PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY FOR BETTER PHILANTHROPY

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Cover: The California Endowment's staff holds a retreat with the President's Youth Council to discuss strategies and goals for the Endowment's youth work. Photo Credit: The California Endowment Photo Archives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As issues of equity and inclusion come to the fore in philanthropy, the sector is beginning to grapple with what it means for those directly impacted by racism, poverty, and other social and economic inequities to also have a seat at the decision-making table. How are individuals directly impacted by inequity involved in shaping critical foundation activities such as strategy and program development, grantmaking decisions, communications, and research and evaluation?

This report examines the unique context of national and large foundations, including the ways in which their size, scale, and orientation pose challenges and create opportunities for meaningful partnership with communities in foundation decision-making. This paper also explores the institutional and individual competencies needed to do this work well and offers recommendations for getting started.

The findings and recommendations are based on a review of the literature, internal documents shared by foundations, and 31 interviews. Interviews were conducted with philanthropic thought leaders, staff from national and larger foundations, staff from smaller, exemplar foundations, as well as individuals who represent directly impacted communities and have served in an advisory role to foundations.

Why Engage Directly Impacted Groups in Foundation Decision-Making?

Foundations have myriad reasons for engaging directly impacted groups in their decision-making. Foremost among them is a desire for greater relevance and effectiveness. In addition, working in partnership with directly impacted communities enables foundations to live out values related to equity and inclusion.

Feedback from community advisors can help foundations: **1)** center their work in the realities faced by the people foundations seek to serve and heighten the level of accountability the foundation has to those communities; **2)** shape funding priorities; **3)** inform design and process to ensure relevance; **4)** ensure that communications and language resonate; and **5)** influence foundations' own internal processes.

The benefits of engaging those with lived experience in foundation decision-making, particularly higher-touch forms of engagement, is about process as much as it is about programmatic outcomes. Community leaders who advised foundations said their involvement helped them: **1)** gain a deeper understanding of philanthropy; **2)** develop leadership skills; and **3)** strengthen nonprofit capacity and social capital in their communities.

A Closer Look at National and Large Foundations

The paper explores how the following dimensions of national and large foundations create both barriers and opportunities for engaging people who are most impacted by inequity:

- National and large foundations have big staffs and tend to have complex internal decision-making structures.
- National and large foundations have the power, voice, and leverage to partner with government and other established institutions, such as universities, to shift policy and systems.
- National and large foundations tend to place a strong value on data-informed decision-making and evidence.
- National and large foundations are likely to face high levels of scrutiny from media, government, and/or the public, resulting in tight legal and financial controls.

Engaging with Community: Best Practices

Engaging directly impacted groups in foundation decision-making in meaningful, systematic, and sustainable ways begins with an organizational culture that supports such practice. Organizational culture goes hand in hand with the skills and competencies staff bring to community engagement efforts. Key considerations related to organizational culture and staff competencies are highlighted below.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- Executive will and leadership are needed to make engaging directly impacted groups a sustainable priority within the organization.
- Foundations doing the deepest work in this area have a strong commitment to equity and inclusion. This includes a commitment to understanding social context, historical oppression, and implicit bias.
- Foundations must grapple with notions of power—what it means to have it, wield it, and share it. Re-framing notions of power and risk can advance efforts to engage directly impacted populations.
- A strong learning culture, with license for experimentation, can help create space for incorporating more inclusive practices.

STAFF COMPETENCIES

- Hire staff who have lived experience, a deep understanding of the historical and social context associated with the populations the foundation seeks to serve, and/or self-awareness about their own privilege.
- Be relationship-oriented and comfortable with the messiness of group process.
- Manage, analyze, and use data from both researchers and communities and translate that data into strategic inputs and directions.

Getting Started

Smaller shifts that happen at a programmatic or departmental level coupled with broader structural changes at the organizational level can, over time, help national and larger foundations embed community input more naturally into the DNA of their foundation. Indeed, foundations doing this work well all describe it as an ongoing learning journey, while also saying they can't imagine operating any other way. Principles to keep in mind include:

First, do no harm. Assess capacity for community engagement efforts and be transparent about goals, process, outcomes, and boundaries/limits. Foundations should begin with an honest assessment of their capacity to engage community and the skills their staff bring to the effort. Without dedicated time and capacity for this effort, the risk of causing harm to communities increases tremendously.

Experiment with multiple strategies and capture lessons, successes, and failures. The reality is that there is no standard practice for engaging directly impacted groups in foundation decision-making. Foundations should determine what works best given existing capacity, resources, and needs. Documenting successes and challenges can help inform future efforts.

It's OK to keep it simple. Then build the muscle to deepen the work. For foundations that are new to this work, start with a pilot effort, assess it, and then think about what it would mean to scale the work.

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1 Introduction

"The people you need to listen to — to both correctly identify the problem you are trying to solve, and to come up with ways to address it — are those with lived experience...It means working alongside the communities you seek to impact and letting them shape and guide the direction of your work." (Raikes, 2019).

Jeff Raikes, co-founder of the Raikes Foundation and former CEO of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Philanthropic leaders strive to be thoughtful stewards of the resources they manage and typically weigh a range of considerations as they make their investments, among them: alignment with the donor's passions and interests, fit with their overall mission and values, an analysis of needs and gaps in a given issue area, and advice from experts.

Yet, as Raikes and others in the field argue, to make progress on society's most intractable problems, philanthropy needs to engage those whose life experiences provide critical insights into successful solutions. Indeed, as issues of equity and inclusion come to the fore in philanthropy, the sector is beginning to grapple with what it means for those directly impacted by racism, poverty, and other social and economic inequities to also have a seat at the decision-making table. How are individuals directly impacted by inequity involved in shaping critical foundation activities such as strategy and program development, grantmaking decisions, communications, and research and evaluation?

About this Report

This paper takes a closer look at how national foundations and large foundations are engaging those directly impacted by inequity, including communities of color and people from low-income communities, in their decision-making.

Based on a review of the literature, internal documents shared by foundations, 31 interviews with philanthropic thought leaders, staff from national and/or large foundations, staff from smaller, exemplar foundations, as well as individuals who represent directly impacted communities, this paper examines the unique context of large and national foundations, including the ways in which their size, scale, and orientation pose challenges and create opportunity for meaningful community engagement.

This paper also explores the institutional and individual competencies needed to do this work well and offers recommendations for getting started.

The stubborn lack of board and staff diversity in the sector only underscores the importance and urgency of this question (Council on Foundations, 2017). Though many foundations invest in under-resourced communities, which are disproportionately comprised of people of color, foundation staff are overwhelmingly White (76 percent). About nine percent are Black, seven percent are Latinx, five percent are Asian, and less than one percent are Native American. Although racial and ethnic diversity has increased slightly in recent years, particularly among foundations with assets of more than $1 billion, people of color are more likely to be in administrative and professional positions, rather than executive positions (Council on Foundations, 2017). Foundation boards are even less diverse. Eighty-five percent of foundation board members are White and 95 percent of foundation board chairs are White (BoardSource, 2017).

Though there is a growing recognition that efforts to increase equity in the field requires re-imagining power structures and traditional hierarchies, Cardozie Jones, a consultant specializing in equity and inclusion, says, "There is nothing simple about what that looks like or sounds like" (Remaley, 2019).

Growing Attention to Equity & Inclusion in Philanthropy

Conversations about equity and inclusion are increasingly taking center stage in philanthropy, particularly as foundations have adopted explicit initiatives focused on equity and inclusion.

In 2015, the Ford Foundation, for example, shifted its grantmaking to focus squarely on inequality. In recent years, both the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and The California Endowment have adopted an explicit focus on racial equity.

Major philanthropic-serving organizations, such as Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, United Philanthropy Forum, and the Center for Effective Philanthropy, regularly spotlight sessions on equity at their conferences and have created a host of reports and resources for the field.

Several recent well-publicized critiques of philanthropy suggest the conversation about equity and inclusion in the sector will only deepen in the coming years. *Winners Take All*, a New York Times bestseller authored by Anand Giridharadas, *Just Giving* by Rob Reich, and *Decolonizing Wealth* by Edgar Villanueva all document the ways in which philanthropy can reinforce inequality, including the systemic ways that decision-making excludes the perspectives of those who have been most harmed by inequity.

Indeed, data from the field show a persistent gap between aspirations and practice. Even though survey data from the Center for Effective Philanthropy indicate that foundation leaders believe more input from directly impacted populations will increase their effectiveness, far fewer foundations incorporate practices consistent with this belief (Buteau, Orensten, & Loh, 2016). In a 2017 survey of 644 grantmakers, 56 percent of funders indicated that they solicited feedback from grantees or other stakeholders. But a closer look at grantmaker activities show only 20 percent engaged grantees or other stakeholders in funding decisions, while 49 percent sought advice from grantee advisory committees on programs, policies, and practices (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2017).[1]

This paper takes a closer look at how national and large foundations are engaging directly impacted groups, such as communities of color and people from low-income communities, in their decision-making and presents ideas for how foundations can begin to close the gap between aspirations and practice.

Why a Focus on National and Large Foundations?

Data show that the top 50 foundations in the U.S. hold $244 billion in assets, more than a quarter of all philanthropic assets (Foundation Center, 2015). Given the substantial resources managed by large foundations, the strategies and issues prioritized by them have far-reaching consequences and who they engage in their decision-making can shape their work in critically important ways.

Though there is a considerable body of literature documenting the importance of engaging directly impacted communities in philanthropic decision-making, many of the exemplars highlighted in the field are regional foundations, community foundations, and women's funds, whose place-based orientation and/or smaller size may naturally lend themselves to a more connected and inclusive model.

There is much to be learned about best practices from smaller foundations that have incorporated effective and thoughtful community engagement efforts into their work. At the same time, to the extent national foundations can deepen and amplify their practices, their visibility, reach, and influence can create powerful ripple effects in the sector.

[1] Data on community and/or stakeholder advisory committees (beyond grantees) was not available, but likely to be lower.

As one former funder observes, "The smaller foundations often have more expertise and experience working with the field and with the community, but the fact of the matter is, without the bigger foundations, these issues remain largely sidelined."

Based on a review of the literature, internal documents shared by foundations, and interviews with funders and thought leaders,[2] this report examines the unique context of large and national foundations, including the ways in which their size, scale, and orientation pose challenges and create opportunities for meaningful partnership with communities in foundation decision-making. This paper also explores the institutional and individual competencies needed to do this work well and offers recommendations for getting started.

Terminology and Focus

NATIONAL & LARGE FOUNDATIONS

This report focuses on national foundations, as well as large foundations, such as The California Endowment, that may not be national in scope, but share similar characteristics by virtue of their size. The terms "large" and "national" are used throughout the report. For the purposes of this report, large foundations are defined as those with assets of $1 billion or more.

DIRECTLY IMPACTED GROUPS

Existing literature on this topic uses a wide range of terms: stakeholder, constituent, beneficiary, community member, resident, client, consumer, individuals with lived experience, just to name a few.

In this report, we tend to use the terms community advisor, constituent, and directly impacted groups to extrapolate beyond place-based language such as "resident" and to be more inclusive of how people from low-income backgrounds, people of color, and other historically excluded groups can be engaged in systems change work beyond the local level. We also favor these over terms such as "client" or "beneficiary" that suggest a direct service relationship and can reinforce power differentials.

