you adopt to shift these dynamics?
- What is the desired state? How would power ideally flow to advance equitable principles in your work?
- What becomes possible if power is shifted in the ways that you envision? How might this transform your impact and community relationships?

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12. BMe Networks, Inc., "Asset-Framing." 2023. Available at https://bmecommunity.org/asset-framing/.

Recent sector-wide discussions have heightened awareness among philanthropic staff about the impact of uneven power distribution, including extractive, unethical or racist practices. However, transforming this awareness into structural change remains a challenge. While we can identify root issues and acknowledge the often unfair advantages created by the wealth/power equation, many of our efforts still operate within traditional, hierarchical and individualistic frameworks. Deep consideration of power and implementation of cultural change are necessary for a more complete power analysis and eventual shift in our external efforts. This requires thinking about to whom grantmaking organizations hold themselves accountable.

Just as we recognize community and nonprofit leaders as experts in the on-the-ground issues that they advance, we should also value their unique insights into how grantmaking organizations work and their ideas for how our institutions might change. The next step in organizational culture work is to move beyond diversity, equity and inclusion and toward structures that are experienced differently, internally and externally, and that produce more effective results shaped by community expertise.

As grantmakers consider adopting more community-driven philanthropy models, a few key considerations regarding power can guide this work:

Intentional Focus on Equity and Transparency.

Community-driven philanthropy requires an intentional focus on equity and a commitment to transparency. Through aligning our processes, structures and roles with our intention to operate differently, we can reshape power dynamics and create more inclusive practices by:

- Cultivating authentic participation for nonprofits and communities by embodying these practices within our own organizations.
- Thoughtfully evaluating traditional structures, such as hierarchies, program officer models and due diligence requirements, and deciding whether to adapt, keep or reimagine them.
- Embracing the complex, ongoing nature of change, and committing to consistent reflection and active listening.

Clear Communication and Role Definition.

To foster genuine collaboration, all stakeholders impacted by decisions should have a clear understanding of processes and parameters. This clarity empowers everyone involved and ensures more equitable participation. Key actions include:

- Clearly defining and communicating the roles of staff, board members, community members and nonprofit participants in decision-making processes.
- Establishing transparent channels of communication between internal and external participants to ensure everyone understands their role and level of authority.
- Exploring and defining our approach to the spectrum of participation, from input gathering to shared decision-making and how it aligns with our goals.

A Framework for Participation

As we spoke with grantmakers at various stages in the journey to implement more community-driven philanthropy, one conclusion stood out: participation can take many forms and defining the purpose and desired outcomes of that participation is vital to a community-driven approach.

Grantmakers described diverse community participation activities, from surveys and focus groups to convenings, town halls, one-on-one dialogues, advisory committees and more. We can view these efforts as falling along a spectrum, based on the nature of the activity, the degree of power sharing and the intended outcomes.

The Urban Sustainability Directors' Network (USDN) highlights a tool originally developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power, in collaboration with the Movement Strategy Center, which outlines the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership.[13] While primarily designed for government officials, this framework can help inform our work in philanthropy. In fact, the spectrum they present can be used not only by local governments and foundations, but also by nonprofits and community-based groups working to facilitate meaningful community participation in solutions development and decision-making. Table 1 presents a spectrum for community participation in grantmaking work based on the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership.

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[13] The tool was originally developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power in collaboration with the Movement Strategy Center, in part drawing on content from several public participation tools, including Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation and the Public Participation Spectrum created by the International Association for Public Participation.

Grantmakers in the GEO community gather at GEO's 2022 National Conference in Chicago, IL.

Photo by Carolina Kroon.

Table 1: Community and Nonprofit Participation Spectrum

Stance toward community	Ignore	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Transform
Goals for engaging community	Deny or limit access to information and decision-making processes.	Provide the community and nonprofit partners with information you believe is relevant.	Ask for input from nonprofit and community partners, but the grantmaker retains the power to act on the input or not.	Center community voice by ensuring that community needs and assets are integrated into planning and processes.	Delegate power to the community to make and implement decisions but retain control of resources.	Foster community ownership by placing full decision-making in the hands of the community.
Messages to communities about their involvement	We are doing what we think is best. We are not open to hearing your voice, needs or interests on this topic.	We will keep you informed as relevant information is available.	We care what you think, and your input helps us understand the community. We may use your input to inform our final decisions.	You are helping us think and act differently about this issue. We recognize your expertise on this issue.	Your leadership and your expertise are critical to how we address this issue, and your time is valuable. We could not do this work without you.	Our community's solutions have the potential to unlock collective power to transform the world we live in. What role should we play?

This table shows various activity goals and messages along the spectrum of community participation, from ignoring community to transforming our practice by centering community agency in decision-making.[14]

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[14] Urban Sustainability Directors Network, "From Community Engagement to Ownership: Tools for the Field with Case Studies of Four Municipal Community-Driven Environmental & Racial Equity Committees." 2019. Available at https://www.usdn.org/uploads/cms/documents/community_engagement_to_ownership_-_tools_and_case_studies_final.pdf.

We see community participation in philanthropy as a dynamic progression. While we advocate for deeper and more consistent participatory practices, in general, we recognize that to be truly valuable, participation must be relevant, meaningful and purposeful. The appropriate degree of participation should be aligned with the context of the activity and the community's unique needs and capacities.

For instance, if a foundation is building a new website, consulting community members may be sufficient; deep collaboration or participation in the process may not be warranted or helpful. Factors to consider include community capacity and interest, existing relationships between the grantmaker and community, and the potential for duplicating existing work. In contrast, if a foundation is setting a new grantmaking strategic focus, choosing to merely consult with nonprofit and community partners rather than engaging in collaborative decision-making could leave community leaders feeling that their expertise is undervalued.

By embracing diverse forms of participation and aligning them with context-specific needs, grantmakers can unlock the transformative power of community-driven philanthropy. This approach empowers communities, fosters trust and leads to more effective, equitable and sustainable solutions.

As we consider ways to assess or measure a grantmaker's activities and progress toward participation goals, we have expanded this framework to apply to community-driven philanthropy. This adapted framework invites us to:

- Commit to evaluating our community engagement practices and intentionally shifting toward deeper community involvement, collaboration and transformative change.
- Assert a clear vision for resourcing our communities grounded in their experience, expertise and desires, which are key to advancing inclusion, racial justice and community ownership.
- Articulate a process for building significant investment in community participation and breaking down systemic barriers to participation.
- Assess our efforts and track progress toward these goals.

Cultivating meaningful, authentic community engagement takes practice, emotional intelligence, and a focus on relationship building and self-awareness. The urgency for philanthropic institutions to get this right often stems from communities harmed by inequitable practices, staff struggling with the gap between espoused values and actual impact, and rapidly changing conditions on the ground. While the need for a philanthropic sector that truly enables thriving communities is paramount, growing our internal skills, capabilities and credibility to manage authentic participation is an ongoing journey.

As the USDN notes regarding community engagement, "Developmental stages allow us to recognize where we are and set goals for where we can go together through conscious and collective practice — so key to transforming systems."[15] Embracing this developmental mindset, we must commit to continuous learning, improvement, listening, adaptation and growth.

The process of defining participation can be an ongoing and evolving one. We have heard in our conversations with grantmakers that their interest in community participation and engagement may evolve over time in relation to an institutional milestone, such as a centennial celebration. This event can spur public programs and build relationships with the wider public — not just grantee organizations. By embracing this developmental, relationship-centered approach, grantmakers can cultivate authentic, community-driven participation that enhances their impact and fosters lasting, equitable change. This journey requires patience, humility and a steadfast commitment to learning and growth, as philanthropy shifts to be a true partner in community empowerment.

Practicing Community-Driven Philanthropy

Beyond this key strategy — resourcing community-led and grassroots organizations and movements — it is helpful to map various activities along the Community and Nonprofit Participation Spectrum as you consider what your organization's journey toward community ownership could look like.

When advancing effective practice, it is valuable to understand grantmakers' actions and how grantmakers could progress to advance those actions along the spectrum. For example, the *consult* phase of the spectrum could involve a listening tour in which grantmakers document feedback about the community's concerns, then return to their office to discuss the concerns and make strategy decisions. However, the *collaborate* phase of the spectrum would involve a

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[15] Ibid.

Grantmakers in the GEO community gather at GEO's 2022 National Conference in Chicago, IL.

Photo by Carolina Kroon.

Inform Activities

These practices focus on sharing valuable information with the community to foster transparency and trust.

- Having a website.
- Publishing a blog/podcast.
- Sharing board/staff information.
- Sharing grantmaking guidelines.
- Sharing grant information.
- Sharing investment information.
- Sharing outcomes from funding portfolios.
- Sharing how decisions are made.
- Publishing reports on progress toward closing equity gaps and outcomes disparities and ensuring that information is accessible to impacted communities.

Consult Activities

At this stage, grantmakers actively seek community input on various aspects of their work.

- Asking for a grant application or report.
- Asking for input on grant strategies.
- Asking for input on grant processes.
- Asking the community to complete a needs assessment, attend a town hall or convene to share their insights.
- Asking for a community member or nonprofit leader to share their story with your board.
- Asking who they would resource.

Involve Activities

Here, grantmakers take concrete action based on community input and establish ongoing channels for participation.

- Acting on input or feedback received and communicating back about changes.
- Engaging in participatory grantmaking (with final funding decisions still being made internally).
- Setting up a permanent community advisory group.
- Amplifying community and nonprofit success stories and assets.
- Involving communities and nonprofits in organizational planning and strategy activities.
- Hiring employees and recruiting board members from communities that are impacted by funding decisions.
- Asking communities and nonprofits to define metrics and measures that are important to them.

Collaborate Activities

This level involves deeper partnership with nonprofits and communities.

- Building nonprofit capacity, especially around racial equity practice, staffing and community engagement.
- Supporting strong nonprofit leadership at all levels, particularly for leaders who are from the community.
- Engaging in participatory grantmaking, ceding decision-making power over funding.
- Replacing formal (written) proposals and reporting with regular communication and trust-based relationships with grantees and community members.
- Fully funding the evaluation and learning efforts that support your ability to report on your outcomes.
- Acting as co-owner of strategies, results and accountability for progress.
- Working with what you know — helping nonprofits and community members connect with other funding sources and traditional power brokers (funding collaboratives, banks and lenders, government officials and legislators).
- Funding community-driven planning efforts.
- Partnering with communities and nonprofits to hold local, state and federal governments accountable for implementing equitable laws, policies and regulations.

Transform Activities

At this most advanced stage, grantmakers become community facilitators and organizers and intentionally place decision-making power in the community's hands.

- Stepping out of the community leader role and into the community facilitator and organizer role.
- Intentionally placing community members in strategic leadership positions within your organization (e.g., executive, investment and governance committees on the board, senior leadership positions on staff).
- Practicing democratic participation and equity by placing full decision-making in the community's hands.
- Focusing on strategies that build capacity for local governance and civic participation.
- Focusing on strategies that build wealth and influence for community members (cooperatives, community development financial institutions).
- Using metrics shaped by or codeveloped with the community that prioritize community voice and power.
- Reframing your community engagement efforts as a support/backbone/administrative function and centering leadership outside your organization.

listening tour in which grantmakers bring forward a set of strategies, engage in deep dialogue with those in attendance, propose changes to the strategies and gain consensus from the community that those strategies are appropriate.

These activities should also build on each other. By embracing a learning mindset for this work, we can iterate and continually seek ways to deepen engagement activities during each grant cycle. The *inform* phase comprises a variety of strategies that range in their degree of transparency. Organizations should also engage in the *inform* activities listed below while engaging in the *involve, collaborate* or *transform* phases, sharing information externally via a website and other communication channels. They should also enhance these practices by inviting an inward flow of information, guidance, decision-making and power from grantees and community members.

The following list provides activities for each stage of the Community and Nonprofit Participation Spectrum. What activities has your organization utilized? What have you learned? What opportunities do you see for engaging in activities in the next phase of the spectrum?

The tactics and strategies that work with one group of nonprofits or community members may not be authentic or appropriate for a different group. The answers to the questions above, along with the work that grantmakers have done to prepare for building strong relationships, will guide the choice of tactics needed to produce the most effective results. In all these efforts, it is important to get the nonprofits' and communities' perspectives on how they would like to participate.

Defining Your Community: Who Should Participate?

As grantmakers, we must thoughtfully examine the question of who should participate in our work. Recognizing the power, influence and resources we typically hold, it is our responsibility to build strategies and structures grounded in deep knowledge and understanding of the communities we serve. This involves developing a clear picture of the people and community, their assets and challenges, and the conditions most conducive to authentic participation.

We can also learn from previous participation efforts: What happened that was helpful? What pitfalls should we avoid in future efforts? Before advancing a participation initiative, grantmakers should pay attention to internal buy-in as well as long-term commitments to community members engaging with us.

Relatedly, our organization's staff and board compositions should reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. As Jonathan Cunningham, former senior program officer at Seattle Foundation, noted, "Foundations need to continue to hire Black staff and support and treat those staff members well. If you want to be supporting and moving more resources to Black-led organizations, if you want the buy-in of Black-led organizations, then you need to have people on staff who understand those communities, who come from those communities, who look like folks from those communities, who are trusted members of those communities, and they need to be treated well enough to stay."

