

Diversifying a Foundation's Trustees

For Sherry Magill, president of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, and her trustees it wasn't hard to realize they needed a board that better reflected the diversity of the region in which they do most of their grantmaking. "It's obvious," Magill says. "We had an all-white board and we operate mostly in the South."

Diversifying the trustees was easier said than done. The Jessie Ball duPont Fund faced a number of constraints, beginning with the leadership structure designated by Mrs. duPont's will. It only provides for four trustees (two of which are appointed externally), and when Magill raised the issue in 2000, only one of those trustees was scheduled to retire off the board in the next five years. "More than one of us asked the question," Magill says, "would it be possible for us to ask the court to expand the number of trustees?"

Although Mrs. duPont had chosen the trustees that served during her lifetime, her will made no specifications about trustees after her death, aside from continued representation from a Florida bank and Episcopal Priest. The board came to the conclusion that Mrs. duPont's lack of specification was an indication that she trusted future leadership of the foundation to adapt to changing times.

The board knew that asking the courts to reinterpret Mrs. duPont's will could bring resistance from stakeholders and onlookers alike. "We minimized potential kick-back by being extremely transparent, forthcoming, honest," says Magill. "We asked folks who could potentially be affected to be our partners." She wrote each of the duPont Fund's 330 grantee organizations to explain the approach. Every single organization agreed to give their support to the foundation's endeavor. Magill also wrote living members of Mrs. duPont's family and received support for the case.

The Fourth Circuit Court of Florida granted the request, and the Jessie Ball duPont Fund then embarked on a year-long process, using a search committee of one current trustee, two presidents of other foundations, and one university chancellor with a background in philanthropy. The search ended in selecting four new trustees, including two African Americans. "I would encourage my colleagues, if they operate under a will, to go back to that source and see what the writer really wanted," Magill says. "We are better as a result."

Creating Pathways for Diverse Philanthropy Professionals

In October 2009, the Council on Foundations held a convening to discuss how the demographics of philanthropy executives could better reflect that of the country's population as a whole. To do this, they invited what had been an untapped group: search firm representatives and human relations officers, the people directly involved in hiring and retaining leaders.

"To the best of our knowledge, this was the first time in recent memory where decision makers—what we refer to as the 'demand side' of the hiring and appointment process—were pulled together for this kind of discussion," says Renée Byng Branch, COF's Assistant Vice President of Diversity and Inclusive Practices.

More than 60 participants in the convening identified two key steps: (1) connect search firms that know diverse candidates with foundations seeking executives from diverse backgrounds; (2) introduce the "Next Gen" to careers in philanthropy and mentor them early in those careers.

These steps formed the basis for COF's [Career Pathways Pipeline Expansion Program](#). Launched in July 2010, Career Pathways is a leadership preparation program for mid-career philanthropy professionals of diverse backgrounds interested in higher-level positions. Over the course of one year, participants attend small-group learning sessions facilitated by both philanthropic leaders and executive search consultants and receive one-on-one coaching and career planning. The second Career Pathways cohort is currently in formation.

Career Pathways does not come with a guarantee of an executive position, but the program takes rigorous steps to help participants improve their likelihood of success. The inaugural class of 15 has reported promotions, incentive bonuses, increased recognition and visibility, and new jobs. As of this writing, the Council on Foundations is recruiting applicants to form the second Career Pathways cohort. Branch reports that the Council is also developing a formal long-term evaluation to measure the program's effectiveness.

While the Career Pathways continues on its trajectory, COF is also exploring producing a toolkit of case studies and best practices for hiring and retaining leaders from diverse backgrounds.

Ultimately, says Branch, "we hope that talent pools become more inclusive and more senior leaders from diverse backgrounds are prepared and considered for executive positions."

A Foundation Looks in the Mirror on Diversity and Inclusion

In 2008, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund began a foundation-wide process to assess diversity within its operations and grantmaking. The endeavor, called the Diversity Working Group (DWG), ultimately spurred an organizational culture change and transformation.

“The decision to take on this work came from the top,” says Andrea Gray, the Fund’s Co-Director of Finance and Chair of the Diversity Policy Steering Committee. “Our board and senior management made the decision that we should look at our diversity policies and practices.”