DIRECT VS MEDIATED ENGAGEMENT

While foundations may elicit feedback from directly impacted groups via their grantees, the nature of funder-grantee relationships means that input is indirect and runs the risk of being filtered. This report focuses on how foundations can engage *directly* with impacted communities.

[2] For additional information on the methodology, see Appendix A.

Why Engage Directly Impacted Groups in Foundation Decision-Making?

Foundations have myriad reasons for engaging directly impacted groups in their decision-making. Foremost among them is a desire for greater relevance and effectiveness.

Community leaders bring expertise about their lived experience and can help foundations more clearly define the issues they wish to tackle; consider solutions that are likely to resonate and gain traction; anticipate potential pitfalls; and help course correct if needed.

As Chris Cardona, program officer for philanthropy at the Ford Foundation, asserts, "If philanthropic decision-makers do not have sufficient connection or access to the lived experience of the people we seek to benefit, the quality of our decision-making will suffer and our impact and legitimacy will be lessened" (Gibson, 2017).

Importantly, working in partnership with directly impacted communities also enables foundations to live out values related to equity and inclusion. When done with care and intention, foundations' efforts to involve and engage community constituents in their work helps philanthropy move away from transactional relationships, traditionally focused on grantmaking, to more transformational ones that center shared learning and co-creation of solutions.

> **If philanthropic decision-makers do not have sufficient connection or access to the lived experience of the people we seek to benefit, the quality of our decision-making will suffer and our impact and legitimacy will be lessened.**
>
> Chris Cardona, Ford Foundation in *Participatory Grantmaking: Has its Time Come?*

How Constituent Feedback Can Improve Foundation Decision-Making

Foundation staff interviewed for this project shared some of the ways feedback from community leaders has helped them in their work.

Center the foundation's work in the realities faced by those they seek to serve and heighten the level of accountability the foundation has to those communities. Although foundations approach their work with an analysis of how to make a difference on the issues and populations they care about, they may not always be grounded in the day-to-day experiences of the communities they want to serve. Engaging those who are directly impacted can help make experiences and realities that might otherwise be invisible to foundation staff, visible. Engaging directly impacted individuals in decision-making can also help reinforce the value that the foundation is ultimately accountable to the populations and communities they seek to serve.

Several years ago, as the NoVo Foundation was developing a new strategy and determining how to invest $90 million, the Foundation spent a year hosting listening sessions around the country to understand the hopes, challenges, and ideas of girls and young women of color (Koening, 2017). As Tynesha McHarris of the NoVo Foundation reflects, “We know that when we listen directly to the people we want to help advance, the result is transformative. When we host listening sessions in the communities we invest in, we get feedback that helps us adjust our priorities and make our strategies more accountable to the organizations we support” (McHarris & Prince, 2019).

Jazmin Ramirez, a youth board fellow at the Marguerite Casey Foundation, echoes the importance of accountability. Ramirez believes that she serves as a living reminder to the Board of the responsibility it has to young people and to immigrant communities. She views her role as being able to “bring [board members] back to earth and remind them, ‘Hey, this actually has an effect on someone.’”

Shape funding priorities. Engaging community-based advisors in decision-making can help foundations identify new areas of investment, as well as refine existing areas of work.

Like many foundations, the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Baltimore civic site typically did not accept unsolicited proposals, privileging organizations with pre-existing relationships with the Foundation and excluding those who did not have those connections. For a recent initiative, the site not only issued an open request for proposals, they convened a team of reviewers that included community members. Of the seven grants awarded, four went to new grantees.

> **For thirty years, we thought…we were working on things that mattered and we’re now actually working on things that matter to people most impacted.**
>
> Gwyn Barley, The Colorado Trust

Foundation staff share that the process not only helped the Foundation enter into new and promising partnerships, but also allowed the Foundation to buffer critiques about its decisions by using an approach that was inclusive of community.

Similarly, when The Colorado Trust, a health conversion foundation, started connecting directly with residents (versus nonprofit leaders) about issues of importance to them, they started working on a very different set of issues, shifting from a focus on reducing health disparities by supporting established nonprofits to investing in resident-driven projects with a more expansive focus on the social determinants of health (Csuti & Barley, 2016). The Trust now supports projects that residents themselves have identified as important to their well-being, including efforts such as creating a community center to give residents a place to connect with one another and fostering dialogue between police and residents to create a stronger sense of public safety. According to Gwyn Barley, vice president of community partnerships and grants, “For thirty years, we thought… we were working on things that mattered and we’re now actually working on things that matter to people most impacted.”

Inform design and process to ensure relevance. Engaging community members in strategy development, grant reviews, program design, and research and evaluation efforts can help foundations ensure that they are asking the right questions and addressing the needs of their communities. For example, in the strategy development process, community advisors can flag dimensions of culture or language that may be important to consider, thus ensuring cultural relevance. In the case of grant reviews, community advisors can provide guidance on which organizations have authentic relationships and credibility with the grassroots. Advisors can support research and evaluation efforts by helping to co-create research questions that are meaningful and relevant to community and helping to interpret findings in the context of community dynamics.

Ensure that communications and language resonate. Foundations may use jargon or use language that can unintentionally confuse or alienate community members. Engaging community advisors in reviewing public-facing communications can help mitigate any potential missteps. For instance, one foundation leader shared that feedback from directly impacted groups helped the foundation think more critically about how it frames its work, avoiding the trap of deficit-based narratives that are used all-too-often to justify funding decisions, and to instead frame its work from an asset-based perspective.

Influence foundations' own internal processes. As foundations engage directly impacted groups in decision-making, they may be prompted to adapt their own internal practices and expectations as well. One community leader says she pushes the foundation she advises to become a more flexible and responsive institution by investing in organizational capacity and advocating for more general operating support grants; another encourages foundation staff to spend more time in community to understand the issues they are facing. At the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative®, the Jim Casey Young Fellows advise the Foundation's work on foster care and have helped support the hiring and transition process of the Initiative's new director.

How Involvement in Foundation Decision-Making Impacts Community Constituents

Engaging those with lived experience in foundation decision-making, particularly higher-touch forms of engagement, is about process as much as it is about programmatic outcomes. Roderick Wheeler, executive director of Grassroots Grantmakers, explains, "The means in which we invest is just as important as the ends; if we focus on the means, we can build community, develop capital, while also improving conditions."

Interviews for this project included conversations with community leaders who advised foundations through a variety of roles, including as advisory committee members, board fellows, and grant reviewers. They shared some of the ways in which they benefited from their involvement.

"**The means in which we invest is just as important as the ends; if we focus on the means, we can build community, develop capital, while also improving conditions.**"

Roderick Wheeler, Grassroots Grantmakers

Gain a deeper understanding of philanthropy. Community constituents report that working with foundations helped them gain a deeper understanding of how foundations operate. Samanthya Marlatt, a Jim Casey Young Fellow, reflects, "I've learned that sometimes with foundations, change is slow. It takes a long time to not do what's always been done." Another shares that she didn't realize the level of internal review and due diligence that needs to occur before a grant can even be considered.

Develop leadership skills. Community advisors also feel working with foundations gives them an opportunity to develop their own leadership. Leslie Renteria Salome, a member of The California Endowment's President's Youth Council (PYC) says, "I learned a lot about myself and [realized] I had a lot of skills I didn't know I had. PYC got me out of my comfort zone." She describes preparing a memo for The Endowment advising it on the next iteration of its strategy as "one of the most powerful, encouraging thing[s] that I've

Potential Pitfalls

Engaging community constituents requires care and intention, as the inherent power dynamics in philanthropy can play out in complicated ways.

TOKENISM. The most frequently cited caveat regarding community engagement is to avoid tokenism. This can happen when it is unclear how solicited feedback is being used to make decisions.

Moreover, "community" is not a monolith. Tokenism can also occur when one person is expected to represent an entire group.

VOYEURISM. In trying to understand other people's lived experiences, particularly those that are culturally or economically different, there can be the danger of coming across as voyeuristic.

Reflecting on a recent set of listening sessions, one foundation leader asks, "What does it mean to take people's stories and ideas, information, sometimes pain, and sometimes joy and then leave? That's a dynamic that in some ways is hard to avoid, even when you're doing it honestly and sincerely." It's important to check one's own assumptions and to understand people's experiences with empathy rather than sympathy.

CULTURE SHOCK. In the case of higher-touch forms of engagement, some community leaders report feeling a disconnect between the wealth and excess sometimes present at foundation gatherings against the backdrop of injustice and inequity they experience in their own communities. As one advisor to a foundation shares, "At retreats, we're in really nice hotels eating fancy foods and we feel like, 'this is not my reality.' I've got to go back to my community where we're fighting gentrification and can't pay rent."

Foundations can address this by engaging community in design and planning processes and being intentional and thoughtful about details such as meeting spaces and vendors.

done." In other cases, advisors' roles have translated into other opportunities for leadership, such as speaking engagements at national conferences and events.

Strengthen community capacity and social capital. These experiences can also position advisors to serve as a resource to their own communities. Natalie A. Collier, who advises the NoVo Foundation, shares, "People [from other community organizations] are now starting to come to me and ask me advice about, 'how do you do this, how do you do that?'" In this way, even community members who are not directly engaged with foundations benefit from the experience of someone who has, potentially catalyzing greater nonprofit and community capacity at the local level.

Some advisors to foundations, particularly those involved in activities that brought them into contact with other leaders across the country, say the experience helped them feel a sense of solidarity with others who have similar experiences and build a broader network of support. One leader states, "It's a way to make good connections to take back to local projects."

Need for Further Research

Foundations that engage community constituents in decision-making consistently note the benefits to their work, yet the reality is that there is a need for more research to understand the impacts of engagement.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Jennifer Ng'andu asserts, "Anytime you engage direct stakeholders with lived experience, no matter how flawed [the process] can be, it often deeply improves the product. But a lot of that relational work may seem intangible…national organizations should consider how they systematically document that work. We have to create proof points about why it matters."

Recognizing the need for more research that deepens the field's understanding of participatory processes, the Ford Foundation released a request for proposals in June 2019 to commission additional research to understand more fully the value, benefits, challenges, and impacts of both the process and outcomes of participatory philanthropy,[3] especially for large foundations. While this effort will yield important insights, ongoing research and evaluation efforts are needed to continue addressing this gap.

Participatory Philanthropy Framework

TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT	EXAMPLES
INFORMING *Grantmakers tell*	• Foundation website or blog • Conference panels featuring foundation staff • Foundation communications outreach, including press releases and e-newsletters
CONSULTING *Grantmakers receive*	• Surveys of community constituents • Focus groups of community constituents • Listening sessions • Site visits involving board members • Site visits involving broader group of foundation staff • Pop-up polls on a foundation's website • Polling and opinion research • Feedback provided via social media channels • Guest lectures by community constituents
INVOLVING *Two-way communication that leads to grantmaker decisions*	• Advisory committees • Participatory research and evaluations, including equitable evaluation • Non-voting board membership • External grant reviewers • Research/report reviewers • Foundation-sponsored convenings that involve grantees and community constituents • Participation in RFP design • Participation in hiring decisions, especially for roles that serve a particular population or community
DECIDING *Two-way communication that leads to joint decision-making; Partnership [pre-grant; granting process; post-grant]*	• Participatory grantmaking • Full board membership • Hiring individuals from directly impacted groups as staff members

Source: Gibson, C. (2017). *Participatory Grantmaking: Has its Time Come?* New York: Ford Foundation.

