



LEARNPHILANTHROPY



Powered by the Johnson Center for Philanthropy

HOW TO MAKE RACIAL EQUITY A PRIORITY IN YOUR FOUNDATION

By: Pat Nanzer,
Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy

Imagine you are a new CEO of a small foundation and you are determined to making racial equity a priority in your foundation.

What first steps do you take?

What would success look like?

Or imagine you work for a well-established, mostly set-in-its-ways grantmaker that says it values racial equity but doesn't show this in its daily practice.

How do you overcome the obstacles?





HOW DID THE FOUNDATIONS DO IT?

This brief, based on detailed studies of each organization published in *The Foundation Review*, takes a look at how two grantmaking organizations – the Consumer Health Foundation (CHF) and the Kalamazoo Community Foundation (KZCF) – integrated racial equity into their governance and operations.

Consumer Health Foundation

For Consumer Health Foundation, the call to address race and racism came from “community speakouts,” a series of forums hosted in 2004 and 2005 across the region to learn from residents about factors that influence health in their communities. Residents consistently identified the impact of structural racism on their health and well-being. Lessons learned from the forums set the stage for the foundation’s strategy of focusing on the intersection of health and racial equity.

CHF board and staff recognized that this new direction was rare in the field, and as part of a learning phase, participated in an assessment conducted by Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity and Applied Research Center (ARC), now [Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation](#).

The assessment found that while CHF had a strong commitment to racial equity, some areas were in need of attention – including more consistent and explicit communications about racism. For example, CHF was encouraged to clarify what it meant by “vulnerable” and “underserved.”

Findings from the community forums and assessment led the foundation to update its strategic plan, mission, vision, values, and theory of change to reflect an explicit commitment to health and racial equity. The foundation features structural racism in its communications and annual reports and meetings. Their board and staff meetings include agenda items specific to establishing a common understanding and consistent use of language regarding racial equity. The foundation intentionally educates board and staff about historical injustices and works to

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “RACIAL EQUITY”?

The first step to making racial equity a priority is defining what that term means.

The Consumer Health Foundation defines it as: “both a goal and a process whereby people of color have an equal opportunity to live a healthy and dignified life” Redwood p. 47.

The Association of Black Foundation Executives sees it as: “a desired outcome or state: when you cannot predict advantage or disadvantage based on race” Taylor Batten p. 6.

Figure 1. Consumer Health Foundation’s Racial Equity Theory of Change



► The Process of Racial Equity

- Board and staff education on racial equity
- Diversity and inclusion at the level of board governance
- Diversity and equity assessments and accountability mechanisms at the operational level

► The Goal of Racial Equity

- Grantmaking
- Capacity building
- Strategic communications
- Strategic partnerships
- Mission-consistent investing

► Intended Change

- Policy and practice change at the systems level
- People of color are organized and effective advocates for the change
- Grantee partners have more diverse organizations and place greater emphasis on racial equity in their strategic plans
- The nonprofit and philanthropic communities are more aware of racial equity concepts and practices
- Increased investments in low-income communities of color

eliminate institution racism in governance and operations by holding board and staff retreats, facilitated discussion, screening documentaries, conferences, meetings, special trainings, and board trips to connect to the issues faced by communities.

CHF illustrates their commitment to racial equity as both a goal and process in Figure 1.

Kalamazoo Community Foundation

For the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) began in 2000 when the board approved a [diversity policy](#). The Council on Foundations recognized their adoption and implementation of the policy as a community foundation best practice.

An [LGBT Equality Fund](#) was established the same year to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning members of the community. The foundation feels that their community has progressed beyond tolerance and they strive for full acceptance.

KZCF began antiracism training in 2006. All staff and board members and new hires complete the workshop “Understanding and Analyzing Systemic Racism,” sponsored by [Eliminating Racism and Claiming/Celebrating Equality \(ERAC/CE\)](#), a local organization whose mission is to eliminate racism in Southwest Michigan.

A review in 2012 showed that most of their efforts fell within the levels of symbolic change and identity change and a few fell into structural change.