The group settled on four goals for the initial exploration: (1) become familiar with contemporary concepts, frameworks, and programs for diversity; (2) assess the current status of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund’s (RBF) diversity relative to staff, board, and grants; (3) identify strengths and weaknesses in the RBF’s institutional culture relative to diversity and inclusiveness; (4) form recommendations on the design and implementation of strategies to improve diversity and inclusion in RBF’s work.

The DWG first conducted an internal audit of diversity and inclusion policies and practices related to all aspects of the Fund’s work—staffing, management, operations, grantmaking. It convened workshops for staff. It developed a diversity definition. And ultimately it created the RBF Diversity Statement, approved in November 2010.

Two key conclusions emerged from the process.

First, diversity is a mandate of Rockefeller Brothers Fund’s mission, not just “the right thing to do.” “Diversity must be rooted in our social justice values,” says Gray.

Second, embracing diversity in practice requires an everyday commitment to promoting an inclusive environment. “Diversity is not the same as inclusiveness,” says Gray. “We concluded that in order to achieve our mission, we had to be more intentional about inclusiveness.”

In just over two years, the group’s efforts have produced tangible results. Action plans have been developed across several areas of the Fund’s work, and staff regularly measure progress according to the metrics outlined in these plans. The assessment of its diversity policies and practices is widely available. The board is more diverse. And staff who previously felt isolated from the grantmaking process are now included.

Developing Cultural Competency among Grantmakers and Grantees

When staff from the REACH Healthcare Foundation decided to address issues of cultural competency among health care providers, they knew they wanted more than just a PowerPoint presentation on diversity. “I always was frustrated with the one-time training I would get that was supposed to make me culturally competent for the year,” says Carla Gibson, Senior Program Officer at REACH. Gibson and colleagues sought something sustainable.

In 2008, the foundation began a multi-year initiative to develop a new model for providing technical assistance in cultural competency to health care providers in the six Kansas and Missouri counties they serve. As the population in those areas began to diversify, the foundation saw the need to equip health care providers to serve people from a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

During the initiative’s first year, the foundation worked with a Denver consulting firm to implement all the procedures internally they later would ask grantees to implement. The process included policy review, assessments of organizational structure and cultural competence sustainability, trainings with board members and staff, and ultimately the development of a customized cultural competence plan for REACH.

“We did not feel we could talk the talk if we didn’t walk the walk,” says Gibson, who heads the initiative.

In the second year, REACH invited organizations to submit applications for technical assistance. “People are used to writing a grant application and getting money,” says Gibson. “We said we are not giving money but instead building internal capacity—whatever that takes.”

As part of the technical assistance, the consulting group starts at the top, with evaluation and training for the board and CEO before moving on to staff and volunteers.

Now in its third year, REACH has a new cohort and is busy building a learning community for the initiative’s grantees. Gibson says the local capacity must be in place for the model to be sustainable, and building that capacity takes time. Most healthcare organizations in Kansas and Missouri cannot afford to hire the consulting firm used, so REACH is working to prepare a local provider to do the work.

“I’m not moving very fast,” she says. “I’m trying to change the way that this community does business.”

Building Community Philanthropy in the American South

“People deserve to have change in their lifetimes,” says Linetta Gilbert, former Senior Program Officer at the Ford Foundation.

Over the past decade, Gilbert championed the development of philanthropy in Southern communities of color through the Ford Foundation’s Community Philanthropy, Race and Equity in the American South (CPREAS) initiative. It employed three strategies: moving the needle on social, racial, and economic equity within the larger field of philanthropy; transforming existing foundations to walk their talk regarding those issues; and creating new models of philanthropy led by or engaging donors of color.

Three CPREAS partners highlight how these strategies worked in building community philanthropy.