[3] Gibson (2017) defines participatory philanthropy as a "wide range of institutional and individual activities such as incorporating grantee feedback into grant guidelines and strategy development, inviting non-grantmakers to sit on foundation boards, crowdfunding, and giving circles."

How National and Large Foundations Can Engage Directly Impacted Groups in Decision-Making

National and large foundations can engage those with lived experience in their decision-making in a variety of ways, from relatively low-touch efforts such as surveys to higher-touch engagement such as advisory and review committees, and in rare cases, more explicit forms of power-sharing, such as board membership.

Several frameworks, such as **Arnstein's Ladder of Participation** and the **Spectrum of Public Participation** developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), articulate what this engagement spectrum looks like. For this paper, we use the "starter" framework for participatory philanthropy developed by Cynthia Gibson, author of the Ford Foundation-funded report, *Participatory Grantmaking: Has its Time Come?*, which draws upon the work of both Arnstein and IAP2 (Gibson, 2017).

This rubric is not intended to connote value or judgment about one type of engagement as better than another. Rather it is designed to illustrate types of engagement. Different kinds of engagement may be appropriate for different kinds of decision-making. In addition, the availability of staff and financial resources available for implementation play into which engagement strategies are appropriate.

Importantly, the engagement framework focuses on working with those who are most directly impacted by inequity, rather than nonprofit leaders, who are often not from the communities their organizations serve. While there are a subset of nonprofit leaders who do, in fact, represent the communities they serve, foundations must take care to understand the extent to which the nonprofit leader is representing authentic perspectives from their community versus organizational interests that may not be aligned with community priorities.

3 A Closer Look at National and Large Foundations

Staff at national and large foundations generally acknowledge that their efforts to engage directly impacted groups in their work is nascent, characterized by "hits and misses." Even those foundations with a strong track record of community engagement recognize that their efforts are part of a learning journey, involving constant pivots and adjustments to do the work better.

> **Even though we work at a national level, if communities don't buy into, and ideally shape our efforts, it's never going to last.**
>
> Jennifer Ng'andu, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Role of Place

National foundations' efforts to be more inclusive of community in their decision-making can be complicated by the fact that much of their work occurs at a systems level and that they may not be rooted in specific communities. Nadia Brigham, a former program officer at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, served in both a place-based role as well as a national role during her fourteen-year tenure at the Foundation. She shares, "When you're working in national, you're doing your due diligence. You're trying to see who the partners are or who's supportive (or not) of whatever effort that's happening. But it's very hard to tether yourself to the community or group. You can see maybe treetops, you can see maybe branches and some of the trunk, but you cannot see roots." Brigham continues, "Place-based folks don't have the luxury of not feeling the pain of the community."

To get closer to the ground, some national foundations, such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and John L. and James S. Knight Foundation, have combined their national work with place-based approaches. Typically, foundations create satellite offices to do this work and hire staff with ties to the local community who bring an understanding of social and historical context to their roles. Through these field offices, foundations are often able to consult with community constituents more consistently in both informal and formal settings.

While a local presence can facilitate closer connections to community, such hybrid approaches can come with their own challenges, particularly when a national framework or agenda doesn't mesh with the local context. Hybrid models can also create tension internally. As one foundation leader observes, "It's very easy to get into us and them. They're out there working really hard on the ground and we're back here at the foundation holding power. We're in a constant rub around that, but that's really been healthy for us because it's made us more accountable."

While the common experience of place fosters a natural entrée to engaging constituents, funders and thought leaders interviewed for this project agree that national funders who are not rooted in place can also engage directly impacted groups meaningfully in their work and that core practices and principles of place-based work can translate to national-level work with some adaptations (see page 15). As Jennifer Ng'andu shares, "Even though we work at a national level, if communities don't buy into, and ideally shape our efforts, it's never going to last."

How Community Engagement Differs in Place-Based and National Contexts and How National Foundations Can Adapt Their Approaches for Effective Community Engagement

	CHARACTERISTICS OF PLACE-BASED WORK	CHARACTERISTICS OF NATIONALLY-FOCUSED WORK	ADAPTATIONS FOR NATIONAL AND LARGE FOUNDATIONS
COMMITMENT	Foundation mission or strategy is likely to signal a long-term commitment to a specific place.	Initiatives may not be based in place, but have implications for place; for example, changing federal policy on a specific issue. Though a foundation's commitment to a particular place may be longer-term, it is not guaranteed to be permanent. At the same time, there is often a desire to see long-term change in place.	National and large foundations can be transparent about their commitment, noting that it may not be a long-term, deep commitment to a single place. At the same time, they can be intentional about building capacity at the local level to sustain their investments once they leave. Capacity can be built by investing in local and regional organizations that create lasting infrastructure and supporting the leadership development of community members.*
RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING	Foundation staff tend to be geographically located in the same place as residents and are in closer relationship with community members.	Foundation staff are in a central, national office and subsequently less likely to be connected to local communities due to distance, networks, etc.	National and large foundations can spend more time with individuals affected by their work, whether that is a geographic location or a particular population. This could be through conferences, site visits, a local office, or other intentional relationship-building efforts. National and large foundations can work with trusted intermediaries to help broker relationships, while recognizing that their connections to intermediaries should not serve as a substitute for relationships on the ground.*
ISSUE BREADTH & FOCUS	Foundation initiatives based in place often cut across different issue areas and recognize the connections that exist between health, housing, education, etc.	Foundation initiatives are more likely to be focused on a single issue (education or housing, for example) or population (women and girls of color, systems-involved youth), sometimes creating artificial silos.	National and large foundations can strive to connect the dots across issue areas, while also acknowledging the ways in which issues play out uniquely based on geography. Foundations have an opportunity to maximize the benefits of deep issue area expertise with the power of innovating in the context of place.
CONTEXT	The political, economic, historical, and social context, whether it is local or statewide, is likely to be more clearly defined.	The political, economic, historical, and social context will be more varied and encompass multiple geographies.	Although it may be harder to understand the full range of contextual factors at play, the process of learning and listening is the same. Again, trusted partners and intermediaries can be of help.*

*For more information, see ***A Foot in Both Worlds: Working with Regional Organizations to Advance Equity***. The report examines how partnerships with regional organizations can serve as a bridge between national foundations and local communities and the role regional organizations can play in creating longer-term, sustainable capacity and infrastructure for local communities.

National and Large Foundation Context: Barriers & Opportunities

This section examines the unique context of national and large foundations and the potential barriers and opportunities it creates in engaging community constituents in decision-making.

CONTEXT

National and large foundations have big staffs and tend to have complex internal decision-making structures.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

Foundation staff can become bogged down navigating internal demands and are unable to engage community in meaningful ways. Staff at national foundations face numerous demands on their time. The responsibility of managing multi-million dollar portfolios comes with layers of paperwork, due diligence, proposal reviews, and relationship management. Working at large institutions, staff must also coordinate across departments and manage multiple levels of hierarchy and approval.

Aaron Dorfman, president of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, believes that national foundations struggle to engage directly impacted groups in their work because they "burden their staff with too many bureaucratic internal priorities so people don't have enough time to actually be in true relationship with the community." Indeed, lack of time and capacity are the most oft-cited barriers to more participatory processes.

One program officer from a national foundation adds that elaborate hierarchies can also get in the way of authentic community engagement. This program officer perceives the foundation president to be receptive of community engagement in decision-making, but laments the difficulty of acting upon community feedback, "The issue is that we have about four or five layers of folks who are in between us. The leadership hierarchy [creates] all these different layers in terms of how things get communicated and so it becomes very disjointed."

The decision-making process can feel opaque. In his annual letter in 2019, Darren Walker of the Ford Foundation asserts that the sector needs to "more clearly [understand] how others experience the institution of philanthropy — how remote we can be, how insular, how difficult to navigate" (Walker, 2019).

As a result, even when community members are engaged in decision-making, it can be difficult for them to understand the mechanics of the process. Leslie Renteria Salome, a member of The California Endowment's President Youth Council shares, "It was a learning process over the past year and half of figuring out the difference between executive roles and board members and being able to know the power that each person carries."

Layers of decision-making can limit responsiveness. By their very nature, large foundations tend to be less nimble than their smaller counterparts. This can make higher-touch forms of community engagement more challenging, as community advisors may feel a greater sense of urgency about the issues facing their communities and have expectations for speedier decision-making processes than what large and national foundations can realistically deliver.

Feedback from constituents may be seen as less relevant. Given the content expertise foundation staff bring to their roles and the large number of internal staff already involved in foundation decision-making, the need for additional feedback may not be viewed as a priority. Additionally, grantee input may be sought out, but grantees may feel compromised in ways that constituents don't because of funding.

OPPORTUNITIES

Build trust by orienting community to foundation mission, processes, and aspirations. Foundations should not assume community constituents know what a foundation does, appreciate a foundation's cachet, or have positive views of philanthropy. In some cases, to the extent a foundation is

Shifting Practices to Engage Directly Impacted Groups in Foundation Decision-Making

BUILD trust by orienting community to foundation mission and processes.

RE-IMAGINE staff roles and structures to support relationship-building with community constituents.

BROKER relationships between policymakers and directly impacted groups.

TEST OUT research findings and policy solutions with directly impacted groups.

ENGAGE directly impacted groups in participatory research and equitable evaluation.

known in a community, it is because they have been responsible for past harms. Working with directly impacted groups gives foundations an opportunity to demystify philanthropy, take ownership of the ways their work may have created harm in the past, and work with community partners to co-create larger-scale social change efforts.

Funders who engage community constituents in their work encourage their peers to spend time up front grounding them in the history, processes, and culture of the foundation. This kind of honesty and transparency not only helps to develop a common understanding of the shared work foundations hope to do with their community advisors, but also helps to build trust.

Re-imagine staff roles and structures. Staff size, and the inherent capacity that offers, can be an asset, given the time and labor required to engage community constituents in meaningful and authentic ways. A commitment to community engagement, though, may mean deploying staff in different ways.

Chris Cardona of the Ford Foundation notes that more participatory decision-making processes can prompt program officers to ask, "If we're not deciding on grants, what are we doing?" He continues, "I think there are a number of answers — facilitators, network weavers, conveners. There's a rich set of roles to be had where grantmaking is less central to it."

The California Endowment, a large, statewide foundation that does deep work in communities, acknowledges that its overhead is high in part because it sees its staff as changemakers, rather than grantmakers. To reflect this role, The California Endowment uses "program manager" rather than "program officer" as a title. Although program managers oversee a grantmaking portfolio, there are also explicit expectations that program managers will build relationships, create connections, and manage conflicts and that they are ultimately accountable to community.

Given that time is the biggest barrier to deeper community engagement, Nichole Hoeflich from Grantmakers for Effective Organizations encourages foundations to deconstruct the ways in which time is a constraint. Is it because of the timing of grant cycles? Is it because of a meeting-heavy culture? Is it because of paperwork burdens? Understanding what the specific barriers are can help foundations make necessary adjustments.

Lead and experiment from the middle. Because national and large foundations have multiple departments with sizable staff, there's an opportunity to lead from the middle by piloting new approaches that can be implemented and evaluated at a programmatic or departmental level, generating lessons learned that can ultimately influence broader organizational change. This may be more feasible than wholesale organizational change which often needs to occur over a longer time period, especially at large institutions.