Defining *community* can be complex, as Hanni Hanson, director of programs at the Compton Foundation, reflects: "The foundation has mostly funded work at a national level. Since the foundation is not embedded in a physical place, it can be harder to identify who our community is and, who we're accountable to. Fundamentally, I see our grant partners — and the social justice movements they represent — as the community to which we must hold ourselves accountable. We do that through consistently asking for and acting on feedback about what we are doing well and what else is needed from us."

Being accountable to the community is also a complex concept and should be considered with care. As mentioned earlier, institutions that shaped philanthropic culture, such as banks and for-profit corporations, are accountable to stakeholders committed to asset growth. Therefore, shifting accountability to communities is not simple, universally practiced or even universally desired. However, this shift has the potential to identify creative solutions and repair long-standing rifts that arose from historical practices that alienated and extracted from communities.

For each organization doing this work, community will mean something different. Felecia Lucky, president of the Black Belt Community Foundation, offers a more expansive definition of community: "When we define who our community is, that includes formally established nonprofits and groups without formal recognition that are doing good work in the community. It also includes local government representatives and state representatives from these areas as well as our congresswoman's office. They're all at the table with the foundation."

Ensuring the voices of nonprofits and communities are truly representative can be challenging, as many grantmakers and nonprofits lack the demographic data to inform this analysis. CHANGE Philanthropy, PEAK Grantmaking, Candid and D5 Compass have been leading the charge for better data sharing and collection, but the field still has room for significant improvement.[16]

Grantmaking can be seen as a series of investments, including not just financial resources but also investments in leadership, relationship building, social capital and advocacy. Investing time to strengthen our knowledge of and connections with diverse, representative nonprofits and community members can have multiple benefits. Several grantmaking institutions we talked with for this research indicated that community participants have become an important constituency from which their organizations recruit potential board members and staff.

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16. Kelly Brown, Carly Hare, C. Davis Parchment, and Melissa Sines. "Action and Accountability: Why Demographic Data Matters Now." Candid, 2020. Available at https://blog.glasspockets.org/2020/05/action-accountability-why-demographic-data-matters-now.html.

We move into this work by building processes and relationships that advance racial equity, inclusion and openness. Acknowledging the roots of the nonprofit and philanthropic sector — to address inequities and gaps left in the system by capitalism — is a start. This invites us to center the voices of those who have been historically excluded, left behind or ignored — the very communities whose leadership and expertise should be centered in decision-making to help catalyze transformative change.

As a grantmaker who is shifting toward more community-driven practices, we invite you to consider these reflections to inform your approach regarding who to engage in your participation efforts.

***Embrace an Expansive Understanding of* Community.**
Reaching out to existing nonprofit partners is an easy starting point, but it is important to avoid narrowly defining *community.* What perspectives and insights might we be missing if we exclude nonprofits that have never received our funding, especially given current disparities in the sector? When we rely only on existing relationships, we risk becoming gatekeepers in a way that damages other relationships and closes us off to insights and perspectives that could lead to innovative solutions. Similarly, limiting engagement to formal institutions like chambers of commerce or large religious organizations could overlook valuable grassroots voices and informal community networks. Embracing a more comprehensive view of community and building new relationships, particularly with groups traditionally under resourced by philanthropy, can help us cocreate holistic, equitable solutions.

For example, Valerie Chang, former managing director of programs at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, describes how relationships with new grantees who had had never previously received philanthropic support helped the foundation ask new questions and rethink its approach to grantmaking, "We found by working with chronically under-resourced community-based organizations, we began to ask more questions about our responsibility to make sure we make the grantmaking process as easy as possible, and provide the guidance, support, technical assistance, legal guidance and grants management so that we could make those grants as quickly as we could."

Value Diverse Nonprofit Leadership.
As noted above, the leadership of nonprofits serving diverse communities does not necessarily represent the perspectives of those communities. In fact, many nonprofits serving people of color are not led by people of color. BoardSource's report, Leading with Intent: BoardSource Index of Nonprofit Board Practices, shows that nonprofits led by people of color have never exceeded 17 percent at the board or staff level.[17] Moreover, some nonprofit leaders may not prioritize racial equity, justice and inclusion, or may not share the same identities (e.g., class or lived experiences) as the community members they serve. Grantmakers must consider both individuals and organizations to advance racial equity through community-driven practices.

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[17] BoardSource, "Leading with Intent: BoardSource Index of Nonprofit Board Practices." 2024. Available at https://boardsource.org/research-critical-issues/nonprofit-sector-research/.

Build Awareness of Implicit Bias.
Implicit biases can influence who we "trust" and which organizations we engage. Studies show that these biases often lead us to favor those we know and who look, act and sound like us. Often, organizations will tend to favor nonprofit participants with existing funder relationships, charismatic leadership or professional staff, while marginalizing smaller, community-based groups, many of which are led by people of color. Moving beyond our existing networks helps avoid unintentionally perpetuating inequities. The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project highlights the insufficiencies and exclusions that arise from how philanthropy has historically determined "trustworthiness," and offers a guide to incorporating a racial equity and power analysis in grantmaking work through culture, leadership, structure and grantmaking practice.

Reframe Power Dynamics to Mitigate Transactional Relationships.
Traditional transactional funder-grantee relationships, which prioritize applications and reports over trust and open dialogue, can inhibit authentic truth sharing. Transactional practices in philanthropy that insist on applications and reports in place of trust and conversations are not conducive to building transformative relationships. As long as grantmakers retain power over funding decisions, there will be an imbalance of power in relationships with nonprofit partners. Closing this gap requires prioritizing deep, lasting relationships where nonprofit leaders feel safe sharing their realities, and funders use their influence to support organizations even beyond direct financial

Additional Resources

On the Frontlines: Nonprofits Led by People of Color Confront COVID-19 and Structural Racism

This report from the Building Movement Project highlights the additional pressures that leaders of color face in the nonprofit sector.

Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table

This research, from Echoing Green and Bridgespan, uncovers the racial disparity in today's funding environment and makes the case that population-level impact cannot take place without funding more leaders of color.

Uncovering Unconscious Bias in Philanthropy

This how-to guide from PEAK Grantmaking is designed to help grants professionals understand bias, how it shows up in philanthropy, why it matters and how they can improve impact and outcomes for communities historically disenfranchised from philanthropic benefit. This guide highlights concepts and definitions around unconscious bias and offers some proven ways to reduce bias that you can apply to your grantmaking practices.

Framework of Cross-Movement Approaches

This resource from the Building Movement Project helps break down the difference between transactional, collaborative and transformational ways of working together.

Listening and Equity

The Fund for Shared Insight adopted a set of equity principles in July 2021, cementing a commitment to hold equity as an explicit and centered value, priority and goal. By creating the #Listening4Equity space, they invite others to engage with the principles in their own listening efforts, not as a checklist or a standard for perfection, but as a tool for setting actionable goals and tracking meaningful progress on the journey toward equity and justice.

support. Grantmakers who are willing to use their influence and cross-sector relationships in service of nonprofit leaders and community members can help organizations sustain themselves even when they are not receiving direct financial support from the organization.

Support Capacity Building for Community Engagement.
In addition to diversifying the pool of people and organizations we are listening to and working with, grantmakers may need to invest in building nonprofits' capacity to engage in community-driven strategies and communicate how increased participation can facilitate more optimal and equitable outcomes, as outlined in GEO's publication, Reimagining Capacity Building: Navigating Culture, Systems & Power.

Balance Short Term Commitments and Expectations.
As many of us have experienced in our organizations, committing to and beginning our racial equity practice can be disruptive. Breaking down traditional hierarchical systems, addressing power dynamics and naming disparities can lead to deep emotional work for organizations and the people in them. It can also lead to board and staff turnover. This is not easy work, and organizations will falter. It is necessary to commit long-term resources, such as multiyear general operating support, to help organizations transform their work from extractive to regenerative. Longer-term partnerships also create space to deepen knowledge about existing expertise that should be shaping solutions.

Additional Resources

Centering Equity through Flexible, Reliable Funding

This publication from GEO makes the case for the benefits of multiyear, general operating support, which allows nonprofits to focus on long-term impact and respond to community needs. Funders can use this resource to understand and begin to integrate flexible, reliable funding practices into their grantmaking.

New Attitudes, Old Practices: The Provision of Multiyear General Operating Support

This study from The Center for Effective Philanthropy examines the state of practice in philanthropy regarding multiyear general operating support. The study found a sobering disconnect between foundation leaders' attitudes and nonprofits' experience, as well as a similar disconnect between foundation CEOs' attitudes and their foundations' practices.

Reimagining Capacity Building: Navigating Culture, Systems & Power

This publication from GEO calls into question traditional capacity-building models that do not account for culture, systems and power in their design, too often "rendering them inadequate for communities of color." The limitations of models that do not consider power dynamics and equity issues have never been more apparent than they are now.

Look Beyond Traditional Nonprofits.

Do we engage with nonprofit representatives as proxies for community, or do we directly involve people living with systemic inequities? The answer likely depends on our institutional context and the nature of our work.

Hanni Hanson at the Compton Foundation raises similar questions: "As a funder our role is to resource the work and not insert ourselves unnecessarily. Of course, that brings up all sorts of questions, like 'Do we really know that they're doing meaningful community engagement? How does someone sitting in a private foundation office really know what's happening?' That's where relationships come in, so we put trust in our partners *and* are consistently present and trustworthy enough in the work that we hear about problems that arise."

Engaging directly with existing community-based initiatives and coalitions is one way that those inside institutional philanthropy can build deeper relationships with the community. Finding ways to join existing work reduces the tendency to invite busy nonprofit leaders and community activists into conversations directed and defined by foundation staff. Involving community members directly will require different skill sets than those many foundations currently develop; however, this tactic offers richness and possibility for funders whose staff are willing to invest in relationships, move in partnership with nonprofit leaders and local community organizations, and intentionally build their capacity for emotional intelligence, racial equity and power analysis.

Grantmaker Stories: Black Belt Community Foundation

Felecia Lucky

President, Black Belt Community Foundation

> "Our community is the Black Belt region serving 12 rural counties in the state of Alabama. As we consider this community, we recognize that it is all voices, it's all of the desires and dreams of community. For us, it's a matter of acknowledging, listening and hearing those dreams, those needs, those desires and also those victories, and being able to celebrate those.
>
> We were created to be able to bring a community together that wasn't being heard, seen, valued or incorporated into any of the dreams and visions for the community more broadly. I feel proud that we started from day one by engaging community and making them a part of us even deciding that we were going to be. They've gone from that to now helping to fundraise. They help us make grants, and when we talk strategically about what our goals and priorities are going to be, their voices are at the table."

Learn more about the Black Belt Community Foundation's community-driven approach in this Montgomery Advertiser article ***Black Belt Community Foundation helps underserved nonprofits find much needed funding***.

Engage Community as Decision-Makers.
Another significant way for grantmakers to deepen their community-centered work is welcoming people with relevant lived experience into key institutional roles that hold decision-making power, such as boards, staff and advisory bodies. Just as many think about legal or accounting expertise as they consider board/staff composition, so should community proximity, knowledge of community and issue area expertise be considered as proficiency that deepens the organization's bench. This requires rethinking traditional decision-making processes and developing a culture of belonging for diverse participants.

Practice Listening Deeply.
As we deepen our community engagement, we need to be prepared to listen deeply and respond to the input from community and nonprofit leaders, implementing better feedback loops, focusing on survey design, data collection and results interpretation, and responding with action and reporting back. The Fund for Shared Insight's Listen4Good toolkit, Listening Together, A Discussion Guide for Funders and Nonprofits, says, "We believe, and our experience has shown, that by taking the time to listen to the voice of nonprofit clients, both funders and grantees will become closer to the people they ultimately seek to help — leading to more effective programming and better client outcomes."[18]

Building Strong Relationships with Nonprofits and Communities

Grantmakers who engage the community are operating on the assumption that strategies are more likely to be effective if they reflect the lived experiences of affected community members

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[18] Fund for Shared Insight, "Listening Together: A Discussion Guide for Funders and Nonprofits." Available at https://fundforsharedinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Listening-Together-Discussion-Guide-Feb2020.pdf.

The Headwaters Foundation
Community leaders gathered at the Center for Prevention and Wellness's 2019 'Voices and Visions' event at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana, to discuss challenges and opportunities in their communities.

Photo by Pickels Photography.

and the knowledge of nonprofit partners. A key part of this process is establishing authentic relationships with trusted community leaders. These individuals can provide critical insights and open doors to further engage a diverse range of voices and perspectives. Philanthropy must be prepared to listen deeply, understand the community's concerns and address them with transparency and honesty. Seeking feedback from current grantees about who else to connect with is a valuable way to continue learning and connect with grantees as partners.

Participation alone is not enough — if partner input is routinely ignored, or if grantmakers' behaviors are not aligned with their values and intentions, the community's trust in the grantmaker's authenticity and desire for meaningful change will be eroded. This dynamic is so prevalent, in fact, that many communities ignore grantmakers' participatory engagement efforts because they do not trust that the time and effort they invest will be honored or integrated into decision-making. To combat this, grantmakers must be transparent about how community expertise and input will be integrated into decision-making processes. Opportunities for community members to directly shape those processes represent a powerful way to shift perceptions and rebuild trust.

Ultimately, the community should be empowered to define the nature of the relationship. Philanthropic institutions must be willing to reconsider traditional power dynamics and make space for the community to shape how decisions are made. This may require patience, flexibility and a willingness to adapt engagement strategies to align with the community's ways of being.