- Established in 1990, the Foundation for the Mid South (FMS) is a regional community foundation that addresses long-standing disparities in the Mississippi Delta communities of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. With Ford’s assistance, FMS took bold steps to shift the foundation’s balance of power to local partners, including diversifying its board and staff, focusing grantmaking on local public institutions like schools and libraries with diverse constituencies, and asking community leaders for their visions of the Delta. The result was a new level of engagement for the foundation with citizens and a new cohort of racially and economically diverse decision-makers.
- The Black Belt Community Foundation (BBCF) is the creation of local leaders who envisioned a community foundation that would serve the 12 counties called Alabama’s “Black Belt” region. Those leaders held town hall meetings in difference counties to hear residents’ ideas about how the community foundation should operate and what it should fund. Exemplifying its mission of “taking what we have to make what we need,” the foundation enlisted 100 Community Associates, who recruit volunteers, build awareness of the foundation’s work, raise and give money, identify new grantees, and “are recreating philanthropy by defining it for themselves,” Gilbert says.
- The Community Investment Network (CIN) identifies and recruits leaders from communities of color in the U.S. South to form giving circles. During Gilbert’s tenure, CIN launched 12 giving circles, in the process not only upending the conventional image of the well-heeled philanthropist but also expanding

philanthropy's influence to build grassroots change. They're showing, Gilbert says, that philanthropy "can open doors for all people, not just wealthy donors."

Says Gilbert about these and other groups participating in the CPREAS initiative, "it's about what the leadership of a fund can do when it has the commitment and knowledge of what people of color bring to the table themselves."

Using Peer Learning to Improve Racial Equity

In 2005, the Annie E. Casey Foundation commissioned the group Marga Incorporated to assess a variety of foundation practices focused on race, inclusion, and equity among more than 25 foundations. The researchers then conducted a series of conversations based on the report's findings with the Rockefeller Foundation, The California Endowment, San Francisco Foundation, and the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund. The conversations focused on the question: How can foundations apply a racial equity lens to their grantmaking and internal operations and policies?

To explore the answers on an ongoing basis, participants formed The Racial Equity Philanthropy Group (REPG).

"REPG provides venues for peer learning exchange," says Marga CEO Cynthia Jones. "Member institutions engage authentically and ask one another hard questions: 'What can we do to improve how resources are allocated to communities of color?' 'How are we and our peer institutions tracking information on racial equity and inclusion and how can we do it better?'"

To get at that practical application, REPG has released a series on racial equity that profiles funder strategies, highlights promising practices, and presents recommendations to the broader philanthropy sector.

The series also lays out REPG's target outcomes, among them "use of a race-equity analysis in grantmaking," "changes in the culture of philanthropy as it relates to communities/organizations of color," and "development of systems for tracking grantmaking to communities of color/minority-led organizations." One persistent issue that came up in the group's discussions about the last outcome was the lack of access to "codifiable" information about staff diversity and quantitative data about foundation investments in institutions and communities of color. So REPG members developed strategies to make this information more transparent in their institutions, and several now have detailed information on the racial demographics of grantees on their websites.

As it adds more foundations to its membership, REPG continues to provide a venue for participants to discuss their perspectives on race, equity, and inclusion in foundations while also acting as a laboratory for ideas and strategies for making practical improvements to institutional policies and practices.

Tracking Fifteen Years of Data on Diversity

In 1991, members of the Minnesota Council on Foundations (MCF) decided to address Minnesota philanthropy's diversity issues. Their goals were ambitious—to create a climate of inclusivity and recognize, work to eliminate, and prevent racism in philanthropy—but they quickly ran into a more mundane roadblock. They didn't have the data. How did foundations and giving programs in the state fare in terms of diversity? And what did diversity really *mean* to their member organizations, especially their leaders?

To address those questions, MCF launched the *Working Towards Diversity* series, reports that would be based on benchmark surveys conducted every five years of member organizations. The first report was released in 1995 and charted the demographics of staff and board members from Minnesota foundations and giving programs and documented how they defined and approached diversity.

The survey also underscored the need for more work.

"When we discussed this data and its implications, we recognized a need for a framework that would enable and encourage all foundations to engage in this work in multiple ways," says Bill King, MCF's President.

The framework that the association's Race and Diversity Task Force subsequently developed identified four roles that grantmakers play—funders, employers, economic entities, and community citizens—and explored the obligations and opportunities to serve diverse stakeholders that each of those roles implied.

The benchmark surveys remain a rich source of information for MCF and its members. With the release of the fourth progress report in April 2011, MCF will have charted more than 15 years worth of changes in the demographics, views, and diversity and inclusion policies and practices of Minnesota grantmakers.

"Becoming more diverse and inclusive requires grantmakers to have will and courage," King says. "Fortunately, as a field of practice, we can share data, examples of promising practices, and replicable strategies that can hasten our progress toward becoming more inclusive philanthropists."