CONTEXT

National and large foundations have the power, voice, and leverage to partner with government and other established institutions, such as universities, to shift policy and systems.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

Working at the systems or policy level may privilege relationships with policymakers versus community members. National foundations have a track record of catalytic relationships with government and systems partners to affect large-scale shifts in policy, such as advocating for the passage of the Affordable Care Act and helping to achieve marriage equality.

As one grantmaker notes, "We operate up here. That makes it very tricky because it's seen [by our foundation] as bigger, better, and more impactful." And while policy impacts can be significant, policy doesn't change without a constituency and connections to government or other large institutional players can cause tensions when working with community, especially in cases where directly impacted groups do not trust institutions that have caused past harm. As one funder shares, "We're too close to government, quite honestly," expressing concerns about the institution's reluctance to challenge partners in government on issues of equity and inclusion because of its desire to maintain positive relationships with them.

OPPORTUNITIES

Recognize that systems change occurs at multiple levels. Systems change often happens most effectively when both grasstops and grassroots approaches are employed (Ranghelli, 2012). Working on a policy initiative can involve partnerships with governments, while also engaging community voices to help shape and advocate for those policies to be relevant and impactful. The California Endowment, for example, maintains relationships with statewide and local policymakers and advocates for systems reforms, while being intentional about engaging residents, educators, young people, people who are undocumented, and other directly impacted groups to understand how policies will affect local communities.

Broker relationships between policymakers and directly impacted groups. While not always appropriate, in some cases, connecting policymakers and systems leaders to directly impacted groups can help propel the change foundations are seeking. For example, in one foundation-organized convening, youth leaders in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP)™ program were able to engage in a meaningful dialogue with systems leaders, whom they may not have ordinarily had access to, resulting in substantive changes to practice. The experience made Dina Emam from Casey realize, "I don't feel the need to be an intermediary because these young people have strong voices, they're able to speak for themselves. I really feel like our job is to get them at the table."

CONTEXT

National and large foundations tend to place a strong value on data-informed decision-making and evidence. They often have dedicated units and substantive budgets focused on research, evaluation, and learning and have easy access to academic and policy experts.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

Large and national foundations may lean on "experts" for input on strategy and program development. This can reinforce notions of what kind of data are valuable, at the expense of community-generated expertise. The move towards strategic philanthropy and data-driven philanthropy places a high value on evidence-based decisions, a welcome practice in philanthropy which can skew toward the whims of donors. At the same time, a commitment to evidence can sometimes focus too heavily on quantitative data. In other cases, evidence may not include an understanding of how interventions or solutions play out in particular settings or with specific populations. Directly impacted groups can provide important contextual insights, yet as Hoeflich of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations observes, "There is this idea across philanthropy that we still look for the most trusted people to advise our work — consultants, academics, the perceived experts. Often those closest to the work aren't perceived as experts…we can default to our own perceptions of power and expertise and who has it and who doesn't."

OPPORTUNITIES

Test out research findings and policy solutions with directly impacted communities. Scholar and researcher Ivory Toldson offers the following advice to consumers of data, "Never use data to understand people. Use people to understand data" (Kaler-Jones, 2019). As powerful as data can be, it can also tell an incomplete story about the reality of people's lives. Engaging directly impacted groups can be a valuable way to test out assumptions and findings before they are used to make philanthropic decisions. For example, the Jim Casey Young Fellows, a group of young people who support the Annie E. Casey Foundation's work on foster care, regularly engage with the Foundation around the implications of research related to adolescent brain development.

Conduct large scale survey or public opinion research. National foundations often have the resources to engage in larger scale research efforts that can not only inform their own priorities as a foundation but can also help inform strategies and approaches at a field-wide level. For example, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation periodically conducts large-scale opinion research to test messages and explore community priorities, using rigorous sampling criteria to allow for generalizability and analysis of differences among racial and ethnic groups. Brent Thompson, senior communications officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, says of one project that is exploring what families need to raise healthy children, "We've invested significantly in this study, but the opportunity to deeply understand the lived experiences of real families and share those insights with others in working in the field will be worth every penny."

Combine community and research expertise for a richer understanding of issues and solutions. There are multiple, creative ways in which to combine the strengths of community-based insights with the expertise of trained researchers.

Through human-centered design approaches, for example, ethnographic methodologies are used to engage community members in understanding their lived experience, recognizing that they are the experts in that. With a deep understanding of this lived experience, those with content or field expertise can generate solutions based on the existing evidence and then go back to community members to explore the viability of those solutions. Both the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The California Endowment have used this approach with positive results (Media Management Services, Inc., 2016; Quintero, 2019).

Similarly, in conducting listening sessions with women and girls of color to inform its strategy development process, NoVo Foundation used a community facilitator to lead the conversations and also hired a cultural anthropologist who brought academic expertise related to gender issues and took the lead on organizing themes from the listening sessions. The cultural anthropologist then worked with participants to make sure her analysis accurately reflected their perspectives.

One staff member at the Annie E. Casey Foundation describes how the Foundation's strong reputation for being evidence-based allows it to advocate for the inclusion of community perspectives, "Casey is perceived as this research engine. So when you look at reports and then look at what's going on at the ground level, sometimes those things don't match up and we are allowed to come in with our expertise and say, 'Though that might be true in a research sense, on the ground it looks a little different. This is how we should mold this strategy to better serve the people we want to serve.'"

Engage directly impacted groups in participatory research and equitable evaluation. Some research methodologies are designed to engage directly impacted groups in shaping questions of interest, collecting data, and interpreting data, while maintaining rigor. These, too, are generally partnerships between formally trained researchers and those from directly impacted groups and can inform problem identification, strategy development, and assessment of outcomes.

The **Healthy Neighborhoods Study**, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, for example, uses participatory action research to examines the relationship between housing and health. The effort engages 45 resident researchers who have played a role in designing the study, collecting the data, and interpreting the results. Already, the research has yielded insights that a more traditional research approach might not have.

Similarly, the Annie E. Casey Foundation recruited community leaders as consultants to conduct research on recruitment and retention challenges in Baltimore's workforce development programs. The effort resulted in better quality data and a host of policy recommendations. According to one of the community-based consultants, the project's success was rooted in the level of trust they were able to create, including "the ability to convey shared experience, empathy and adaptability; that's important when we are engaging people who have a deep mistrust of institutions and systems" (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

As The Colorado Trust became more community-centric in its approach, Gwyn Barley notes that, "The ways we ask and answer questions has changed dramatically." The Trust now partners with evaluation consultants who "demystify evaluation and make it valuable to the community. Because if we're doing it just for ourselves, it's a waste of our time. This is the community's knowledge and story."

Notably, large, national foundations such as the Kresge Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Ford Foundation and others are adopting **equitable evaluation** into their work, an approach to evaluation that puts equity in the center, in part by engaging community in how the evaluation takes shape and how it is implemented.

CONTEXT

National foundations are likely to face high levels of scrutiny from the media, government, and/or the public, resulting in tight legal and financial controls.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

Elaborate contracts, liability waivers, and/or other financial and legal practices may not be supportive of inclusion. As one funder observes, foundations are essentially financial institutions, and like any financial institution, they must follow strict guidelines embedded in the tax code. Board members, executives, and staff must make careful risk assessments and have financial and legal controls in place to ensure their work meets or exceeds regulatory requirements and does not damage the foundation's reputation or jeopardize its nonprofit status.

Questions with financial or legal implications that can arise include: What's the proper compensation? How is that compensation managed, especially for individuals who may not have bank accounts? What are potential liability issues associated with travel, particularly for foundations that engage young people or other vulnerable populations, such as people who have been involved in the criminal justice system? What kinds of agreements need to be put in place and how formal do they need to be? Is there a risk that activities could be viewed as politically partisan?

While such oversight is essential, several funders mentioned even seemingly simple gestures like providing honoraria to individuals often created bureaucratic headaches. In other cases, standard waivers with complicated legalese were sometimes a turn-off for individuals whose communities had a history of extractive and exploitive interactions with institutions.

Information technology, physical space, and other resources may include protocols that keep people out, rather than bring them in. In an age where cybersecurity is paramount, IT staff need to create systems that maintain privacy and are protected from hackers.

This is especially true for foundations that may be funding politically sensitive work. At the same time, security can create barriers to collaboration with outside partners. As one funder notes, “IT [protocols] are challenging when the sole focus is minimizing security risk. By only working on that, we stand to unintentionally keep people out who are trusted partners in this work.”

Lack of access to physical space can also pose a barrier to engagement. Foundations engaging directly impacted groups may need to meet outside of normal working hours yet meeting space may be difficult to access. For example, one foundation makes convening space available to community partners, yet due to administrative and operational concerns, the space is unavailable on the weekends and evenings, times that would be more convenient for youth who serve as advisors.

OPPORTUNITIES

Develop relationships with trusted intermediaries, fiscal sponsors, and community foundations. Many funders interviewed for this project shared administrative workarounds so that they could more effectively engage directly impacted groups in their work. More often than not, these workarounds involve forging relationships with partner organizations to facilitate engagement. Many large and national foundations, for example, make grants to nonprofit intermediaries to coordinate logistics, stipend payments, travel, and other details that may be difficult to process within the foundation’s financial and administrative constraints. In other cases, they may work with community foundations, which can give grants to individuals more easily than private foundations. Likewise, fiscal sponsors can be used to provide support to individuals who are not formally part of a nonprofit organization.

Review protocols to “right-size” or adapt financial, administrative, and legal processes. Consultant Marcus Littles, who has extensive experience advising large, national foundations, challenges foundations to re-examine their “holy grails” and their rationales for certain processes. In some cases, there may not actually be a legal or ethical mandate in place, but rather a legacy of “this is how we have done things.” For example, contracts and legal agreements can be modified to use more accessible language and create parameters for shared ownership, while still protecting the foundation. Likewise, information technology systems can be assessed for both security and accessibility. To work more effectively with community members, one foundation, for example, switched their grants management software to Fluxx, which is a more open platform for outside users and adopted BaseCamp as an online tool to collaborate and communicate with residents. In the case of financial controls that make it difficult to provide stipends or honoraria, a workaround used by one foundation was to hire community advisors as part-time staff.

Engage finance and administration staff on equity journey. Some foundations have been explicit about engaging finance and administration staff on their equity journeys, recognizing that all parts of the foundation need to be aligned on the foundation’s core values. At the Ford Foundation, for example, Catherine Hyde Townsend, the Foundation’s disability inclusion consultant, has worked with the security, legal, events, and catering teams to orient them to inclusive practices. At The Colorado Trust, Gwyn Barley says they have been intentional about engaging their finance and operations staff, taking the stance that “If you're going to work at this foundation, you have to be bought in to a shared commitment of undoing racism and other oppressions, and [understanding that] every staff person plays a role in that work.” By creating alignment on values, finance and administration staff can act as allies and help generate new and more inclusive practices that remain legally and financially sound.

4 Engaging with Community: Best Practices

Engaging directly impacted groups in foundation decision-making in meaningful, systematic, and sustainable ways begins with an organizational culture that supports such practice. Organizational culture goes hand in hand with the skills and competencies staff bring to community engagement efforts. Existing reports in the field lift up the competencies needed to do this work well, foremost among them listening, humility, and empathy.

As one funder shares, at the core, it’s important to come together as colleagues on equal footing, “[Treating advisors] as equal colleagues side-by-side in the work is a really important component in how we relate to [our community advisors].”