Erin Switalski, program director at Headwaters Foundation, a health conversion foundation in western Montana, describes a large community design thinking event they held with their Native American partners. Providing training with a national design thinking firm for local Native American leaders, they convened 200 community members — both tribal and nontribal — and engaged them to identify solutions to the community's most pressing health challenges. The event was designed and led by local community members, incorporated traditional foods and culture, and reached a diverse swath of community members. However, at the end of the event,

Additional Resources

Core Principles of High-Quality Listening and Feedback

Feedback Labs outlines core principles of high-quality listening and feedback, such as why this approach is important and how to do it well, noting that it supports shared power in decision making and leads to continuous reflection, learning and improvement for both grantmakers and grantee partners.

Nonprofits Integrating Community Engagement Guide

From the Building Movement Project and the Alliance for Nonprofit Management, this resource outlines why and how to build capacity for and practice constituent engagement.

Headwaters asked people to vote on which project Headwaters should fund. Erin describes why that strategy may not have been the right approach: "The process of going through two days of intense work as a community, only to be required to vote on one project at the end didn't sit well with everyone. They came up with 14 inspiring projects that needed funding, and we asked them to choose one. While we saw it as ceding power to the community, we didn't recognize the inherent Western mindset of 'winner takes all' by having them take that vote. It was counter to the collective mindset of sharing and reciprocity of that community."

It is not possible to engage the community perfectly every time. As philanthropic institutions continue to strengthen community engagement muscles and engage communities with different traditions, practices and modes of operating, we must remain humble, open to learning and committed to honoring the wisdom and practices already present within the communities we seek to serve. When grantmakers listen, codesign opportunities for engagement and try to understand existing practices, we can build durable, authentic relationships that empower communities to define their own paths forward. In reflecting on the convening, Switalski notes that: "We went in without knowing nearly enough. Our foundation had more resources and so it was easy for us to move quickly. We should have taken more time to build relationships, understand the community and find a participatory process that aligned more with their values."

Many communities perceive philanthropy's brand of participation as inauthentic, performative, extractive or tokenizing, which can prevent grantmakers from doing effective work. Participation, when done thoughtfully, is a powerful tool for change. Grantmakers who excel in this area understand that effective participation is built on mutual respect and shared goals. They structure their engagement to honor diverse perspectives and leverage the strengths present in their community.

By focusing on relationship building first, grantmakers can tap into the rich knowledge and experience that communities offer. When grantmakers and communities work together as true partners, it paves the way for more equitable, effective and sustainable outcomes. Strong, authentic relationships become the catalyst for innovative practices and thriving communities, where all participants' contributions are valued and integrated into the work.

Three Key Conditions for Building Stronger Relationships Across Power Differentials

Grantmakers and nonprofits have identified three key areas that help foster authentic relationships:

1 ***Transparency***
Open communication about strategies, process and decision-making build trust and empower partners. Requirements that ask for nonprofit transparency without grantmaker transparency

indicate that we need to take a closer look at power dynamics and how closely they align to our ideal state. When power differentials are not considered, those with more power may require or request more information than they themselves are willing to provide. Grantmakers can lead with transparency by:

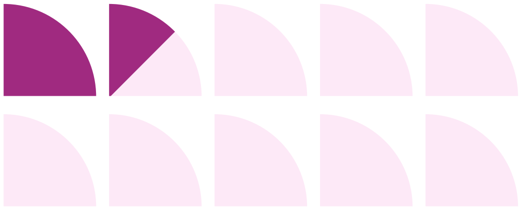
- Clearly articulating their vision, mission and values.
- Sharing financial information and decision-making processes.
- Providing accessible guidelines for grant applications and reporting.
- Welcoming candid conversations about challenges, viewing them as opportunities for growth.
- Sharing how decisions are made and who is involved in the decision-making process.
- Recognizing that transparency in both directions strengthens the ecosystem.

This kind of transparency benefits our partners; it gives them information that lets them better assess how to spend their time and limited resources. Transparency can also strengthen relationships if grantmakers respond with respect and gratitude when nonprofit partners share their struggles; respect and gratitude are key to gaining and maintaining trust.

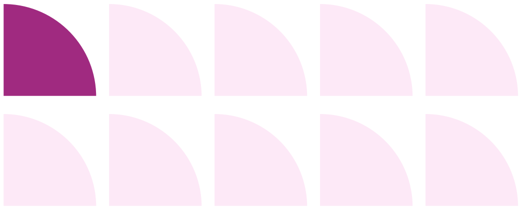
As Figure 1 shows, Candid's data highlight that most foundations could improve their transparency efforts. Common

Figure 1. Candid's Foundation Transparency Challenge[19]

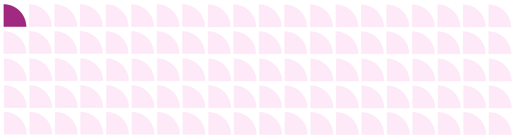
What we know about the field:



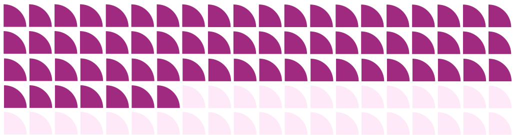
Only 14% of foundation evaluation staff prioritize externally sharing knowledge gained.**



Only 10% of foundations use a website to communicate the story of their work.*



Less than 1% of foundations report recent grants data to Candid.



Nearly 67% of foundations only accept applications by invitation.*

* Based on Candid's tracking of all U.S. independent, corporate, community and grantmaking operating foundations.

** Center for Evaluation Innovation: Benchmarking Foundation Evaluation Practices (2020) practices in the sector, such as invitation only applications or not having a website that shares funding priorities and recent grant data, make it more difficult for those seeking funding to know whether it makes sense to apply for grants and to find those grantmakers who might be interested in supporting their work.

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[19] GlassPockets, "Foundation Transparency Challenge." Candid, 2022. Available at https://learningforfunders.candid.org/content/infographics/foundation-transparency-challenge/.

2 *Skills and Knowledge*

Successful partnerships thrive when we dedicate time and resources to building the necessary skills and competencies before implementing a community participation strategy. Recognizing the critical role that program officers play in engaging with nonprofit and community partners, various models and tools have emerged highlighting the critical skills needed in this role.

The Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy's Program Officer Competency Model© highlights the need for human-centered skills in our work, such as inclusive practice, relationship-centered approaches, collaboration and power dynamics. Yet, these competencies are not just needed for program officers — these same skills must exist in our boards, senior staff and operations staff.

Additionally, many grantmaking institutions are hiring staff with a background in the communities they serve as an opportunity to bring in relevant relationships and knowledge of issue areas. When done with care for the ongoing work and awareness of the potential negative impact of poaching key leaders, this approach — although not a panacea for longer-term relationship building — can deepen trust and credibility with communities.

Additional Resources

Program Officer Competency Model©

The Program Officer Competency Model© was created by the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University to help grantmakers navigate a path toward trust-based relationships and transformed philanthropic practice.

Reimagining the Program Officer Role

This guide from the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project invites grantmakers to redefine the program officer role by naming trust-based competencies, skills and responsibilities for effective partnerships, collaboration and service.

Transparency Self-Assessment

GlassPockets, a former initiative from Candid, tracks 26 indicators of transparency and publishes a scorecard for funders based on their online practices. Indicators include things like board of directors' lists, grantmaking strategies and process, code of conduct, executive compensation, demographic data and investment policies.

3 *Credibility and Alignment*

Building strong and trusting relationships is impossible when what you say is not aligned with what you do. Aligning practices with values is essential; otherwise your credibility comes into question. Grantmakers can demonstrate their credibility by:

- Allocating resources in ways that reflect community priorities.
- Offering responsive communication and helpful feedback.
- Ensuring investments align with community well-being.
- Creating an inclusive organizational culture that values diverse perspectives.
- Continuously learning from and adapting to community insights.

Creating this alignment supports credibility and fosters nonprofit and community trust. This leads to more genuine conversations that support our ability to learn from and with communities about current and shifting realities.

Grantmaker Story: Seattle Foundation

Jonathan Cunningham
Former senior program officer, Seattle Foundation

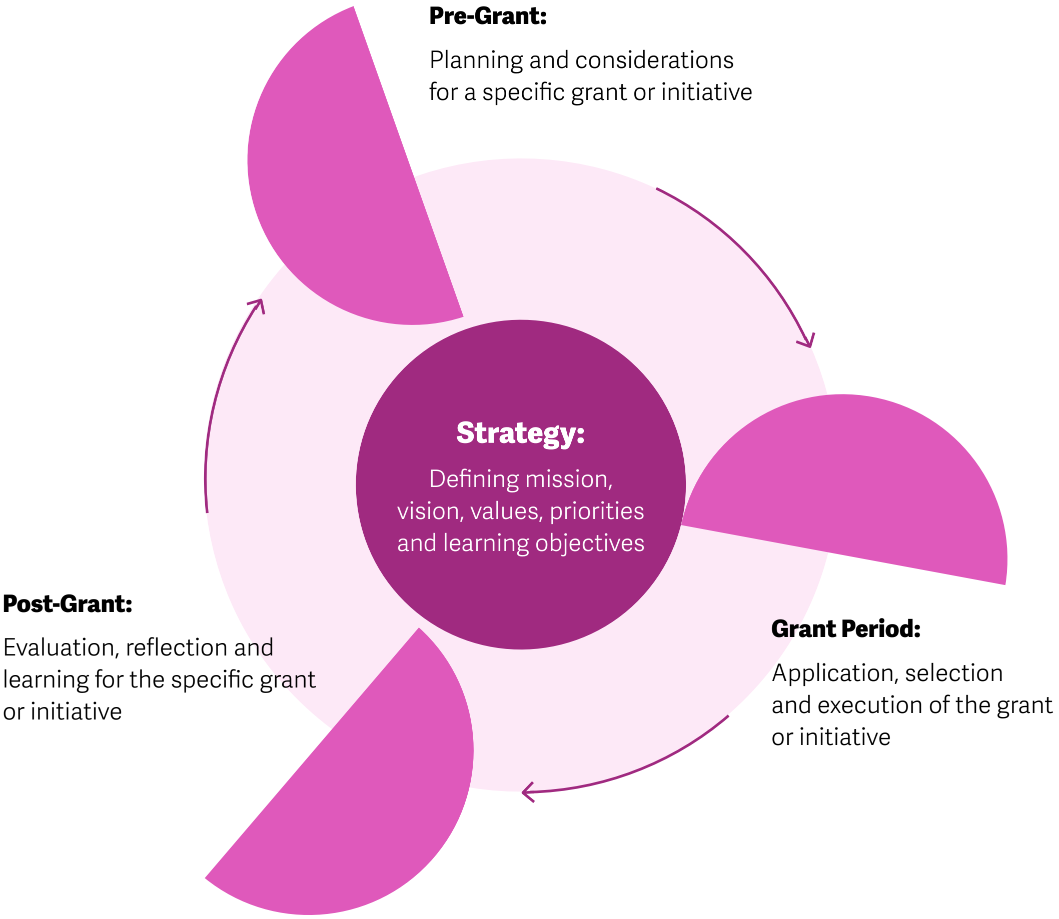
> “REPAIR — Racially Equitable Philanthropy Aimed at Initiating Reparations — is a five-year $25 million commitment from the Seattle Foundation to the Black community of the greater Seattle region. It was codesigned and built with Black community members from the Central District and the South End of Seattle, the heart of the Black community.
>
> We put together a group called the BLOC, which is our Black Led and Black Serving Organization’s Cohort. From that group, we were able to really listen to the most pressing issues that are happening within the Black community (which we define as voices from across the African diaspora in the region), and through that we were able to help heal some relationships that had been frayed over time. A REPAIR does not happen because one or two staff members think that it should. I just think as a field … we need to first admit what we do not know and then be able to go out and source that information versus having a bright idea. You really need to be able to build things with community members.”

When Should We Make Participation a Priority?

Once we determine who the critical voices are in the process and build authentic and honest relationships with those nonprofits and communities most impacted, we need to consider when to include them in ways that will help us achieve more equitable outcomes. Our goal should be to identify and structure accessible and transparent opportunities for nonprofits and communities to influence decision-making. Similarly, we should be clear with ourselves and with those we engage about what we intend to do with the input and the ideas we hear.

There are many opportunities to increase nonprofit and community participation in our work, and to share power with or cede power to communities (Figure 2). Participation does not begin

Figure 2: Philanthropic Processes for Participation


Pre-Grant:
Planning and considerations for a specific grant or initiative
Strategy:
Defining mission, vision, values, priorities and learning objectives
Post-Grant:
Evaluation, reflection and learning for the specific grant or initiative
Grant Period:
Application, selection and execution of the grant or initiative

and end with the technical aspects of our grantmaking processes. Some grantmakers believe true participation means that nonprofit and community partners are influencing, or even driving, decisions regarding their organizations' overall strategic focus. The short answer is that opportunities for participation are myriad.

Here are some examples of opportunities for grantmakers to make our work more participatory and share power with diverse nonprofit and community leaders at different stages of work:

- Asking for outside input through a strategic planning process.
- Engaging nonprofits and communities in the planning process for a new grant program or initiative.
- Making participation a priority throughout the grants process, from application design through review and selection.
- Prioritizing learning with others in the course of our work, chiefly by making learning and evaluation a participatory process with nonprofits and communities.
- Taking on systems-level work to align our values and actions and demonstrate that we are in sync with our nonprofit partners' priorities.
- Sharing our internal progress toward internal equitable culture goals to demonstrate learning and progress.