In 2010, KZCF claimed an **anti-racist identity** and began to strengthen their **inclusion statement** for grant agreements. The foundation learned from community conversations – some very intense – that pushing grantees for full inclusion might force an unintended change in their mission or purpose. They modified the inclusion statement to reflect this feedback.

KZCF cohorts attended Peer Action Learning Network (PALN), a yearlong immersion curriculum consisting of six one-day seminars to enhance intercultural competency. Over three years, the foundation showed significant improvement.





PRACTICES, IMPLEMENTATION, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

The Consumer Health Foundation and the Kalamazoo Community Foundation shared practical strategies that they used to implement the process of racial equity in their organizations. **Charts 1 and 2 show some of these strategies.**

Chart 1: Consumer Health Foundation

Racial Equity Practice	How Practice Was Implemented	Opportunities for Growth
Educate Board and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Held community speakouts• Used annual retreats and facilitated discussions as primary venues• Conducted a learning journey for the board to see the issues faced by the communities served by their grantee partners• Attended conferences, meetings• Viewed and discussed documentaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Become educated by hosting facilitated conversations for board and staff
Develop processes and indicators to guide operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revisited vision, mission, values, theory of change, and strategies to reflect a commitment to racial equity• Aligned communications with commitment to racial equity by developing a three-part message platform• Used a matrix that includes each board member's demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age, geography) and areas of expertise and fills gaps by using diverse networks• Recruited staff and consultants using diverse networks• Ensured that a diverse pool of candidates was interviewed prior to making a hiring decision• Included agenda items to board and staff meetings to establish a common understanding and consistent use of language• Included one-on-one meetings with the president in staff orientations to talk about values and commitment to diversity and equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define racial-equity values, assess how internal practices align with values, and begin to support any necessary changes• Assess how programmatic resources are being used.

Chart 2: Kalamazoo Community Foundation

Racial Equity Practice	How Practice Was Implemented	Opportunities for Growth
Educate Board and Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held community conversations • Attended antiracism training • Attended trainings, engaged in internal dialogue and reflection to enhance intercultural competency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop intercultural competency by learning to be self-aware; embrace people who are members of groups other than those with whom they personally identify; adapt their mind-sets and behaviors to bridge differences in culturally appropriate and authentic ways.
Develop processes and indicators to guide operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined racial-equity values, assess how internal practices align with values, and begin to support any necessary changes • Assessed how programmatic resources are being used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better to move in the right direction instead of pursuing a perfect course • Hold firm on the spirit and intent • Adjust implementation • Keep trustees and staff engaged, embracing improvements to prepare for pushback

WHAT CAN YOUR FOUNDATION DO?

To change the way your foundation operates, and to create organizations that are diverse, inclusive, and free from institutional racism, you can borrow and adapt what the Community Health Foundation and the Kalamazoo Community Foundation have done.

Here are some steps your foundation can take:

- **BECOME** educated by hosting facilitated conversations for board and staff; attend antiracist trainings; include the topic on annual meeting agendas;
- **DEVELOP** racial equity indicators to guide operations by revisiting vision, mission, values, theory of change, and strategies to reflect a commitment to racial equity;
- **ADOPT** diversity, equity and inclusion policies;
- **COLLECT** demographic data for the board, elect board members and hire staff that reflect the broad diversity of the community; and
- **ASSESS AND MAXIMIZE** the potential of how resources are being used by retaining a diverse group of product and service vendors that are committed to promoting a diverse workplace.



REFERENCES

Pickett-Erway, Carrie; Springgate, Susan; Stotz-Ghosh, Suprotik; and Vance, Tom (2014) "Difficult Conversations: Lessons Along the Journey Toward Inclusion," *The Foundation Review*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 8. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1193> Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr/vol6/iss1/8>

Redwood, Yanique and King, Christopher J. (2014) "Integrating Racial Equity in Foundation Governance, Operations, and Program Strategy," *The Foundation Review*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 5. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1190> Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr/vol6/iss1/5>

Taylor Batten, Susan (2014) "Editorial," *The Foundation Review*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 2. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1187> Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/tfr/vol6/iss1/2>