Here are a few best practices that are especially relevant to those working at large and national foundations.

Foundations that Involve Community Constituents in Decision-Making Have…

- **Executive leadership that values and prioritizes participatory process**
- **Strong organizational commitment to equity and inclusion, including an understanding of historical oppression, social, context, and implicit bias**
- **An understanding of power — what it means to have it, wield it, and share it**
- **A strong learning culture, with license for experimentation**

Organizational Culture

Executive will and leadership are needed to make engaging directly impacted groups a sustainable priority within the organization.

Program officers or departments within a foundation can experiment to bring participatory practices to their work, but for such practices to become sustainable in the longer-term, executive leadership must see it as a value and create structures to support and enable participatory processes.

At the Hewlett Foundation, Larry Kramer has been a strong advocate in the Foundation’s efforts at listening. In fact, how well staff incorporate listening into their strategies is now a part of the performance review process. Similarly, staff at The California Endowment credit its president, Dr. Bob Ross, as being a champion of engaging community members and young people in its work in deep and meaningful ways.

In addition to foundation executives, the Board plays an important role in creating an authorizing environment. Creating opportunities for board members to engage with directly impacted communities outside of the boardroom can give them important insights about community needs and help them become advocates for greater community engagement in decision-making.

Rather than simply having community constituents present to their Board, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, for example, conducts periodic board trips to the places where Kellogg is doing its work. While the visits are highly structured, Nadia Brigham, formerly a program officer at the Foundation, observes that "in the unscripted parts of the program, [board members] always get nuggets about the work that is being accomplished, what the needs are, [and] an understanding of the day-to-day of those who are most impacted."

Foundations doing the deepest work in this area have a strong commitment to equity and inclusion. This includes a commitment to understanding social context, historical oppression, and implicit bias.

While equity and inclusion initiatives are not a prerequisite for engaging directly impacted populations in decision-making, it is not a coincidence that foundations that are doing the deepest work in this area are intentional about equity and inclusion, including articulating their values around these principles, interrogating their policies and practices, and creating personal and professional development opportunities for staff to engage in their own reflection.

In 2014, for example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's internal work on equity and inclusion led the Foundation to publish *Race Equity and Inclusion Guide: Seven Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion within Your Organization*. The second step in the guide encourages foundations and other organizations to engage affected populations and stakeholders and offers the following advice, "Strive to engage stakeholders who have active and authentic connections to their respective communities. It is important to ensure meaningful participation, voice and ownership. The sooner you can engage a diverse mix of stakeholders, the sooner you will be able to move from talk to action in creating equitable opportunities for the communities you seek to serve." Though the Annie E. Casey Foundation had engaged directly impacted groups prior to its work on equity and inclusion, the Foundation's explicit value statement creates an enabling environment, as well as an expectation, to do so.

Likewise, The California Endowment's core values include "listening beyond our own plans and inner circles." To hold itself accountable, The California Endowment conducts periodic diversity, equity, and inclusion audits. The audits focus primarily on internal organizational practices, but also touch on the extent to which staff believe The Endowment is living out its core values and sharing power with community stakeholders.

Relatedly, thought leaders and funders stress the need to be grounded in historical context and the ways in which institutions and systems have excluded certain communities or caused harm to them. Such an analysis not only underscores the importance of inclusion, but also begins to recognize and address root causes, while maintaining a sensitivity to the perspectives directly impacted groups may bring to decision-making processes (Schlegel & Peng, 2017; Villanueva, 2018).

> **[The history we're taught] is very much filtered and told in very selective ways. And so we do a lot around understanding oppression, how systemic oppression shows up in the community, how we've gotten to where we are, and why we're here.**
>
> Gwyn Barley, The Colorado Trust

Gwyn Barley shares, "[The history we're taught] is very much filtered and told in very selective ways. And so we do a lot around understanding oppression, how systemic oppression shows up in the community, how we've gotten to where we are, and why we're here." The Colorado Trust retains coaches to help staff along on their internal reflections and journeys. Other foundations have created spaces to reflect on personal and professional identities, biases, and power, which are likely to influence how staff engage directly impacted groups.

Foundations must grapple with notions of power—what it means to have it, wield it, and share it. Re-framing notions of power and risk can advance the work of engaging directly impacted populations.

Power and control are interrelated concepts, and ultimately it can be the loss of control that can make foundations skittish about engaging directly impacted populations in decision-making. One foundation leader interviewed for this project encourages foundations and their staff to reflect on this, "'What is it that we're afraid of?' is a really important question for many of us in philanthropy. I know what I'm really afraid of, whenever I engage, is losing control. What is that like for larger foundations? It's hard."

And while more inclusive decision-making can challenge how a grantmaker understands their role, Hanh Cao Yu of The California Endowment observes, "Involving communities in decision-making doesn't mean the foundation abdicates its responsibilities. In fact, what's more important is that it has more clarity in terms of what its responsibilities are."

While some foundations and their staff may be reluctant to give up their power, Marcus Littles, a consultant to numerous large foundations, observes that foundation staff who want to be more inclusive sometimes err on the side of minimizing their

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> Hanh Cao Yu, The California Endowment

own power, which can also be problematic. He suggests that foundations and their staff explore what it means to lean into their power and have honest and transparent conversations about how they can be responsible stewards of their power. Littles observes, "I don't know that there are institution-wide conversations around how are we stewards of our power as funders. It tends to be personal or interpersonal conversations. [Institution-wide conversations] tend to be navigated horribly or at least inconsistently."

It is important to acknowledge that shared decision-making comes with risks. Foundations are opening themselves up to criticism and they may ultimately not be able to follow-through on recommendations from their community advisors, potentially generating ill will. In addition, the time commitment involved in more collaborative decision-making often comes at the expense of efficiency. Simply considering a different approach to decision-making can feel risky. One funder reflects, "There's a mindset around what we see as the right thing and the right way; the way we understand risk, the way we define risk. All of it is deeply rooted in the psyche of a foundation."

Yet it's also important to consider the risk of not listening and getting feedback, including lack of buy-in that can derail desired outcomes and an incomplete or inaccurate assessment of problems and/or solutions. Catherine Hyde Townsend, who serves as a disability inclusion consultant to the Ford Foundation, notes, "When Ford came out with its inequality strategy and consulted hundreds of experts, seemingly no one mentioned disability. It's probably because they did not have connections to disability experts or disabled people, in general. It's a good example of what happens when our staff don't reflect the community we're purporting to serve."

A strong learning culture, with license for experimentation, can help create a space for incorporating more inclusive practices.

Opening up decision-making to involve directly impacted groups, like any human enterprise, is likely to be messy and require more staff time and capacity than decisions that are made by foundation staff alone. Combine that with the importance of wrestling with power, identity, and historical and social context, mistakes will occur, and pivots will be necessary.

An organizational culture that views missteps as opportunities to learn and grow will be well-poised to incorporate community perspectives into their decision-making. Alex Lohrbach of the Annie E. Casey Foundation says of the Foundation's work with young people in foster care, "We're learning together and being in that co-learning space can be a little uncomfortable, but it's so much better for the work to be in that together."

Nichole Hoeflich, director of programs at Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, encourages funders to shift their mindsets, asking "What can we do to make this possible?" rather than "Why is this going to be hard?," a process another funder describes as permission to "imagine what's possible." This can be as simple as deciding which conferences to attend. One funder says that when she first started in her role, she attended traditional philanthropy conferences and has since started attending conferences that are more likely to "bring in the voice of difference" and bring her closer to the experience of directly impacted groups.

Staff Competencies

Hire staff who have lived experience, a deep understanding of the historical and social context associated with the populations the foundation seeks to serve, and/or self-awareness about their own privilege.

Like most mainstream institutions, large foundations tend to prioritize academic and professional credentials in hiring decisions. As foundations seek to be more inclusive in their approaches to engaging directly impacted populations, it is also important to consider the staff's own lived experience and at a minimum, their understanding of the historical and social context of the populations they seek to serve. Indeed, those interviewed for this project identified hiring decisions over and over as a precursor to doing community engagement work effectively, noting that those with lived experiences that more closely reflect the populations foundations serve are more likely to understand the nuances associated with those communities.

When The Colorado Trust shifted its approach to be more resident-driven, they realized they didn't have the right staff. Gwyn Barley shares, "I had a staff of program officers who were excellent at managing and directing projects across a number of organizations from a place of power. We needed staff who

Foundation Staff Who Engage Effectively with Community Have…

Lived experience, deep knowledge about the communities the foundation seeks to serve, and/or self-awareness about their own privilege

Respect for relationships and the messiness of group process

An understanding of how to use both academic and community-based data in foundation decision-making

really understood how to authentically partner by sharing power and capacity and expertise. That took us through a very hard set of decisions around rebuilding our staff to truly do this work by sharing power and building partnerships. Even the title of 'officer' sends a very strong message into communities that are disempowered, disenfranchised, othered, left out."

Hiring staff with lived experience does not always have to happen in program areas. The Ford Foundation, through its work in criminal justice reform, became connected to the Bard Prison Initiative. Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, recognizing the barriers to employment faced by formerly incarcerated individuals, worked with colleagues at the Foundation to create a program that brings in Fellows to work in different areas of the Foundation, from human resources to program areas. According to a member of the Foundation's staff, while not the primary goal of the initiative, their very presence helps to raise awareness among staff about the issues faced by formerly incarcerated individuals by weaving them into the DNA of the organization.

Not coincidently, foundations that are doing deep community engagement work are more likely to have staffs that come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. For example, in part due to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's internal work on equity and inclusion, the Foundation's staff composition shifted considerably. By 2012 half of Casey's leadership consisted of people of color and by 2014, half of its staff was comprised of people of color to reflect the communities it serves. As one foundation leader, whose foundation has been similarly intentional about hiring diverse staff, shares, "There's something about having a multiracial community within the Foundation that's important. It's not a skill set but it's an important value."

At the same time, all foundation staff, regardless of their race or ethnicity, are likely to have privilege by virtue of their educational backgrounds or their socio-economic status. Yet privilege can be hard to recognize. As Jeff Raikes asserts, "Privilege is invisible to those who possess it. And power is wrapped up in privilege…You must pay attention to see it" (Raikes, 2019). Having a sense of self-awareness around one's own privilege and how it manifests in relationships with community members is critical. One funder, a White woman, says, "I get my steady diet of privilege every day, so I know that I have to hold those tensions and be hyperconscious about how those are playing out at all times."

Be relationship-oriented and comfortable with the messiness of group process.

For foundations who wish to engage directly impacted groups in their decision-making, it's important for staff to have strong people skills. Aaron Dorfman of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy states, "[Staff] should be highly relational. They should have some curiosity about people and issues and want to be engaged and want to learn from the constituencies."

Getting honest feedback from anyone, particularly people who come for directly impacted groups, requires a high level of trust and being in true relationship with people is critical to creating a spirit of trust. Jazmin Ramirez, a youth board fellow at the Marguerite Casey Foundation, notes that board members are always excited to see her, include her in the board's social events, and follow-up on details about her life that she's shared with them in the past. Although seemingly minor details, Ramirez believes building relationships on a personal level creates an environment that allows her to feel comfortable and valued. Samanthya Marlatt, a fellow with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, notes that the relationships she has with the initiative's staff are so strong and positive that she sometimes finds work situations outside of the Foundation challenging because she is not treated as well.