While it might sound ideal to have nonprofits and community members involved in virtually every facet of our work, the amount of time required for participation is a common concern raised by nonprofit partners and grantmakers alike. For partners who are often working with scarce resources to tackle tough challenges in our communities, any request for uncompensated labor from a funder is inequitable (and in the case of grantee partners, may be more coercive than voluntary). Therefore, it is important to compensate for community-centered expertise. Community input is no less valuable than other types of expertise brought in to shape an organization's work. It should be compensated at similar levels, not with stipends that barely cover the cost of travel or time away from work.

Concerns about how much time this requires are magnified, given that, all too often, nonprofit and community inputs are not actually incorporated into grantmakers' final decisions. To make people feel that participation is worth their time and effort, grantmakers need to ensure that participants can see how their contributions shape the foundation's work. Many grantmakers do not have a process in place to determine the extent to which we are integrating nonprofit and community perspectives in our work. Some record how much feedback we receive (e.g., number of surveys, number of participants submitting feedback at a convening, etc.). But grantmakers are often less diligent about recording feedback, as well as whether and how we acted on the feedback.

The Fund for Shared Insight has several resources on its funder listening action menu and recommends five steps for creating high-quality, equity-based feedback loops:[20]

1. Design how you will gather feedback.
2. Collect the data.
3. Interpret and analyze the results.
4. Respond to feedback by taking action.
5. Close the loop with those you asked so they will know what you heard and what you did.

As you answer the question of *when* your community should participate, there are two key considerations as you develop your strategy: (1) Do not ask for feedback if you are not going to take it seriously and act upon the input; and (2) Pay them for their time and intellectual labor/insight.

Applying a Power Analysis: Key Questions to Ask and Answer

When nonprofit and community partners help shape grantmakers' strategies and processes across organizations' work, that work is more attuned to on-the-ground realities. This approach fosters a sense of shared ownership among those implementing supported programs — a crucial element for the success of any grantmaking strategy.

Additional Resources

Fostering Participatory Learning Approaches in Philanthropy: A Guide for the Curious

Engage R+D's Guide is a comprehensive resource for funders looking to integrate participatory learning into their grantmaking practice. After reviewing practical tools, strategies and real-life examples, funders can better align their work to the lived experience of the communities they seek to serve.

Learning Together: Actionable Approaches for Grantmakers

GEO's resource from 2015 shared findings and case studies of grantmakers opening their learning and evaluation practices to nonprofit partners, community members and others to design collaborative and effective learning approaches.

The Power Manual: How to Master Complex Power Dynamics

Written by Cyndi Suarez, this resource discusses major theories of power and its role in society. Grantmakers can use this book to better understand power dynamics and how to navigate them.

Power Moves

NCRP's Power Moves is a self-assessment for funders looking to evaluate the impact of their strategies and practices for building, sharing and wielding power for equity in their communities.

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[20] Fund for Shared Insight, "What is feedback?" 2024. Available at https://fundforsharedinsight.org/what-is-feedback.

The first steps in implementing more community-driven philanthropy involve having a clear power analysis for the community participation we want to engage in, identifying who should be included and determining when the participation should take place. This requires grantmakers to reflect and explore how their nonprofit partners and community leaders want power to be shared, what kind of participation they want to engage in, who they think should be included and when they want this participation to take place.

> **"When nonprofit and community partners help shape grantmakers' strategies and processes across organizations' work, that work is more attuned to on-the-ground realities. This approach fosters a sense of shared ownership among those implementing supported programs…"**

Beginning these internal conversations is key to examining your organization's culture around power and decision-making:

- How does your organization define, distribute and use power? Where is power held traditionally, culturally and in practice? How has this changed — or not changed — over time?
- Who has access to decision-making authority and why?
- What participation and inclusion opportunities are granted to those without traditional or hierarchical power?
- How do you acknowledge and value forms of power that don't involve money, wealth or traditional decision-making frameworks?
- How do traditional notions of power influence your assessment of trustworthiness or risk? Are you open to redefining these concepts to be more inclusive?
- How do you use your organizational power to shape culture and systems? What impact does this have on your staff, partners and communities?
- Do you recognize opportunities when you can exercise your personal power and influence to advocate for change to the status quo and implement changes in your work?

Grantmakers in the GEO community gather at GEO's 2022 National Conference in Chicago, IL.

Photo by Carolina Kroon.

Getting Ready for Community-Driven Philanthropy

Building a Culture that Nurtures Emergence

Getting Ready for Community-Driven Philanthropy

Building a Culture that Nurtures Emergence

Analyzing our current organizational cultures and practicing how to change them are vital steps toward more community-driven philanthropy practices within philanthropic institutions. This process invites us to transform our relationships with ourselves, each other, our communities and the issues we aim to address.

As grantmakers, there is both challenge and possibility in reimagining the grantmaker role. We have an opportunity to lean into collective decision-making and reconsider how we share power. The grantmakers and partners featured in this publication present partnerships rooted in trust, not centered around control or gatekeeping.

Through our conversations with grantmakers, we know that trust-based philanthropy can lead to cultural and social transformation. So much becomes possible if funders participate differently. Sharing power and changing traditional structures invite us into a new paradigm. Rather than being gatekeepers, why not operate more as organizers and advocates? Rather than believing that we are the experts, why not lead with listening paired with meaningful action?

While it is tempting to immediately experiment with new engagement tactics, embracing community-driven philanthropy requires thoughtful consideration of internal shifts needed to create conditions for success. This involves transforming systems, policies and decision-making structures to close inequitable gaps, reshape power dynamics and meaningfully include perspectives of those with deep expertise due to their relationships, proximity or lived experience.

This work calls for mindset shifts across our organizations. The goal is to create philanthropic cultures that value participation and address power dynamics at the heart of philanthropy's relationships with nonprofits and communities. Cultivating philosophies that align with shifts in the broader communities served can ensure that internal cultures and practice do not create barriers to broader systemic change.

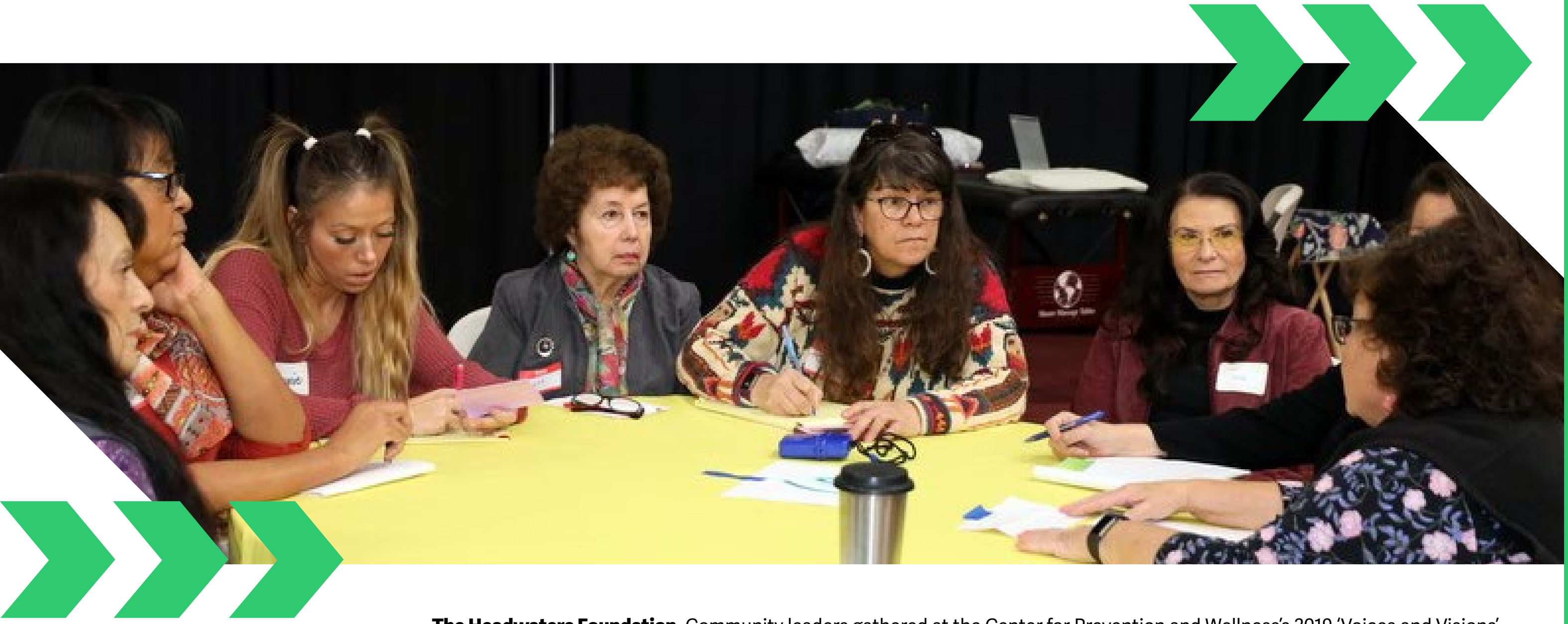
As Erin Switalski, program director of Headwaters Foundation, reflects: "Early on, our board made the decision to approve an annual grantmaking plan with clear guardrails for the staff to make grant decisions. They recognized that staff members had the relationships with organizations making change and were in a better position to understand if their work aligned with the mission, goals and strategic framework that the board approved. This trust of the staff from the board is essential for our staff to feel comfortable building a strong relationship with grantees. Without fear that a board who doesn't understand the work might not approve something moving forward, more time can be spent with grantees as true partners, not trying to figure out how to frame their work so a board understands it."

Internal culture work does not mean external community-driven efforts must wait. Instead, there is an opportunity to examine your organization's culture with an eye toward elements that make participation more difficult. This might involve discussing the benefits and possibilities of participation with the board and staff. It could also mean working to build capacities like facilitation, participatory budgeting or strategic communications to ensure that everyone has the skills to be an authentic partner with nonprofits, community members and others.

In Shaping Culture Through Key Moments (2016) and Exploring Microcultures and Why They Matter (2017), GEO examined the impact that culture has on grantmaking effectiveness. Productive organizational cultures demonstrate attributes such as mutual respect, transparency and shared learning, both within and outside the organization. Without an organizational culture that values shared ownership and reflects the principle that everyone has something valuable to contribute, it will be challenging for grantmakers to adopt the right mindset for authentic participation. Ultimately, community-driven philanthropy is not a single program or policy, but a set of values and commitments embedded throughout an organization, from staffing and budgeting to communications and evaluation.

Embracing Equity in Organizational Culture

Entrenched power dynamics are baked into our organizational cultures — the systems, structures, policies and processes, and unspoken ways of being that define our organizations — making it difficult to shift to more community-driven approaches. Authentically engaging with these dynamics means approaching power differently — for example, using an asset-based



The Headwaters Foundation. Community leaders gathered at the Center for Prevention and Wellness's 2019 'Voices and Visions' event at Salish Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana, to discuss challenges and opportunities in their communities.

Photo by Pickels Photography.

approach, seeking to amplify and build upon existing strengths within our organizations and communities.

Felecia Lucky, president of Black Belt Community Foundation, describes this approach: "We make sure that our volunteers are represented in our board leadership so that it's not all bank presidents and attorneys. This creates a culture of learning, where people from the community are beginning to understand the power that traditional power brokers have. At the same time, those closer to the community are helping traditional power brokers understand that their power is no greater than the power that communities wield."

Making these changes involves increased vulnerability and risk-taking both organizationally and individually, as it requires honest reflection on organizational structures and systems as well as individual practices and interpersonal relationships. Sheryl Petty, Ed.D., founder and CEO of Movement Tapestries, outlines approaches for equity-embedded change management in the publication, A Change Management & Deep Equity Primer: The What, Why, How & Nuance, offering helpful starting points as you consider embarking on changing organizational culture within your organization. Various factors can spark opportunities for culture change, making it easier to discuss and implement power sharing and other community-driven practices within your organization. To truly transform our organizational cultures, we must be willing to transform ourselves, our ideas about leadership, our perspectives on effectiveness and success, and more. This work requires the capacity to stay committed to a change process and embrace complexity.

Additional Resources

Building Resilient Organizations

Maurice Mitchell offers a perspective on the issues facing progressive social movements and discusses the root causes of the current crises within organizations. This article calls on leaders to better understand the challenges faced by community partners and ultimately encourages drastic change to their practices to better support the people and movements for lasting change.

A Change Management & Deep Equity Primer: The What, Why, How & Nuance

In this partnership publication from GEO, Sheryl Petty, Ed.D., highlights the nature of change and its ability to be both generative and disruptive. By advancing and embodying deep equity, grantmakers can reveal new possibilities in their work and service to communities.

GEO's Culture Resource Guide: Overview

This framework guides grantmakers to consistently work to understand, assess, shift and tend to their organizational culture. Culture work is not linear but whether it is intentionally built has broad ripple effects on organizational effectiveness.

