

Programs & activities

Programs that focus on equity can drive positive change by centering equity in the design, structure, messaging and implementation.

Introduction

Equity work is grounded in an effective program strategy and bolstered by collaboration with partners and community members. Each program and initiative that a foundation supports needs to be highly integrated with the foundation's mission, intended impacts and overall strategy. Opportunities for impact include:

- Strategic choices about whom to fund and how to support grant recipients
- Building field capacity alongside other funders
- Dialogue and engagement with community members
- (Non-partisan) advocacy on equity

Tools for equity

An equitable program strategy framework contains four components:

1. Program and portfolio strategy development

The external work of a foundation includes making strategic choices about which organizations to support and maintaining relationships with the larger community.

Key Questions

- How does our overall program strategy match our mission, vision and equity goals?
- Will our portfolio of programs realistically meet our population-level impact goals?

- How do our programs fit together to serve our mission? How will the portfolio further our equity work, and how do the programs connect to fit into our larger equity goals?
- Have we utilized both community input and self-reflection to choose programs and partners?
- Have we used the right information (disaggregated data, field research, community input, etc.) to develop our program strategy?

2. Grantee sourcing, screening and selection

In working with each grantee, examine their current and proposed work through an equity lens. This requires asking questions of your organization's programmatic approaches, as well as those of your grantees.

Ask of your own organization

- Does our selection committee include members of the communities we want to serve?
- Are there implicit biases at play in our criteria for grant applications and/or our selection process?
- Are there other stakeholders or voices we should include in our processes?

Ask in regard to grantees

- How will this grantee's program advance equity?
- Who is being served by the grantees? Are the project's goals and outcomes clear?
- Who runs the grantee organization or initiative? Do the grantee's leaders reflect the communities the grantee serves?
- What are the elements of the program itself? Who will be delivering the services?

3. Grantee support and field building

Supporting grantees and evaluating programs can help create successful outcomes for individual organizations.

Foundations can also advance a field (a set of individuals and organizations working to address a common social issue or problem) by “field building”—activities that drive a field’s progress toward impact at scale.

Key questions

- Are our grantees reaching their desired goals and outcomes? If not, is there any support we can provide?
- Have we provided funding for targeted capacity building?
- Are we building the field by convening the right partners, connecting organizations with similar goals, and providing insight?
- Are we engaging inclusive decision-making to empower those closest to the problem to co-lead and co-create solutions that advance the field?

Sources

The Bridgespan Group

Field Building for Population-Level Change

4. Grant and program monitoring & assessment

Programs can take on a life of their own. Intentions for equity can be diluted over time. Regular monitoring and returning to strategic intent is important.

Key questions

- Is the program serving the intended audience?
- Is the grantee reaching the desired goals and outcomes? Is disaggregated performance data being used?
- Are there implicit biases in the program implementation or structure?
- Do those who deliver the services fully understand the strategy and the equity stance for the work? Are they comfortable interrupting inequities when they observe them?

- Do we have clear criteria for how we will measure results for the program? What criteria will we use to determine whether to continue or discontinue the program?