At the same time, bringing together people with diverse experiences and perspectives is bound to result in conflict and occasional tension. Likewise, creating mechanisms for input from a broader range of constituencies is likely to result in a higher level of process, as well as non-linear processes. Not only do these processes take more time, they may create complicated and unanticipated situations.

The ability to understand these dynamics as an expected and natural part of the work is important. Nate Balis, director of the Juvenile Justice Strategy Group at the Annie E. Casey Foundation observes, “Pretending that it's going to be just a thing you put on top of other things is not true. If you're genuine about it, it takes a lot of time. It requires a lot of work, work that feels like extra work because it's not moving the ball necessarily, and yet that's what it is. You can't do this without investing in the people and the relationships with them.”

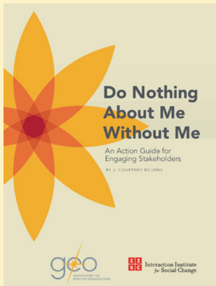
Understand how to manage, analyze, and use data from both researchers and communities and translate that data into strategic inputs and directions.

Foundation staff often wade through large volumes of research and data to analyze issues and determine strategy. As foundations engage directly impacted groups into their decision-making, they need to become comfortable in reconciling data from those who bring insights from their lived experience with other types of information. A critical aspect of sense-making is to be able to understand data in context and to be able to unpack the story behind the numbers.

Valerie Threlfall, a consultant whose work has focused on best practices for listening and high-quality feedback loops, notes “There’s currently a lack of clarity about how foundations can use this kind of input to make different decisions. There needs to be more use cases out there. Foundations are often looking for the roadmap.”

> **Pretending that it's going to be just a thing you put on top of other things is not true. If you're genuine about it, it takes a lot of time. It requires a lot of work, work that feels like extra work because it's not moving the ball necessarily, and yet that's what it is. You can't do this without investing in the people and the relationships with them.**
>
> Nate Balis, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Resources on Best Practices for Community & Stakeholder Engagement

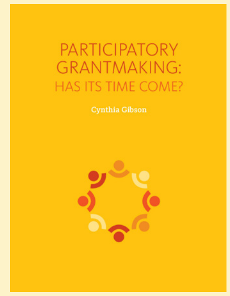


Do Nothing About Me Without Me: An Action Guide for Engaging Stakeholders (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations & Interaction Institute for Social Change, 2010)

Offers guidance on stakeholder engagement, including definitions, rationale, and options for involving grantees and community partners in strategy development and highlights practices to enhance diversity, inclusion, and equity in grantmaking. Includes case studies.

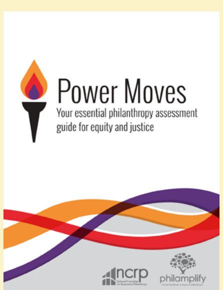
Hearing from Those We Seek to Help: Nonprofit Practices and Perspectives in Beneficiary Feedback (Center for Effective Philanthropy, 2014)

For nonprofit organizations, hearing from the beneficiaries they seek to serve is an important practice for planning, implementing, and evaluating their programs and services. This paper explores how feedback and an understanding of intended beneficiaries' needs reach foundation funders and influence their funding and strategic decision-making.



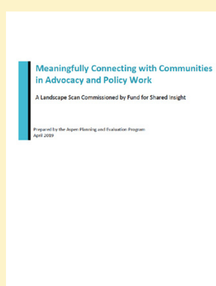
Participatory Grantmaking: Has its Time Come? (Cynthia Gibson, 2017)

Commissioned by the Ford Foundation, this paper explores participatory approaches and their potential use by foundations. The paper synthesizes several existing participatory frameworks, identifies common components, and applies these to philanthropy as a "starter" framework that can be used as a springboard for ongoing discussion and development.



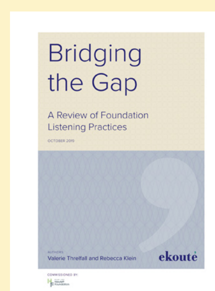
Power Moves: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice (National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2018)

This toolkit helps foundations determine how well they are building, sharing, and wielding power and identify ways to transform their programs and operations for lasting, equitable impact.



Meaningfully Connecting with Communities in Advocacy and Policy Work (Aspen Planning and Evaluation Program, 2019)

This landscape scan explores whether and how U.S. funders and nonprofits focused on advocacy and policy connect with the people and communities their work is intended to benefit.



Bridging the Gap: A Review of Foundation Listening Practices (Threlfall & Klein, 2019)

This paper includes a review of current practices, numerous case studies, and tips for foundations seeking to listen more actively to those they seek to help.

5 Getting Started

Change, for any institution, is hard and rarely happens overnight. For large and national foundations that wish to become more inclusive in their decision-making, it will be a journey that requires both tactical and structural changes. Smaller shifts that happen at a programmatic or departmental level coupled with broader structural changes at the organizational level can, over time, help large and national foundations embed community input more naturally into the DNA of their foundation. Indeed, foundations doing this work well all describe it as an ongoing learning journey, while also saying they can't imagine operating any other way.

Building new muscles for community engagement can be daunting as an organization, but foundations don't have to have everything figured out. Reflecting on equity and inclusion initiatives in philanthropy more broadly, equity consultant Cardozie Jones makes a comparison to recycling, "We don't need a few people doing it perfectly to make progress, we need a ton of people doing it imperfectly" (Remaley, 2019).

First, do no harm. Assess capacity for community engagement efforts and be transparent about goals, process, outcomes, and boundaries/limits.

Foundations should begin with an honest assessment of their capacity to engage community and the skills their staff bring to the effort. Without dedicated time and capacity for this work, the risk of doing harm increases tremendously. Potential risks include damaging relationships with community members, siphoning their time and energy, and negatively impacting the Foundation's future work. One community advisor had this critique of their experience, "[The Foundation] brought us together to impact our community and nothing happened… we came up with initiatives and ideas…we had a vision…and I don't know where it went. It disappeared."

Along these lines, transparency is also key. Leslie Gross of the Annie E. Casey Foundation offers this advice, "Be clear about the expectations for participation and engagement. The time that young people take to share their experiences and expertise is valuable. Foundation staff should be clear about what is going to result from a meeting or other interaction — Is this a listening session to gather perspectives? Is there a plan to incorporate suggestions into existing work? And be open about what won't happen. For example, 'We want to hear your thoughts about this soon-to-be-published brief so we can anticipate possible responses, but we aren't going to be re-editing.' If you're bringing in people one time as opposed to engagement in an effort, let them know what the outcome is. Whatever the work is you're doing, be clear about what is."

Hanh Cao Yu of The California Endowment advises a process-oriented approach, "Don't set the 'what' of what you're doing, but the 'how.'" In addition, having a clear set of values brings a sense of intention and purpose in community engagement efforts.

This orientation toward transparency builds trust and also helps manage expectations, particularly given that community feedback is likely to be just one of many inputs foundations consider as they are making decisions.

Engaging Community in Decision-Making: A Roadmap for National Foundations

Change, for any institution, is hard and rarely happens overnight.

For larger foundations that wish to become more inclusive in their decision-making, it will be a journey that requires both tactical and structural changes. Smaller shifts that happen at a programmatic or departmental level coupled with broader structural changes at the organizational level can mutually influence one another and, over time, help national foundations embed community input more naturally into the DNA of their foundation.

This graphic lays out a roadmap for this journey, highlighting best practices at the staff and organizational level to do this work well.

STAFF SKILLS & COMPETENCIES

- Acknowledge and address power dynamics and try to mitigate them when possible.
- Listen deeply and remain open to influence. Approach community engagement with humility and a spirit of co-learning.
- Ensure staff are continually growing in cultural competency and getting ongoing exposure and professional development to build their cultural knowledge, skills, and awareness.
- Avoid jargon and attend to language needs, either through staff who are bilingual or multilingual, or translators.
- Ensure that staff are exposed to best practices in this field, as well as what has been learned from your organization's work, so that everyone is starting from a shared baseline and learning from there.

ORGANIZATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

- Provide compensation for time and expertise and ensure flexible payment methods, including pre-paid debit cards that do not require participants to have access to a bank.
- Communicate how feedback will be used (or not used) by the foundation. Create feedback loops to ensure transparency and close feedback loops, especially when feedback cannot be acted upon.
- Consider how community participants will benefit from their engagement and be mindful of engagement that is extractive. Examples include products (such as videos or reports that are shared with the community) or leadership development support.
- Pay attention to food, dress, choice of vendors, etc. and make sure they signal inclusiveness.
- Document lessons learned and create organization-wide protocols, guidelines, and timelines to institutionalize inclusion of community expertise.

SHORTER-TERM SHIFTS
AT THE PROGRAMMATIC/DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL

REFLECTION

Get clear about why you are engaging directly impacted communities in decision-making and how specifically the team hopes to benefit from community-based expertise.

Take a close look at your existing practices and protocols and identify where there is room to be more inclusive. Can community constituents be integrated into advisory committees, review panels, or other processes?

Determine if it's helpful (given your context) to have intermediaries or other partners broker relationships with community constituents.

ACTION

Establish criteria for engagement, ideally with those whom you hope to engage.

Who will be included? How will participants be recruited? To what extent do they represent a cross-section of perspectives/experiences?

How long will the engagement last? What are the roles and responsibilities for advisors and foundation staff? What is the accountability mechanism for staff to use input from those engaged?

To the degree possible, codify these to promote transparency and to provide a roadmap for future efforts.

Provide orientation, training, and support for community advisors, as well as staff who will be working with the advisors.

Discuss how community advisors and the communities they represent will benefit from their engagement — and check to make sure they did.

For higher touch engagement, debrief with participants to identify what went well and what could be improved. Document lessons learned for departmental, organizational, and field learning.

LONGER-TERM CHANGES
AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

VALUES

Articulate organizational values related to equity and inclusion, including the importance of engaging directly impacted communities in decision-making and an understanding of social context, historical context, and implicit bias in the foundation's work.

Engage the Board in defining organizational values and expectations for community engagement.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Integrate lived experience as a consideration in hiring practices.

Include expectations about connection to community in job descriptions and staff review/assessment criteria.

Review job responsibilities and ensure enough time is available to staff to support community engagement.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES

Assess financial, administrative, and programming protocols and practices for inclusion of community constituents.

Are there mechanisms to compensate people for their time? Are contracts and waivers written in plain language? What supports (child care, transportation, translation) are needed to facilitate participation?

Examine grant cycles to ensure that timelines and review processes allow for engagement from directly impacted groups.

> **There's not one silver bullet. It's about continually challenging yourself to go deeper and learn more and be a better funder, a better partner to their communities.**
>
> Aaron Dorfman, National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy

Experiment with multiple strategies and capture lessons, successes, and failures.

The reality is that there is no standard practice for engaging directly impacted groups in foundation decision-making. Some foundations will be more comfortable with surveys and focus groups that center on a specific set of questions. Other foundations will be more comfortable engaging smaller numbers of people, but in deeper ways, through advisory committees for example. Moreover, different needs for feedback might call for different types of engagement. Strategy development might require more intensive consultation, while getting a pulse of how things are going in the implementation phase might require a quick survey.

Dorfman of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy asserts, "There's not one silver bullet. It's about a continuous commitment to getting better and doing all of these things; they all feed on each other. Diversifying the staff is going to help, building relationships with folks from the constituency is going to help, changing the board or having an advisory council, those things are going to help. It's not one thing. It's about continually challenging yourself to go deeper and learn more and be a better funder, a better partner to communities."