Hanni Hanson, director of programs at the Compton Foundation, reflects on a key moment at her organization when board conflict over whether to spend down the endowment resulted in a transformation of the foundation's overall approach to philanthropy. "The tensions forced conversations about our different visions of what the foundation should be. It helped us articulate our values more explicitly, align behind the decision to redistribute our assets in support of social movements and reimagine our internal practices to be more relational and grantee oriented. We have even created a new program in our closing years to support reparations and wealth return."

When beginning this internal work, it is important to explicitly name what you are seeking to achieve in your organizational transformation and name the culture you are working to create and what you hope it will help achieve. Elz Cuya Jones, former deputy director at North Star Fund reflects on what this looked like within her organization:

> "Being explicit about dismantling white supremacy freed us and liberated us to be bold, and it increased the commitment of our donors in that. I think folks gravitate toward a bold stance rather than a wavering one. We may have lost some people, but what we gained was much greater. We no longer talk about dismantling white supremacy as something that needs to happen outside of North Star Fund, we talk about it as a way of being in our work.
>
> We can't tear down those structures out in the world if the way that we are managing our teams is oppressive, if the way that I speak to our donors is simply upholding the status quo, if I'm not checking you on that weird thing that you said to me or if I'm holding my team in anger in any kind of way. I really love that our workplace has been transformed from a place that is effective to a place that just feels better. It's not just a place where I can grow professionally and do good work. It's all of those things, but now, it feels healthier and more wholesome."

Additional Resources

Racial Equity Tools: Decolonization Theory and Practice

This resource list from Equity in the Center™ explores the theory and practice behind the decolonization movement. By exploring these resources, grantmakers can start to interrogate ongoing colonialism and colonial mentalities that permeate our institutions.

3 Ways to Decolonize Your Nonprofit as Told by a Black Queer Feminist Organizer

In this article, Neesha Powell describes the Nonprofit Industrial Complex and outlines three key strategies for nonprofits looking to embrace a different way of organizing: (1) Embrace a culture of abundance, not scarcity; (2) Less hierarchy, more collective decision-making; and (3) Practice transformative justice/ community accountability.

Practices that support sharing power and shifting culture within our own organizations include:

- Developing our ability to embrace complexity and context.
- Making decisions along with those who are directly impacted.
- Fostering openness and comfort with having difficult conversations that require us to move through conflict toward growth.
- Embracing diverse communication styles and languages.
- Aligning urgency with strategic purpose rather than defaulting to unnecessary deadlines.

Making these changes can be difficult as we are so often working to create cultures and ways of being that we have not experienced ourselves inside institutional structures.

By recognizing the unique value each person brings — whether they're on the board, in operations, programs or executive roles — we can create organizations that truly embody the principles of equity. This inclusive approach not only enhances our internal dynamics but also strengthens our capacity to effect meaningful change in the communities we serve.

Exploring Innovative Organizational Structures

Transforming hierarchy and power dynamics within our organizations and exploring values-aligned decision-making structures can require understanding how organizational power structures can create more inclusive, effective organizations. As a sector that often defaults to hierarchical models, we have an opportunity to explore values-aligned organizational structures. The Society for Human Resource Management notes, "Organizational structure aligns and relates parts of an organization, so it can achieve its maximum performance. The structure chosen affects an organization's success in carrying out its strategy and objectives."[21]

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21. SHRM, "Organizational Structure Explained: A Comprehensive Guide for Businesses." 2024. Available at https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/tools/toolkits/understanding-organizational-structures.

Additional Resource

The Exit Interview: Perceptions on Why Black Professionals Leave Grantmaking Institutions

ABFE's report reveals that the experiences of many Black professionals in grantmaking institutions may challenge the current perception of the field's increasing commitment to diversity.

This insight empowers us to organize our collective work in ways that enhance our impact and reach. By exploring innovative structures, we can create organizations that are not only more equitable but also more effective in achieving their missions.

Some potential approaches to consider include:

- Building organizational structures that encourage more direct communication and collaboration.
- Adopting decision-making processes that incorporate input from all levels of the organization.
- Rotating leadership roles to provide broader exposure to different perspectives.
- Developing cross-functional teams that break down traditional departmental silos.
- Adopting participatory budgeting processes that give staff more say in resource allocation.

Locus of Decision-Making

Shifting our organizational cultures to be more fluid, power aware and inclusive offers opportunities to build alignment and address resistance. Doing this effectively requires transparency and fostering consistent, open communication about decision-making processes and rationales.

There is much that links how decisions are made internally to how an organization makes decisions that are more external facing. In both situations, it is key to understand the context and assess a level of participation that is appropriate to the situation. In most circumstances, it is worth challenging ourselves to move toward deeper participation and higher transparency. Developing the practice of increasing participation in ways that bring people into decisions that affect them allows individuals and teams to know how their perspectives broaden considerations and ultimately inform decisions.

How internal decisions are made is comparable to how external decisions are made in that different levels of participation are appropriate based on the context. Building a community-driven philanthropy context does not mean that every decision needs to be held in the “collaborate” or “transform” category, but it does mean that we should go through a process that lets us consider how to increase participation in all our activities. We should be clear on why we’re landing where we are and be communicating that with consistent transparency. By practicing the elements of participation internally, we build the muscles needed to practice high levels of participation externally.

It is also worth noting that organizations do not only practice one of these decision-making types. Too often, decisions that are seen as high stakes or important lean toward the left end of the spectrum, while decisions that are seen to "not matter" lean toward the right end of the spectrum. For instance, boards and senior staff retain decisions over funding interest areas and investment allocations, while offering program staff decision-making authority over individual grants or decisions to convene grantees. Similarly, administrative staff may be excluded from decisions or deliberations about individual grants — even where they may have valuable knowledge and lived experience — but are given decision-making authority for lower-stakes decisions, such as where to have the staff party or what to order for lunch. These examples illustrate that we cannot meaningfully analyze where decision-making lives without analyzing where power lives in our organizations.

Valerie Chang, former managing director of programs at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, offered: "Work on racial justice had participation from a tremendous number of people that had not been doing grantmaking before and people were excited about the work. I think it changes the way in which people think about what they're doing, and how they're seeing things across the broader range of the organization and contributing in different ways, not just by what their job title is." Her colleague Tara Magner, director of Chicago Commitment, expanded on this sharing: "The MacArthur Foundation formed different internal committees of volunteers. The committee on racial justice, for instance, included program officers and colleagues who were administrators, coordinators or grants managers. The committee was open to anyone who wanted to volunteer. That opened conversations about our traditional and somewhat rigid practices around who can serve as a program officer on a grant. Is it only a person with the title of program officer or with a title that is higher in the hierarchy?"

Examining and Shifting Decision-Making Internally

The complex nature of the high stakes issues we are trying to tackle are not easily solved when we are swamped with too much data and too little authority. This can be a recipe for poor decision-making generally. Getting explicit about the kinds of decisions your organization is making, who has the authority to make those decisions and who is accountable for those decisions is a first step.

Here are some questions you can ask as you consider how to untangle your organization's decision-making and to begin having transparent conversations about power and authority:

- Is there agreement in your organization or team about which decisions are high stakes and which are low stakes?
- Are decisions that are delegated accompanied by clearly articulated constraints?
- Are crosscutting decisions made with the right people in the room, across organizational boundaries?
- How can you facilitate transparent and rapid flow of information without overwhelming people?
- Have you mapped your current decision-making process for common or repetitive types of decisions? (Who has a voice, who has a vote and who has veto power?)
- What skills, capabilities or life experiences are needed and/or valuable for making this decision?

Undertaking structural reorganization is not to be taken lightly. Unless done carefully, it can lead to misalignment across the organization, as gaps open and conflicts arise over turf. An organization that has already developed good practices around transparency and accountability will be more successful at embracing more agile — and equitable — decision-making.

Personal Power and Influence as a Lever for Participation

All of us generally take decision-making power or cede decision-making power in ways that are shaped within larger societal and institutional frameworks. Before we ask our staff, volunteers, communities or ourselves to participate in making decisions about things that impact them, we must also act with the belief that everyone's ability to learn and grow is of equal value. As we begin to untangle high stakes decisions, delegated or ad hoc decisions and the accompanying authority and accountability across our organizations, many of us will begin to recognize the big and small decisions we make on a day-to-day basis that can either strengthen or hinder our engagement with communities, nonprofit leaders and movement leaders.

Additional Resources

Decision-Making Tools from Bridgespan

There are many great tools to help organizations make stronger, more effective decisions. We recommend Bridgespan's guidance on decision-making frameworks, which helps organizations untangle the locus of authority and influence in their decisions, policies and processes.

Seek Maximum Appropriate Involvement in Decision-Making

The Interaction Institute for Social Change encourages leaders to examine how and who to meaningfully involve in decision-making. Seeking maximum appropriate involvement is one of seven practices of Facilitative Leadership for Social Change.

Liberating Structures: 15% Solutions

A great tool for beginning to think about what power you (and your colleagues) hold, this activity can help you consider a framework for "discovering and focusing on what each person has the freedom and resources to do now." It invites us to ask, "What is your 15 percent? Where do you have the discretion and freedom to act? What can you do without any other resources or authority?"

By completing this activity, on your own and with a group, you may find solutions to big problems where decision-making is distributed widely or unevenly. Used in concert with the decision-making tools above, it can help deepen conversations across your organization and with your stakeholders around the locus of decision-making.

Pro-Tip: For organizations just getting started with more participatory internal and external practices, it is worthwhile to explore all the great tips and activities provided by Liberating Structures.

Self to Systems: Leading for Race Equity Impact Leadership

Developed by ProInspire, this tool allows individuals and organizations to explore identity, center relationships, align values and collectively reimagine a more equitable sector. "Foundational Principles of the model are that one can operate as a leader from any position within an organization; that leaders within the social sector must prioritize the advancement of racial equity from self to systems and that the process for individuals to advance racial equity includes committing to actively learning and unlearning, taking intentional action and building processes for accountability."

Grantmakers' community roles mean that many of our day-to-day activities leave an impression on our communities regarding how we value their expertise and time. From things as simple as customer service (like quick email response time, picking up the phone versus emailing, and being present in the moment with grantee partners and community leaders) to more complex interactions (like providing technical assistance on an application or report, conducting a grantee survey or running a grantee convening), together inform within our community.

Another important lever of influence that stems from the grantmaker role is the power to recommend. Depending on our specific title or function, we may or may not have direct authority over the grant size, grant restrictions, what we ask for in applications or reports, which grantees we fund, how we measure success — but most of us touch the process in some way, regularly making ad hoc or delegated decisions, and making recommendations based on our knowledge. Much of the power wielded in the philanthropic sector flows through connections, access and networks — so what are the opportunities to amplify voices that are excluded from these forms of power? Laura Gerald, president of Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust, shares how the foundation uses its unique perspective as a funder to support community, in part by sharing stories and helping to build connections between individuals and the systems that affect their lives:

> "We spend time in community and use our voice to ask difficult questions of the systems that are keeping communities that have been marginalized out of the discussion. We can use our voice and influence to provide leverage for the excluded parties. For example, as we worked to expand Medicaid in North Carolina for over a decade, we told stories about people impacted by not having access to healthcare and invested in grantees to tell stories about people on the ground. At the same time, we work to connect healthcare institutions with grassroots groups and residents, because we found that sometimes, even though they may be serving these communities, they struggle to be in authentic partnership with community. The trust can serve in that connector role and help the healthcare system move beyond simple service provision to seeing communities as partners in creating healthier outcomes."

Applying an Analysis for Transformation: Questions to Consider

Efforts to implement and sustain changes that positively impact organizational culture, create opportunities for clear communication, participatory decision-making and consistent expectations across hierarchy, are all important. In fact, we can learn together with our nonprofit partners, our communities and our peer organizations, if we are willing to share our own organizational culture challenges and how we are confronting, overcoming and/or learning from them. But we must be clear that those changes are supporting our authentic, appreciative engagement with communities. If communities are not experiencing the benefits of work we are doing to build different internal organizational mechanisms, we are still off track. Using the questions below, reflect on how your organization's internal dynamics influence external-facing work and the experience of your community.

- What values and assumptions are explicit — or implicit — in our work? Spoken or unspoken? Are they helpful or unhelpful when advancing changes that support increased community participation?
- How are the communities we serve represented in organizational leadership? How are compensation and material resources distributed across these lines?
- How is our organization's leadership, voice and authority distributed across race, ethnicity, gender, ability or disability, class and other characteristics important to our community?
- How do we minimize the disruption to community members when internal organizational changes like strategic shifts and staff transitions occur?
- What mechanisms do we use to listen to our community and how is what we hear used to shape our work?
- Do employees, volunteers, grantees and other community members have a process or mechanism to raise concerns about our organizational culture, strategic direction or other elements of our grantmaking practice?
- How are cultural and linguistic norms weaved into our day-to-day operations?
- What work are we doing — individually and as an organization — to demonstrate and enact a culture of belonging and psychological safety?

Nonprofit grantees of Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust engage in work with community members.

Photo by Shawn Poynter, courtesy of the Kate B Reynolds Foundation.

Putting Community-Driven Philanthropy into Practice

Putting Community-Driven Philanthropy into Practice

Throughout this publication we have explored how to apply an equity lens to your work, how to define participation with a power analysis and how to shift our organizational culture and structures to support community-driven philanthropy in our work.

What does it take to put community-driven philanthropy into practice?

Principles for Community Engagement

Community-driven philanthropy exists on a spectrum of practices with varying levels of nonprofit and community participation and decision-making. While it may not be feasible for all grantmakers to implement every practice, GEO encourages grantmakers to consider how we can move our practices across the spectrum of engagement toward increased inclusion and relationship-strengthening practices that analyze power, access and structural inequities.

As Chicago Beyond's Whole Philanthropy philosophy states: "Justice is not just an abstract state of liberation that exists 'out there.' We enact justice every day: in each encounter with others, through every relationship we build, with every plan we make — our actions can restore or harm people and communities."[22] This underscores the importance of building awareness around power dynamics to thoughtfully navigate relationships with grantees and community members.

This is a process. As Hanni Hanson, the Compton Foundation director of programs points out, "You can prioritize structures and authentic relationships to help mitigate and soften that power dynamic." This context can help ground the development of more participatory engagement practices over time. Hanson underscores the centrality of relationship building with grantees in evolving practices:

> "We consistently try to mitigate the power dynamic between the staff and potential grantees or current grantees. We've radically simplified our grantmaking processes and tried to engender some mutuality in those relationships: for example, we've moved to reporting calls instead of written reports, and always ask on the calls how we can be helpful to them. Reporting is now an opportunity to connect and share mutual learnings instead of surveilling grantees' progress. More important, there has been a shift toward understanding the foundation's fundamental purpose as supporting our grantee partners and the movements they represent. In that frame, our job is to use our institutional leverage and resources on their behalf, for example, by helping them get in front of other funders or connecting them to potential allies they don't yet know."

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[22] Chicago Beyond, "Whole Philanthropy." 2023. Available at https://chicagobeyond.org/insights/philanthropy/whole-philanthropy/.

"'You can prioritize structures and authentic relationships to help mitigate and soften that power dynamic.'"

Grantmakers have a range of options available for engaging with nonprofit and community partners and facilitating participation. To develop more participatory engagement practices, grantmakers can consider the following reflective questions:

- How do we define our community and who should participate in our work?
- How comfortable are we with sharing power? What feels challenging and why?
- How transparent are we willing to be? How accountable do we want to be?
- Have we built the relationships needed to begin this work? What work will we need to do to ensure opportunities for privacy, anonymity and psychological safety? If we are new to a community or working to repair past harm, what additional work do we need to do as we build relationships?
- Have we built or shifted responsibilities and priorities to add needed staff capacities, program plans, timelines and program budgets to fully commit to this work?
- Are we able to openly discuss our mistakes and shortcomings?
- How do we evaluate our impact, and how does power influence these assessments?

Chicago Beyond
Josh Williams talks with an attendee at a Chicago Beyond event at Chicago Beyond's Home for Social Innovation in Chicago, IL.

Photo by Roger Morales, courtesy of Chicago Beyond.

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Strategies and Practices to Embrace in Your Community-Driven Philanthropy Work

Build internal competencies. Increase your board and staff skills in racial justice, community organizing, facilitation, navigating conflict, tension and building alignment. Hire talent with lived experience.

- *Share meaningful power and authority.* Restructure processes to share power, including meaningful decision-making authority, with nonprofits and community members.
- *Increase capacity and accessibility for participation.* Provide relevant support and capacity building that allows nonprofit leaders and community members to participate fully. Possible tactics to support this include flexible meeting times and locations, meeting outside the traditional workday, providing childcare and transportation, creating agendas that are collectively shaped, and providing devices and technology to support engagement.
- *Build mechanisms for listening to community and grantees.* Formalize listening practices as part of your participation work. This might involve creating staff roles focused on community listening efforts or building the capacity of your communities' nonprofits to listen to the individuals they serve.[23]
- *Compensate participants.* Provide meaningful compensation for community expertise and time. Proximity to community and knowledge about community or issue areas offer expertise that is valuable and necessary for effective philanthropic work. Instead of small stipends that are based on inequitable ways of valuing work, consider compensation that aligns with how other types of experts are compensated within your organization's work, such as consultants, lawyers and so forth.
- *Be purposeful about participant demographics.* Pay close attention to participant demographic data to ensure you are engaging diverse representation, and address barriers that could be preventing full participation. Disaggregate feedback and input based on demographic data to understand the experience across participants. Josh Williams, director of strategy and operations at Chicago Beyond shared his perspective with us, "Doing this well requires internal reflections to deconstruct biases, reframe risk and deeply trust the perspectives and experiences of community members."
- *Follow through on commitments.* Cultivate relationships based in trust and accountability by honoring commitments, responding to grantee and community feedback and sharing

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[23] Katy Love, Valerie Threlfall, Sabrina Hargrave, "A Guide to Funder Listening in Action." Fund for Shared Action, 2024. Available at https://fundforsharedinsight.org/funder-tools/funder-listening-action-menu/.

openly about actions taken based on participation. Erin Switalski, program director at Headwaters Foundation, shares how they approach grant reporting conversations:

> "Our grantee partners asked us for quarterly check-ins, and those are opportunities to ask 'How is this going? What's the landscape? What's changed? Where are your challenges? What else can we do to be supporting you beyond just the funding that we gave you?' Then we follow up. For example, we heard from grant partners that they needed support thinking about communications and narrative change work. We responded by hosting what we called an 'Action Lab: Messaging for Impact,' where we brought an expert on narrative change to lead a workshop with a handful of grant partners. We cocreated the agenda with the grant partners ahead of time, and also invited them to bring one partner that wasn't a grantee of ours. We got incredible feedback about this support."

Grantmaker Peer Networks

Abundance Movement

Join the *Abundance* movement and participate in the Abundance Action Community, where funders make tangible, public commitments to shift your practice, policies and ways of being and significantly increase funding to support Black-led and Black-centered organizations.

GEO's Community-Driven Philanthropy Peer Community

We encourage you to join a peer network of grantmakers in the GEO community where participants surface challenges connected to building trust with nonprofits and communities, examine the role of power and engage in peer coaching and other activities.

Participatory Grantmakers Community of Practice

The Participatory Grantmakers Community welcomes grantmaking practitioners who are interested in sharing resources, lessons learned and ultimately how to shift power to communities.

Practices to Avoid

- *Conducting unnecessary surveys or gathering unnecessary information.* Avoid surveying or convening your nonprofit partners to ask them whether you should implement less burdensome application and reporting processes, whether you should increase your overhead rates, whether you should cover staff time and support pay equity at nonprofits, or whether they need unrestricted, multiyear funding or capacity-building support. In the field, the settled answer to all these questions is an emphatic *Yes*. These baseline community-driven practices complement and strengthen any community-driven philanthropy efforts.
- *Overemphasizing "phantom" conflicts of interest or false concepts of objectivity.* In fact, everyone brings biases and conflicts to decision-making processes. To be more participatory by engaging those closer to the issues, we cannot ask them to check their experiences at the door. Legal conflicts of interest can be easily managed via transparency practices, policies and procedures. Outdated notions of objectivity prioritize detachment instead of tapping into the benefits that come from personal experience.
- *Letting perfect be the enemy of good.* Waiting until every aspect of a project or initiative is "fully baked" can delay allocation of critical resources where they are needed most, decrease participant enthusiasm and morale, and reinforce traditional ways of working together as leaders. These traditional ways encourage perfectionism, lack transparency and promote unrealistic expectations, all of which discourage creativity, experimentation and innovation within the group. Working together as design and thought partners from an initiative's onset increases opportunities for cocreation, which involves listening, asking questions, exchanging ideas, exploring possibilities and negotiating for mutually satisfactory results.
- *Working in isolation*. Many grantmakers are tackling these culture and power issues. Instead of navigating these challenges alone, join a peer community or cohort to start learning from your peers and sharing more effective practices.

Resourcing Community-Driven Philanthropy

The journey toward community-driven philanthropy requires examining how resources are allocated within grantmaking organizations. This process helps you to understand an organization's priorities and commitment to community engagement. The heart of this assessment is a deep dive into organizational budgets, which often reflect internal priorities: the technology that keeps operations running smoothly, the processes that govern applications and reporting, and the staff time dedicated to planning and evaluation. While these elements are crucial for organizational functioning, they represent only one side of the philanthropic equation.

The other side includes the community engagement activities that connect grantmakers and the communities they serve. These activities encompass a wide range of efforts, from marketing and communications to convening nonprofits and community members, and include the vital work of building and maintaining trusting partnerships, implementing participatory grantmaking practices and supporting grassroots organizations. They also extend to resourcing community-led planning efforts, fostering leadership development and empowering citizens to engage in local governance.

However, it is crucial to recognize that not all community partners are created equal. Some have long-standing relationships with philanthropy and consequently larger budgets, while others have traditionally operated outside of white-dominant community structures and have been chronically under resourced. This disparity calls for a nuanced approach to community engagement and resource allocation.

The experience of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, as shared by Tara Magner, director of the Chicago Commitment, illustrates the complexities of supporting smaller, emerging organizations, which may be less well-equipped to deal with crisis, less resourced for the operational requirements of a 501(c)(3) organization and not necessarily positioned to secure philanthropic support. Magner shared this example:

> "[The foundation] funded a small-sized organization with a couple of small grants, and then with a larger grant. Later in time, we learned that the organization's status as a public charity had been rescinded by the IRS. We tried to be helpful to that organization as it worked to reinstate its status as a public charity. We were happy to assist but were cognizant that doing so required dedicated time from program officers, grants managers and the legal department. These colleagues were all supportive but did not necessarily plan for those extra hours of work for one organization. As a result of this and other examples, we try to keep MacArthur's leadership and other teams and departments up to date with the struggles that organizations face so that when there is a genuine challenge of this sort, our colleagues understand the context. This is part of the experience of funding community-based work and/or of supporting small-sized organizations. Ultimately, we added more staff to our grantmaking team out of the recognition that we needed more people to do this work well."

We can draw the connection that resourcing community engagement activities at high levels within organizational budgets is not necessarily transformative if grants are still primarily going to well-resourced organizations with large budgets. This reality calls for a fundamental shift in how grantmakers approach resource allocation. It is not enough to simply increase overall community engagement budgets if those resources are still primarily flowing to well-established, well-resourced organizations. True community-driven philanthropy requires a commitment to better resourcing small, emerging organizations, led by those with deep, firsthand understanding of the challenges at hand. When foundations better resource emerging and BIPOC-led organizations, it opens opportunities to help close historical funding gaps to Black-led nonprofits and to drive more effective, hyperlocal, community-sourced solutions.

The Compton Foundation's approach, as described by Hanni Hanson, offers a glimpse into a more proactive, holistic way of thinking about resource allocation. By considering their long-term impact and responsibilities, especially in light of their spend-down strategy, they're asking questions such as "How are we redistributing our resources in a way that aligns with our mission?" This is part of a broader practice of looking at its asset redistribution as a reparative return of wealth extracted under racialized capitalism. For example, in 2022, halfway through its five-year spend-down trajectory, the Compton Foundation revised its open four- and five-year grants to include compounding 8 percent increases each year. This recognized the impact of high inflation on nonprofits and shared the income that the foundation had earned on invested funds it had already promised to the field.

The Black-Led Joy and Wellness Fund at the Seattle Foundation is an example of why doing this work with Black community members is essential and how resourcing can and should be considered expansively. Former Senior Program Officer Jonathan Cunningham reflected on the fund:

> "We recognized how much weight Black-led and Black-serving organizations were dealing with. There's the ongoing and also unrelenting, persistent anti-Black racism, which never goes away. Their burn rate is high, particularly with the staff who also could be in their client base.
>
> We considered what the right kind of support might look like. We didn't make folks do some laborious grant process, we designed a very streamlined application process, and Black community members created the questions including: "What do you know? Share more about what your challenges are, what does joy and wellness mean to you? If you were to get these funds, how would you utilize them?" It's the whole gamut of things that are eligible for funding, it's open-ended: massages, spa packages for the staff, care packages, wellness packages, rests, retreats, sabbaticals, gym memberships, wellness activity, reimbursements. We focus on smaller grassroots organizations with budgets of $500,000 or below.
>
> That was intentional because we know that they often do not have the resources to provide some of that stuff to their staff. That was the focus. We got 29 applications, and we were able to fund all of them. It seems like the through line is, how are you incorporating community voices and how is that shifting how the foundation operates?"

The path to genuine community-driven philanthropy is paved with intentional resource allocation, a commitment to equity and a willingness to reexamine long-held practices. By aligning their resources more closely with their values and the needs of their communities, grantmakers can create more equitable, effective and transformative philanthropic practices that truly empower and uplift the communities they serve.

Assuring Mutual Accountability

Traditional philanthropic-nonprofit relationships often emphasize one-way accountability, asking nonprofits to develop lengthy proposals to describe their work, assessed against peers in the field in ways that stoke notions of scarcity, and then funded based on criteria chosen by individual grantmakers. This cycle is often followed by requests for regular reports with clear data and measurements that can help us understand whether we made "good" decisions about what to fund.

Community-driven philanthropy turns this type of accountability on its head and creates opportunities for funders to be accountable to the communities they serve and support. Laura Gerald, president of Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust says: "At the Trust, we start by listening to the communities we serve because the people most impacted by disparities are the experts on what they need to thrive. We invest in community-led mapping and research and support convenings so residents can identify opportunities and strengths, problems and barriers, and ultimately solutions. We amplify the power and voices on the ground and hold ourselves mutually accountable, along with institutions working in these spaces, to produce outcomes that actually fix problems and reduce inequities."