Whatever the approach, though, it is important to assess and reflect on the engagement alongside those the foundation has engaged. Documenting successes and challenges can inform future efforts and help avoid re-inventing the wheel.

It's OK to keep it simple. Then build the muscle to deepen the work.

For foundations that are new to this work, they may want to start with a pilot effort, assess it, and then think about what it would mean to scale the work. Another approach is to identify a key inflection point that might be ripe for input or course correction and move from there.

When the Marguerite Casey Foundation decided to bring on a youth board fellow, Laura Boyle of the Foundation says that transparency and humility were key: "We were realistic to say, 'we're starting this program and we may not have it perfect, but we want to engage you [youth], so please share feedback on your experience.'"

Over time, these small efforts add up and can build the muscle to engage impacted groups in a foundation's work. Says Nichole Hoeflich of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, "Anytime you do things over and over again, it gets a little easier every time. If it's the first time you do it a new way, it's going to be hard. But the second time you do it, it's a little easier, and suddenly by the fifth time it's become the norm."

6 Conclusion

Regardless of a foundation's size and scope, engaging community constituents in decision-making requires care, clarity of purpose, and intentionality. At the same time, size and scale can complicate community engagement efforts. For large, national foundations that seek to engage constituents in their decision-making, power differentials may be exacerbated; a focus on large-scale policy and systems change may come at the expense of community engagement; and not being rooted in a particular place can make it more difficult to form authentic relationships.

Yet national foundations, by virtue of their size and scale, have an opportunity to make an outsized impact by adopting participatory practices that center the expertise of those directly impacted by inequity. Such expertise can not only contribute to the success of the foundation's initiatives, deepening the impact and sustainability of its interventions, but also advance core principles of equity and inclusion that are becoming increasing central to the sector's work.

Case Study: The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, based in Baltimore, works nationally to improve the lives of children and their families. With assets of more than $2.6 billion, it is one of the nation's largest foundations. The Foundation engages directly impacted populations in its decision-making through a variety of channels, including advisory committees, participatory action research, and grant reviews.

While the Foundation's participatory efforts engage parents and adult community leaders, many of the Foundation's engagement initiatives seek the input of young people, given the Foundation's focus on children and families.[4]

Notably, in 2013, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's longstanding commitment to equity and inclusion started to deepen, with the Foundation taking a closer look at its internal operations. This work resulted in a strategic framework and a theory of change to inform its internal practices, including a deeper desire to engage those most directly impacted in their decision-making (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

How Organizational Culture Contributes to Casey's Community Engagement Efforts

Explicit organizational commitment to engaging directly impacted communities. Though community engagement has always been an important value for Casey, the Foundation is now taking a more explicit stance on the need to engage directly impacted communities in decision-making. While the depth of youth and community engagement varies across the Foundation's work, one staff member notes that there is a "very deep sense of sweeping commitment across units that it's important…[and] there's a desire to deepen it."

Tomi Hiers, who started at the Foundation in 2016 and became its vice president of civic sites and community change in 2019, shares, "More than ever, there is an openness around new things and a deep commitment to partnering with impacted populations to gather qualitative information and ensure their voices are not just amplified, but truly valued. So much of this stems from the racial and ethnic equity and inclusion work the Foundation undertook prior to my arrival, and it's been a phenomenal learning journey."

Similarly, Dina Emam, a program associate in the Center for Economic Opportunity, describes engagement of those with lived experience as an important component of how the Foundation now operates, "I've never encountered a Casey project or initiative where constituent engagement, whether it's youth or community, has been included as an afterthought. It's always kind of embedded from the beginning."

Strong commitment and support from senior leadership. Like other foundations who do this work well, many Casey staff credit its leadership for centering equity and inclusion in its work. Equity and inclusion are infused into all aspects of Casey's work, including its annual budget discussions where the Foundation asks explicit questions

[4] In 2015, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, previously a stand-alone nonprofit organization, became a unit of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Initiative already had a robust model of youth-adult partnerships in place and their approach has served as a model for other youth engagement efforts within the Foundation.

How Directly Impacted Groups are Engaged in Decision-Making at the Annie E. Casey Foundation

Select Examples

JIM CASEY YOUNG FELLOWS (NATIONAL). The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative® focuses on advancing policies and practices to support youth across the country who are transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Every year, the Initiative develops new partnerships with individual young leaders across the country through its week-long Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), which engages approximately 17 young people annually. YLI supports the development of participants' leadership and advocacy skills, preparing them to become Young Fellows. Of those who participate in YLI, approximately 91 percent become Young Fellows, joining previous Young Fellows in informing the work of the initiative. There are currently about 70 active Young Fellows. Fellows are deeply embedded in the work of the initiative, participating in a wide variety of work including: informing strategy, developing surveys, advising on messaging and language that will resonate with young people, participating in staff hiring processes, and shaping research on adolescent brain development.

JUVENILE JUSTICE STRATEGY GROUP YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (NATIONAL). The Council engages young adults who are currently or formerly involved in the juvenile justice system to support its national juvenile justice strategy. The Council meets in-person four times a year and participates in regular conference calls. Council members review materials, draft and edit reports and presentations, conduct field research, and attend and present at conferences and meetings.

YOUTH LEADERS POLICY COUNCIL (NATIONAL). The Council brings in youth voice into the Foundation's policy work and consists of representatives from the Foundation's other youth advisory committees as well as several young people from grantee organizations.

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING (BALTIMORE). In its Baltimore civic site, the Foundation set up a participatory grantmaking opportunity to restore residential power to neighborhoods, allocating $52,000 to residents who distributed these funds to 15 projects across Baltimore, ranging from murals to a quilting bee.

In its East Baltimore Participatory Research Project, the Foundation brings on resident advisors to drive the decision-making of the project. While Casey staff provide the structure for project and guide the process, the resident advisors co-design a request for proposals to choose a research partner, create the scoring rubric, sit in on interviews, choose the partner, and onboard them.

about how investments address equity and inclusion. In addition to dedicated staff leadership roles focused on equity and inclusion, senior leadership encourages program directors to integrate those with lived experience in their decision-making and gives them broad discretion to determine what that looks like.

Allocation of financial resources to support engagement. Importantly, Casey devotes substantial resources to its youth and community engagement efforts, not only making sure community members are compensated for their time, but also investing in the leadership and professional development of those who are advising them. By doing so, the Foundation seeks to even the playing field and create co-learning opportunities for everyone. "If you value it, you can't do it on the cheap," advises Nate Balis, director of the Juvenile Justice Strategy Group.

Practices Supporting Successful Community Engagement

Strategic use of intermediaries and consultants. In addition to dedicated staffing for higher-touch forms of engagement, such as advisory committees, the Foundation supplements its capacity with intermediaries and consultants. For example, the Juvenile Justice Youth Advisory Council, which has several in-person, multi-day meetings with its members, partners with a nonprofit organization that manages logistics, such as the distribution of pre-paid debit cards, travel arrangements, etc., while also supporting meeting planning and design. Given the trauma that many of the Council members have experienced and the ways that can manifest, the Foundation also has their partner "on call" for any mediation or support that may be necessary.

Focus on preparation and relationship-building. Foundation staff invest considerable time and energy preparing their community advisors for meetings, presentations, or any other projects they may undertake. Kathleen Holt-Whyte, a consultant to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, observes that for young people to be able to "show up in the room as powerful contributors and partners" the Foundation needs to take the time to brief them on any background or context they may need to know about a particular research or policy effort. This includes walking through materials together and practicing talking points. While the nature of preparation may look different for youth than for adults, Foundation staff note that this practice applies to adults too, as any adult in a professional setting would also want to be briefed on relevant information to contribute meaningfully.

In addition, the Foundation is intentional about forging authentic relationships. The Juvenile Justice Strategy Group Youth Advisory Council, for example, has a buddy system, where staff members are paired up with members of the advisory council and connect with them informally on a monthly basis to get to know each other and have a sense of what's going on in one another's lives. The fruits of relationship-building are also evidenced among the Jim Casey Young Fellows, who routinely describe their relationships with the staff as that of "family."

Commitment to reciprocity. In part because many of the Foundation's advisors are young people, the Foundation provides them with a variety of professional development opportunities. This ensures that there's a sense of reciprocity — that the Foundation is investing in the advisor, the same way the advisor is investing in the future success of the Foundation. This principle applies to adult advisors as well, as the Foundation seeks to identify ways to create value for advisors and/or the communities they represent.

Ability to calibrate the right level of engagement. The Foundation recognizes that community members are taking time out of their lives to support the Foundation's work and strives to establish the right level of engagement for advisors, based on their availability, interests, and areas of expertise.

For example, the Jim Casey Young Fellows partner with the Initiative through a variety of channels, including participation on different workgroups, co-creation of resources and training, and professional development. Young Fellows may also become part of the Advisory Committee, which serves as part of the national team to set the direction of the Jim Casey Initiative.

For the Youth Leaders Policy Council, staff had to assess "how fully baked does something have to be before it goes to them, where exactly is the right place to bring them into the conversation?" Laura Speer, formerly the associate director of policy reform and advocacy at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and her colleagues found that some of the policy pieces "were just too in the weeds." Because this Council focuses on policy broadly across Foundation initiatives, Speer noticed that it was hard for members to provide feedback on an issue that didn't impact them directly. For example, those involved in foster care could not always contribute to conversations that focused more on juvenile justice. The Foundation is in the process of re-visiting how this group functions based on lessons learned thus far.

Towards a More Systematic Yet Flexible Approach

To date much of this work has occurred within the purview of individual departments, sometimes creating disparate practices. Balis shares, "Internally…when different groups were engaging people as partners, things like how much you pay them became a thing because our group was doing it one way and the other group was doing it another way. There wasn't an Annie E. Casey Foundation way of doing it." The Foundation has since taken steps to ensure consistency in honoraria and is now moving towards becoming more systematic as an organization in how it engages directly impacted communities in its decision-making.

Recently Speer stepped into the newly created role of director of strategy, which works with the office of the president. One of the responsibilities of her new role is to coordinate the Foundation's work across departments better. Under Speer's leadership, the Foundation now has a Youth Engagement Workgroup that brings together staff across departments to share best practices and operationalize internal guidelines to help both the Foundation and community members involved to get the most out of the experience. Speer and colleagues recognize that there's not a "one size fits all" approach to engagement. In its work moving forward, the Foundation will articulate the continuum of engagement and what types of engagement are best suited for different needs and roles.

Case Study: The California Endowment

Among the largest foundations in the country, The California Endowment's (TCE) assets total $3.8 billion. TCE is a private, statewide health foundation although it also influences both the philanthropic and health sectors nationally. In 2010, TCE initiated a ten-year strategy, Building Healthy Communities (BHC), that focuses its work in fourteen local communities, while also working at a regional and statewide level.

Community engagement efforts are deeply embedded in how the foundation operates. This approach stems from TCE's values as a foundation and illustrates the intentionality of this work within the foundation. Hanh Cao Yu, chief learning officer at The California Endowment, states, "There are many systemic mechanisms in place that enforce this kind of engagement behavior and how we approach our work. It starts with our values of making sure that we work in close collaboration with those most impacted. You can see this in the way that Building Healthy Communities is set up in the sites….Ever since I came to the Endowment in 2016, the Board has always asked, 'What are the results of the community engagement study or the participatory design?' They're the ones asking on a regular basis, which increases the authorizing environment for us to really make sure we live up to those values."