Grantmakers in the GEO community gather at GEO's 2022 National Conference in Chicago, IL.

Photo by Carolina Kroon.

Imagine funding organizations and grantmaking institutions staffed and led by people from the communities that will be most impacted by the decisions made. They develop proposals, do the research, collect the data and come up with the ideas to present to their community. The community, through a democratic decision-making process, determines which ideas to fund and which community organizations should carry them out. This organization then monitors results based on criteria chosen by the community and reports back to the community on successes and challenges to help the community grow their capacity to make better decisions the next time.

North Star Fund's former Deputy Director Elz Cuya Jones describes the ability of their community funding committee to skillfully navigate this process: "Our community funding committees make our funding decisions. We facilitate the group of organizers and activists to make those funding decisions for us and have a group of people holding all of that knowledge and understanding of the trajectory of many of these issues over time, versus a single program officer or two."

Accountability in this context becomes a tool for continuous improvement and learning. It creates opportunities to openly discuss what has and hasn't worked to deepen understanding and support shifting practices. This understanding is especially critical when working with communities where foundations have historically caused harm.

As Erin Switalski, program director at Headwaters Foundation describes: "When we launched our early childhood initiative, we knew we wanted to fund local community-based organizations to act as the anchor organization for a community collaborative. Therefore, trusted community leaders needed to hold this role. To find those organizations and leaders, we held community meetings where we invited organizations working in the realm of child and family support to be nominated as the anchor organization and had the community vote in real time on their phones. That's who we funded. In some communities, the community chose organizations that weren't the notable ones a funder would have likely selected."

Embracing Community-Driven Accountability: Key Questions to Ask and Answer

Shifting the perspective on accountability is just a small step, but as with the previously discussed aspects of putting community-driven philanthropy into practice, the implementation takes commitment to action and a desire to see community needs and perspectives centered in grantmaking work.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on your organization's current practices and identify opportunities for growth. Use them to explore how you can move your organization's participation practices along the Community and Nonprofit Participation Spectrum toward greater inclusion and power sharing with your communities.

- How do we incorporate historical and political context into our strategies, processes and evaluations?
- Are our practices aligned with our values and stated intentions? How do our existing values, norms or historical practices align with community-driven principles? How can we amplify these strengths?
- In what ways do we actively seek and implement feedback from employees, volunteers, grantees and community members?
- What structures have we put in place to ensure nonprofits and community members have meaningful decision-making authority?
- How well do the demographics of our grantees and those they serve reflect our intended impact communities? How do they compare to our staff and board demographics?
- How much of our organizational budget is dedicated to resourcing community engagement activities?
- What activities are currently taking place that could be classified as participatory or community-driven philanthropy?

Evaluating Community-Driven Philanthropy

Evaluating Community-Driven Philanthropy

Evaluation and learning present opportunities for deeper community engagement and collaboration in philanthropy. By embracing participatory and community-driven evaluation practices, we can enrich our organizational learning with the invaluable insights and experiences of nonprofits and communities. This approach aligns well with the philanthropic sector's growing commitment to intersectional racial equity and allows us to better understand and address the complex dynamics that shape our work.

Institutions committed to being learning organizations, and those that have identified equity as core to their values, are reviewing their evaluation and learning frameworks and trying to adapt those practices to better measure and understand the complex relationships and nuance of social change work. By appropriately involving communities in the evaluation process, we can:

- gain more accurate and contextual insights,
- empower communities to shape the metrics of success,
- foster greater trust and collaboration between funders and grantees, and
- develop more effective and responsive programs.

This shift toward participatory evaluation not only enhances our understanding of impact but also strengthens our partnerships and ultimately leads to more sustainable and meaningful change.

Redefining Success

To answer the question of what comes next, we must first redefine success in terms of the community. Traditional evaluation methods, while valuable, may not fully capture the dynamic and responsive nature of nonprofit work. By evolving our approach, we can better reflect the complex realities of community-driven initiatives.

Embracing community-driven forms of learning and evaluation offers opportunities to develop structures that incorporate context, embrace diverse communication methods and collaboratively define success with communities. Jessica Mulcahy, senior director of philanthropic evaluation strategies at Success Measures describes a "continuum that exists between traditional third-party evaluation focused on a question defined by a foundation or researcher and more participatory and collaborative community-centered methods," noting that responsive evaluators shape evaluation processes along this continuum by listening to a full range of voices within the organization, project focus or community. Joshua T. Muketha, innovation and strategy manager at

Chicago Beyond agrees, noting that: “Traditional research is set up to keep evaluators separate and neutral. However, with a community-based research approach, a new orientation is required. The community organization and researchers may need to engage differently and get more proximate to one another to create new structures.”

Additional Resource

The Equitable Evaluation Framework™

As we discuss specific strategies and tactics grantmakers can use to deepen their practice of community-driven philanthropy, we recommend exploring the Equitable Evaluation Framework™ (EEF). The EEF includes a commitment to three Principles. These foundational guideposts examine the why, how and what of evaluative thinking.

Principle One (The Why)

Evaluation and Evaluative work should be in service of equity:

- Production, consumption and management of evaluation and evaluative work should hold at its core a responsibility to advance progress toward equity.

Principle Two (The How)

Evaluative work should be designed and implemented commensurate with the values underlying equity work:

- multiculturally valid and
- oriented toward participant ownership.

Principle Three (The What)

Evaluative work can and should answer critical questions about the:

- ways in which historical and structural decisions have contributed to the condition to be addressed;
- effect of a strategy on different populations, on the underlying systemic drivers of inequity; and
- ways in which cultural context is tangled up in both the structural conditions and the change initiative itself.

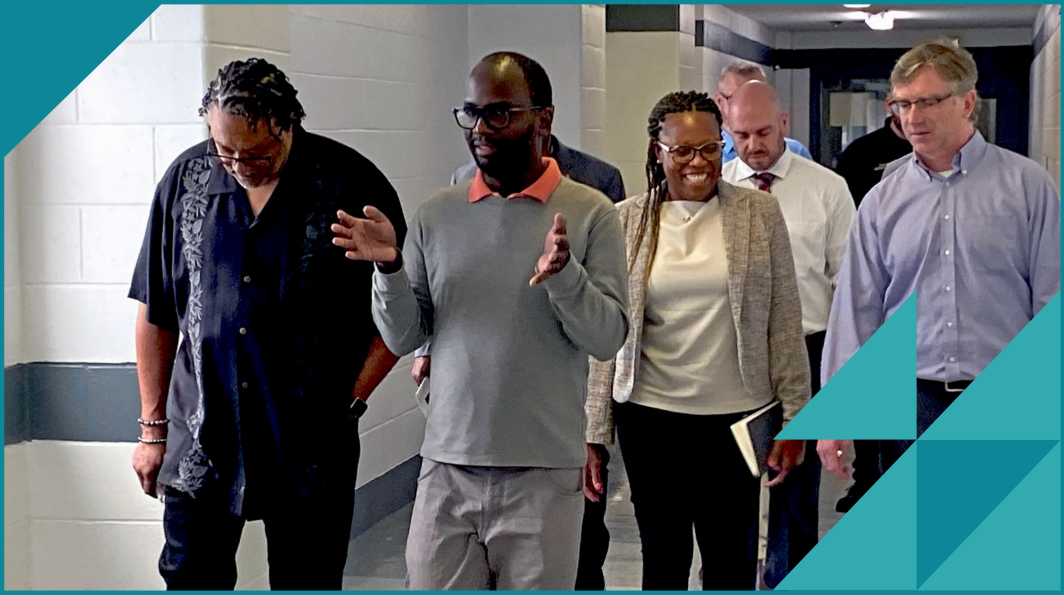
The Equitable Evaluation Framework™. “EEF Expansion: Elements of the EEF.” 2023. Available at https://www.equitableeval.org/framework.

Informing through measures that are identified by grantees and broader communities as relevant and meaningful is a process in itself. As Erin Switalski, program director at Headwaters Foundation, describes:

> "We created our foundation's theory of change by hiring a consultant to interview grantees and ask them what success looks like. These interviews were used to build the outcomes in our theory of change. For example, grantees told us that success was changing mindsets and shifting narratives, it was building stronger relationships across sectors. So, in our conversations with grantees, we're listening for those indicators."

Approaches that include codeveloping strategy and change models with the community have the potential to ensure work is responsive to and aligned with issues communities are grappling with as they try to advance change. Switalski continues, "As we listen to our grantees, we hear what they care about in their work and what they're thinking and wondering. It allows us to learn as we go, instead of on an annual basis through a report."

Community-driven philanthropy thrives on building relationships, engaging others and sharing power. Although it is counter to how we have sometimes thought about progress, we can measure progress through the strength of our partnerships, the depth of community engagement, signs of trust among residents and the diversity of voices in decision-making. Just as there is no single tactic for nonprofit and community participation, there is no single way to evaluate engagement. Jessica Mulcahy of Success Measures points out the usefulness of practices that are already in place in many organizations: "Valuable data exist as natural artifacts of the work organizations do. Some of this can be repurposed to help funders understand change in the community or among participants. For example, interviews and conversations with participants yield qualitative data, and even grantee responses to well-crafted, simple



Chicago Beyond
Joshua Muketha walks with Chicago Beyond's Holistic Safety National Advisory Council member, Stephen Walker, at the Corrigan Correctional Center in Connecticut.

Photo by Andrius Banevicius, Connecticut Department of Corrections.

report questions can play a useful role. Themes and insights can be systematically drawn from the notes of these efforts and provide valuable insights to funders."

Grantmakers working to be more participatory have developed different ways of thinking about and learning from their work. One grounding principle helps connect our evaluation and learning work with our other efforts: when we center our evaluation and learning efforts on those most impacted, we will achieve more effective and equitable results. Involving nonprofits and communities throughout our process — from learning and evaluation activity design, to data and insight collection, to interpreting what we are seeing and hearing — helps us incorporate their key insights into the drivers of success and the contexts and realities of the work we fund. As John Brothers, former president of the T. Rowe Price Foundation says: "Nonprofits get to see issues, impact and progress in ways that we don't. When we come together, we get to leverage our strengths in ways that result in meaningful change in our communities. We don't tell them what their reality is. We are better partners by listening first and learning from their experiences."

> **"One grounding principle helps connect our evaluation and learning work with our other efforts: when we center our evaluation and learning efforts on those most impacted, we will achieve more effective and equitable results."**

Of course, lived experience and relevant experience would ideally exist across the organization. Executive Officer for Strategy and Learning at the Atkinson Foundation Patricia Thompson describes how the foundation invites their board and staff members to share their lived or personal experience with the issues behind their funding priorities. This allows them to avoid asking "grantees to share the knowledge they've derived from lived experience or on the ground without being prepared to share what we know firsthand — modeling openness and vulnerability and emphasizing reciprocity and partnership."

When we define success in terms of civic participation, equitable quality of life and thriving communities, we recognize that grantmakers and nonprofits are part of a larger ecosystem driving change. Instead of focusing narrowly on attributing credit, we can look at readily available population-level statistics that reflect broader community outcomes.

Community-driven philanthropy is a strategy used by grantmakers, and it is at that level that the work must be evaluated. It is our work and our efforts that are under investigation; therefore, the evaluation and learning costs (technology, staff time, etc.) should be built into our budgets,

Sample Indicators of Relationship Strength

In our research, grantmakers offered many examples of how they know when their relationship with the community is strong. The depth of relationship between grantmakers and communities can serve as a progress assessment for organizations seeking to build more participatory and community-driven philanthropy processes.

The following indicators could provide a starting point for grantmakers to consider as we assess our relationship with the community and practice moving beyond technical approaches and centering love, justice and vulnerability.

- We see alignment with our personal and organizational values.
- We share our failures, successes and lessons learned with our community.
- We are freed from the obligation to always be right.
- We are invited to spaces that our organization was not previously welcome and receive applications from leaders and organizations who are new to us.
- We help people solve problems that matter to them.
- We give our community the benefit of trying again when they fail.
- We reserve judgment and release attachment to specific outcomes.
- Our community consistently invites us to hear and reflect on more complete depictions of their reality, including things that they may not have been comfortable sharing with a funder before.
- We become advocates for our community.
- Being wrong is an opportunity to learn, not a state to avoid.
- We recognize and honor the power and assets that exist in communities.
- We see our role as facilitating community ownership, rather than directing community outcomes.

rather than passed off to our nonprofit partners and communities. Jennifer Axelrod, Associate Vice President of Learning and Impact at The Chicago Community Trust, illustrates what this has looked like with their partners: “We started by asking what data are we collecting and how are we tying that together? We’re doing more storytelling, so we’re integrating qualitative approaches that allow communities to tell their stories in a more complex way. We’re in the process of hiring a third staff member to our team to go out and work in community with our community agencies to help them build that capacity, as they shouldn’t have to pay to provide data that we need.”

Evaluation and Learning Practices on the Participation Spectrum

Our learning and evaluation practices can align to the Community and Nonprofit Participation Spectrum. Grantmakers can adopt the following practices to engage nonprofits and communities at various stages of the spectrum. Using the potential community-driven learning and evaluation activities below, consider where nonprofits and communities are currently involved in your work. Then, reflect on how things are going, and what it might look like to center community learning more deeply to shift your practices further along the spectrum.

The Atkinson Foundation

Photo by Nick Kozak.