Currently, TCE is beginning to plan the its strategy for the next decade of work, a transition planning process that is rooted in a deeply participatory approach that includes power builders, systems leaders, grantees, grassroots community youth and adult leaders, as well as other funders.

While much of TCE's work is place-based, many of the principles undergirding the transition planning process, are applicable to national foundations as well.

Participatory Design Principles

TCE's transition planning process is guided by a set of goals and overarching participatory design principles. Design principles include:

- An openness to multiple perspectives and opinions, including skeptics as well as supporters with the aim of going beyond the usual suspects
- Transparency and clarity about how feedback will be used
- Accountability, including the sharing of information in multiple ways that are timely and accessible.

As TCE embarked on this process, they also established a set of goals, including the following:

- Cultivate buy-in and ownership among those most directly impacted, with a commitment to hearing from skeptics and getting beyond the usual suspects
- Provide space and subsequent commitment to "work through" different perspectives and strategies
- Allow for preparation of challenges that may arise in a collaborative and collective space

Staged Engagement Process

The engagement process is staged, using different and complementary points at different points in the strategy development process. In addition to the ongoing engagement that regularly occurs in each of the sites through the site "hub" structure which plays a convening and collaboration building function, The Endowment has also launched a two-part, formal community engagement process. The first, the Community and Stakeholder Engagement Study, occurred in 2016, just past the mid-point of Building Healthy Communities, and the most recent, the Beyond 2020 Transition Planning Participatory Design process, began in 2018.

PART 1: *Community & Stakeholder Engagement Study*

The Endowment began by establishing an integrated staff team across multiple program areas and the Learning and Evaluation staff to guide and engage a partner, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), to conduct an independent Community/Stakeholder Engagement process. CSSP conducted interviews of individuals and convened focus groups with a diverse array of 175 people engaged in and/or knowledgeable about Building Healthy Communities. The study was organized around five strategic lines of inquiry:

1. **Impact in the first five years:** What do stakeholders perceive as BHC's most significant accomplishments? What could have been done better?
2. **Opportunities looking forward:** What changes can make BHC even more effective between now and 2020?
3. **Alignment of state-local advocacy, policy/systems and narrative change:** How have community and state or regional forces worked together to advance health equity? How can this be more effective?
4. **Sustaining a movement for health equity:** What alliances, capacities, leadership or other forces should be sustained beyond the period of BHC funding, and how?
5. **Innovation and new directions:** What areas of opportunity and possible innovation should TCE consider beyond 2020 in the continued advancement of health equity?

The overall pathway to engagement looks like this:

Once TCE got the first round of input from community members in its transition planning process, TCE wrote up a summary of the results, a report back to the community entitled, **Voices of Partners: Findings from the Community & Stakeholder Engagement Study**.

The breadth and scale of TCE's work across diverse geographies and demographics in California means that it often receives large volumes of feedback. While TCE looks for patterns and themes in what they are hearing, they also have an appreciation that their partners" won't necessarily speak with one voice" and understand that managing difference and conflict is part of the participatory process. With this is mind, data were analyzed by constituent groups, resulting in an overall report as well as five additional reports focusing on feedback from specific groups, such as youth.

Dr. Ross introduced the report by writing a letter, "We Heard You" in plain, jargon-free language, that made it clear that the path forward was shaped by the feedback TCE received. TCE made an effort to disseminate this through various channels and modalities to ensure participants were kept in the loop.

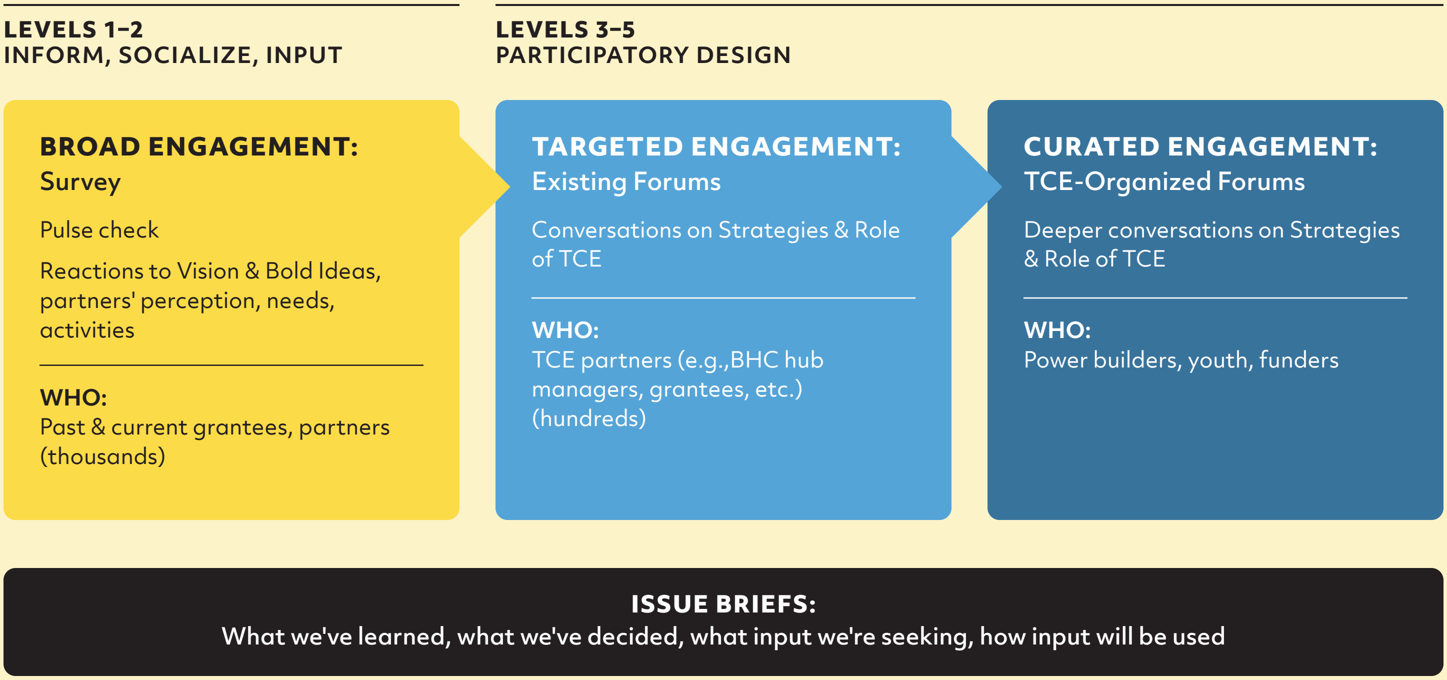
PART 2: *Beyond 2020 Participatory Design*

TCE launched Part 2 of its community engagement to invite partners to help shape the next phase of work after Building Healthy Communities. The Participatory Design process began with an attention-grabbing email from Dr. Ross to stakeholders asking for help, "We need your input in deciding on how to spend our next billion dollars!" the email read.

TCE worked with a trusted research partner to launch a statewide survey of past and current grantees and partners, including young people and community residents, asking them to react to TCE's vision and "bold ideas." The survey, available in Spanish, Hmong, Khmer, Vietnamese, Somali, and other languages, yielded more than 1,200 responses and large amounts of qualitative data in response to open-ended questions.

Pathway of Engagement

Beyond 2020 Participatory Design



Following up on their statewide survey, a relatively low-touch effort that provided a “big picture” perspective on community priorities, data were used to help TCE plan more curated conversations to dive in deeper around the feedback that TCE received, especially things that are surprising.” TCE considers the statewide survey a “Level 1–2” engagement, with more curated engagement as “Level 5.” Yu explains, “We’re honest in saying there’s a whole spectrum of engagement: you can have a level 5, where you’re really truly collaborating and co-designing.”

Co-creating the Next Phase of Work

Although the process is still unfolding, there are already examples of how community input is shaping TCE’s decision-making.

- TCE has held off on branding its next strategy iteration, because as Yu states, “We can go through the process together of determining what it is that we call it once we talk about our common vision and common purpose.”
- When asked what areas the foundation should be working in, mental health rose to the surface. While the Endowment has not historically had a focus on mental health for the general population but has focused trauma informed healing for youth and young adults, Yu says it has prompted internal reflection, “It’s one of those really good pause moments to say, ‘This is what we’re hearing, we need to make a conscious decision about where TCE has strengths and can be of service to the most vulnerable populations in the state.’”
- Feedback from community about the importance of racial equity led to a board resolution to commit to centering racial equity in TCE’s work.

APPENDIX A:
Methodology & Limitations

Overview

High-level learning questions guiding this inquiry were developed by the project team and refined in consultation with Ashley Crawford Starck and Katrina Badger, program officers from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Questions were further revised based on feedback from project advisors. This report is based on a literature review, 31 interviews, and internal documents and reports shared by interviewees.

Valerie Threlfall, a consultant to the Hewlett Foundation working on a similar report, collaborated with the research team to avoid duplication of interviews and the two teams shared high-level interview notes and themes with one another, while protecting interviewee confidentiality, to inform the analysis.

Learning Questions

What are the ways in which large, national foundations engage individuals most affected by inequity in their decision-making? What are some examples in philanthropy of engaging those most affected by inequity along the engagement spectrum (consultation, involvement, collaboration, partnership, empowerment)?

How do large foundations and/or organizations account for their size and culture (which can often create an inherent power differential) as they attempt to engage those most affected by inequity in authentic and meaningful ways?

What are the competencies required to build productive relationships with those most impacted by inequity? What additional resources (ex. financial investments; professional development) are needed to do this work well?

Much has been written about engaging stakeholders, eliciting beneficiary feedback, etc. What is the next phase of this work? What are some new/cutting edge practices in philanthropy? Outside of philanthropy?

What is the experience of those affected by inequity as they have participated in foundation decision-making?

Participants

The research team, in collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, identified an initial set of key informants representing the following roles or perspectives: national foundations; smaller, exemplar foundations; philanthropic thought leaders, and individuals who had the experience of advising foundations. Additional interviewees were suggested by advisors and snowball sampling was used to further expand the list.

Fifteen interviews were conducted with large or national foundations. Three interviews were conducted with representatives from smaller foundations. Five interviews were conducted with philanthropic thought leaders and four interviews were conducted with members of directly impacted groups who had the experience of advising a foundation. Four additional interviews were conducted with staff from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Interviews took place by phone or video between March–May 2019 and were 30–60 minutes long.

Analysis

The research team conducted a thematic analysis of the interviews and cross-referenced the analysis with the literature review and documents shared by interviewees.

Limitations

Since this is a qualitative inquiry, it cannot be generalized broadly to all national foundations, but rather offers illustrative examples and perspectives to inform foundations' work.

Although attempts were made to engage a community member as a project advisor, we were ultimately unable to identify someone who was a fit for the project. However, a community-based reviewer provided comments on a draft of the paper.

Three of the four community advisors interviewed for the study were young adults and their perspectives represent in part their developmental stage, particularly with respect to academic and career goals. Older adults may have insights about their relationship to foundations that were not captured in this report.

Some foundations indicated that they had conducted internal assessments of their work but were not at liberty to share those reports. Future learning in the field will benefit from public-facing evaluation reports.

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