Inform Activities

- Sharing desired outcomes and organization goals.
- Publishing reports on progress made toward closing equity gaps and disparities in outcomes.
- Sharing outcomes from funding portfolios.
- Ensuring that information is accessible to impacted communities.

Consult Activities

- Asking for a grant application or report.
- Asking for input on grant processes.
- Asking the community to complete a needs assessment or to attend a town hall or convening to share their insights.
- Asking for input on grant strategies.
- Asking for a community member or nonprofit leader to share their story with your board.

Involve Activities

- Acting on input or feedback received and communicating back about resulting changes.
- Amplifying community and nonprofit success stories and assets.
- Involving communities and nonprofits in organizational planning and strategy activities.
- Asking communities and nonprofits to define metrics and measures that are important to them.

Collaborate Activities

- Developing the foundation's desired outcomes with the community.
- Replacing formal (written) proposals and reporting with regular communication that reflects trust-based relationships with grantees and community members.
- Fully funding the evaluation and learning efforts that support your ability to report on your outcomes.
- Co-owning strategies, results and accountability for progress.

Transform Activities

- Stepping out of the role of community leader and into the role of community facilitator and organizer.
- Placing decision-making in the hands of the community.
- Focusing on strategies that build wealth and influence for community members (cooperatives and community development financial institutions).
- Focusing on strategies that build capacity for local governance and civic participation.
- Using metrics that prioritize community voice and power.
- Reframing your community engagement efforts as a support/backbone/administrative function and centering leadership outside your organization.

After reflecting on your learning activities using the participation spectrum, consider the following questions:

- Who was involved in the participatory opportunities? Are there untapped stakeholders?
- Thinking about the outcomes you and your community would like to see from your shared work, are there opportunities to be more specific about how that would happen?
- What opportunities are there to increase nonprofit and community engagement in your learning and evaluation activities?

Embracing Learning Together

Evaluating how participation strengthens our relationships with nonprofits and communities is key to understanding the effectiveness of our community-driven philanthropy practice. If we can shift our policies and practices away from traditionally dominant value frameworks, we can reevaluate our strategic mindset, the goals we set and the ways we measure progress against our strategy. It also may mean acknowledging that not everything can easily be measured — or perhaps, that "measuring" isn't quite the right goal. Hanni Hanson, director of programs at Compton Foundation shares:

> "Instead of trying to measure things like movement building and culture change that are influenced by factors beyond our small institution, we approach this work from a more iterative model of evaluation. We ask, 'What are we learning? What are our grantees learning? What does that tell us about where we collectively go next?' This approach points to the idea that measuring progress is not always straightforward and may require a different relationship [with] the practices that we have used in the past. Of course, this does not mean those practices are never appropriate, just that we can take advantage of the breadth of evaluation and learning practices and match them to the requirements of what we want to achieve."

Joshua T. Muketha, innovation and strategy manager at Chicago Beyond describes how this plays out in their previous research work. He notes that: "Valuing data to achieve an end — securing funding, improving programs, sharing learning with the field, changing narratives — is not the same as intrinsically valuing a human story and experience. Honoring a participant's voice requires intention, and it may not just happen from documenting a person's story, demographics or outcome."

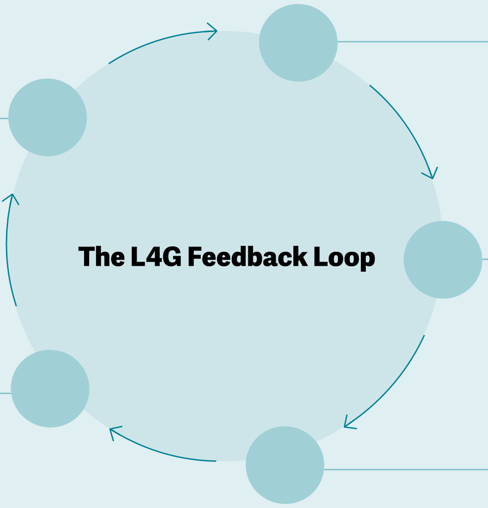
Becoming a learning organization involves unlearning traditional approaches and embracing uncertainty. This shift requires some vulnerability for funders as we move toward mutuality, dialogue and emergent learning. For instance, when the T. Rowe Price Foundation revised its grantmaking strategy, it encouraged nonprofits to lead the way in determining how success

Additional Resource

Fund for Shared Insight (FFSI)'s Listen4Good Initiative

FFSI launched an independent capacity-building program, Listen4Good, that trains organizations to listen and respond to their clients using an equity-informed feedback program. While FFSI is centered around designing and deploying survey-based feedback, the Listen4Good cycles through similar steps, representing the constant learning built into the model.

The L4G feedback loop cycles through five key steps.



Design
Work collaboratively to develop a survey that focuses on client experience –using Listen4Good core questions as a foundation.

Collect
Prepare clients to offer candid opinions and tailor data collection to what works best for them.

Interpret
Use proven analytical tools to draw insights from client responses with an emphasis on voices least heard.

Respond
Make organizational, programmatic, and operational changes based on client feedback.

Close Loop
Share results with your clients and explain how you're responding to what you've learned.

Studies show that Listen4Good-participating organizations:

- use Listen4Good survey data to make specific improvements to programs, services, operations and client-staff interactions;
- build enduring institutional capacity that allows them to maintain strong feedback systems even after Listen4Good;
- gain a peer learning community and deeper ties with funders; and
- develop a culture of openness and listening, which catalyzes their broader equity, diversity and inclusion journeys.

This model is one that community-based funders can adopt right away, and one that all funders can consider supporting for their nonprofit partners.

would be measured. Its message to grantees, as former foundation president John Brothers describes, is: “You determine your performance measures. What can we do to support you in reaching those outcomes?” The approach was informed by ongoing surveys of grantees on the foundation’s own practices and engagements, such as: “What did they think of us? How did they connect with us? What were the things that we were doing well? What were the things that we were not doing so well and how can we continuously improve as funder?”

Too often, conventional learning and evaluation practices have burdened our nonprofit and community partners with explaining and reporting their work on our terms. If we over-rely on community partners and nonprofit organizations to gather data that meets our strategic goals, we are passing off one of our stewardship responsibilities regarding the dollars entrusted to us.

Instead, we can shift this learning responsibility back to grantmaking organizations, leveraging our financial resources to gather and analyze data that benefits all participants. This approach aligns with our stewardship role and allows us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of what works. Patricia Thompson, executive officer for strategy and learning describes the Atkinson Foundation’s approach: “Our learning and accountability framework places the onus on us to evaluate ourselves first. We do engage in dialogue about impact and metrics, but mostly about how partners understand their impact and what they choose to measure. They are not asked to apply our framework to their work.”

By reevaluating our oversight practices, we can ensure that our efforts contribute to addressing structural inequities rather than reinforcing them. This means balancing our responsibilities across all our investments, from small, volunteer-led nonprofits to larger initiatives, always keeping community well-being at the forefront.

HIRE360.
Through localized mentorship, direct investment and specialized services, HIRE360 strengthens the participation of underrepresented populations in the Chicago area — with a special focus on engaging youth to consider the trades as a viable and inspiring career path, mentoring and growing Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and Women Business Enterprise (WBE) firms and creating a supply chain of partners that are accountable to higher participation standards.

Photo by Teresa Crawford, August 29, 2024. Courtesy of the Chicago Community Trust.

Additional Resources

Fostering Participatory Learning Approaches in Philanthropy

This comprehensive guide from Engage R+D shares practical tools, strategies and examples for how and when to apply participatory learning to your evaluation practice.

Emergent Strategy

This book by adrienne maree brown guides readers to be in right relationship with change by emphasizing process and flexibility rather than rigidity. Grantmakers are encouraged to use this resource to adapt their grantmaking approach towards embracing uncertainty, encouraging collaboration and funding organizations that prioritize learning and experimentation.

Measuring Love in the Journey for Justice: A Brown Paper

Shiree Teng and Sammy Nuñez coauthored a brown paper that calls on love as an antidote to justice. Grantmakers can use this guide to ground their understanding of love as a community practice and explore the ways power can be infused with love.

Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning and Adaptation

This article from The Foundation Review, a publication of the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University, offers Emergent Learning as a framework to support the creation of these conditions and describes how the tools help make thinking visible and support real-time and peer learning.

PEAK Grantmaking's Community Conversation | Learn, Share, Evolve

Watch this recording of a community conversation webinar from PEAK Grantmaking highlighting how knowledge sharing practices can create the conditions for collective learning to thrive with our peer funders and partners, while ultimately contributing to positive change in our communities.

Embracing Community-Centered Learning: Key Questions to Ask and Answer

Acknowledging the power and influence that we hold as grantmakers and beginning the work to share it more broadly with our community also creates an opportunity to reveal and acknowledge the ways in which we've used our power to harm in the name of stewardship, due diligence, evaluation and return on investment. These questions can support reflections about our hopes for our learning practices and promote opportunities to increase community participation.

- How can we build and strengthen the relationships, knowledge, skills and abilities needed for effective community engagement and cocreation?
- In what ways can we ensure mutual accountability between ourselves and our partners, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and trust?
- How might we evolve our evaluative processes to focus less on quantitative metrics and more on capturing and sharing transformative work?
- How do we define success and to what extent is it similar or different from how our community defines success? How can we bridge any gaps?
- How can we embrace complexity and uncertainty as parts of an emergent learning strategy?
- Are we measuring the efficiency of our grantmaking systems, or the effectiveness of our investments of time and capital within communities? How can we ensure our outcome measures truly reflect community impact?

The Atkinson Foundation

Photo by Nick Kozak.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Transformative Philanthropy for Thriving Communities

As narratives and expectations in the sector increasingly call for structural changes that move beyond “diversity, equity and inclusion” activities, grantmakers face critical questions about the sources of power and wealth in philanthropy and their historical impacts on communities. As grantmakers strengthen their capacity to do community-driven work, we will transform ourselves to transform how we engage with communities. Our relationships to our collective history, our individual stories, the wealth endowed in philanthropic institutions and its creation are ripe for a closer look. Often these stories help us more clearly see the disconnect that we seek to repair with our philanthropic investments. To do that work, many philanthropic institutions are intentionally referring to reparations, repair and healing in their language and strategy, which shifts philanthropic paths away from historical patterns of extraction, and toward practices that seek to repair and reimagine relationships with communities that suffer most from systemic inequities, structural injustices and underinvestment. Cracks in the Foundation: Philanthropy’s Role in Reparations for Black People in the DMV, a report commissioned and funded by iF, A Foundation for Radical Possibility and developed by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, uses publicly available data to allow foundations to view the impact of their wealth creation through the lens of harm caused to communities, and to consider what progress toward repair with affected communities would look like. Justice Funders’ Resonance: A Framework for Philanthropic Transformation [Second Edition] describes how grantmakers can move away from extractive practices toward restorative and regenerative practices, flipping the rulebook for philanthropy on its head and shifting the locus of power to communities.

> *We believe that diverse, equitable and inclusive practices in philanthropy must serve the purpose of addressing one of the field’s most challenging dynamics: that decision-making and control of resources rests with those in organizational positions of power and privilege, who uphold the status quo. Therefore, DEI practices must result in a shift in decision-making toward communities most impacted by our extractive economy. These practices must also challenge our current extractive economic system, rather than existing within them.*
>
> *We believe that people who work in foundations or have influence over philanthropic wealth play a critical role in leveraging their power to redistribute wealth, democratize power and shift economic control to communities. As a source of accumulated power and wealth, philanthropy’s role is to find its unique path toward taking values- and movement-aligned actions.*[24]

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[24] Justice Funders, “Resonance 2nd Edition, A Just Transition Guide for Philanthropic Transformation.” Resonance Framework, 2024. Available at https://justicefunders.org/resonance-framework/.

In other words, it is important to analyze current culture, systems and power structures, including diversity, equity and inclusion approaches. However, the true transformative potential emerges when we couple this analysis with a vision that reimagines more equitable and historically informed structures, including racial equity, racial justice and liberation. Felecia Lucky, president of the Black Belt Community Foundation, offers examples of the foundation's multipronged efforts to manage power dynamics with a diverse group of community members, congresspersons, nonprofit leaders, movement leaders and community residents. She described how the foundation was able to move toward their vision of centering community in their work by recognizing and valuing all voices equally, openly discussing their history, designing meetings that ensured equitable participation and empowering community members to lead discussions in their own communities.

For organizations seeking to fully transfer decision-making power to communities, it is imperative to develop a transformation plan that includes racial equity–informed strategies and goals that align with your organization's mission and context, acknowledge internal organizational dynamics, reflect on historical, current and aspirational community relationships, and evaluate existing practices, processes and systems. This nuanced work demands intentional, collaborative efforts rooted in community engagement. The growing conversations on reparative philanthropy offer an opportunity for collective reflection, learning from both past challenges and successes and cocreating a more equitable future for the sector.

Even as we discuss these types of transformations, we are not all there yet. Embracing community-driven philanthropy requires listening and responding to the goals and needs expressed by communities, and a commitment to examine and undertake the necessary next steps to align our own cultures, systems and power structures.

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In writing this publication, we interviewed nine different grantmakers, who helped us build on the work we began in 2018. Throughout this publication, you will see highlighted quotations from these interviews that help tell the story of the journey to and through community-driven philanthropy. Our interviews included conversations with staff from the following foundations:

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North Star Fund

Headwaters Foundation

Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

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