

Guide to Grant Making with a Racial Equity Lens
Key Questions for Grant Makers
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GrantCraft is collaborating with Lori Villarosa at the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity and writer Julie Quiroz-Martinez to produce a guide to grant making with a racial equity lens. The purpose of the guide is to help grant makers deepen their thinking about race and ethnicity and turn that thinking into effective grant making.

The guide will offer practical wisdom on key questions:

- Why is a racial equity lens important?
- How can I use a racial equity lens to be more effective in my grant making?
- How can I prepare myself to manage the challenges and tensions that may arise from using a racial equity lens?
- What can foundations do, in terms of policies and training, to support grant makers in using a racial equity lens?

To make the guide as useful and accessible as possible, discussion of each question will include concrete examples from the experiences of a broad range of grant makers. We know that grant makers are using a wide array of approaches, and we hope to illustrate ideas and solutions that will be helpful to foundations of different sizes, perspectives, and programmatic interests.

How can you help? Please read through this outline and make notes on stories, examples, or suggestions that could enlighten and perhaps inspire other grant makers. (As you'll see, we've already included a few quotes from interviews we've conducted with a dozen grant makers across the country.)

Forward your notes to Gail Cooper at g.cooper@fordfound.org. If you'd prefer to talk by phone, please let Gail know. GrantCraft guides acknowledge all contributors, but we keep all quotes anonymous.

1. Why is a racial equity lens important?

Here's our working definition: *A racial equity lens* helps us see how race or ethnicity shapes experiences with power, access to opportunity, treatment, and outcomes, both today and historically. It also aids us in thinking about what can be done to eliminate the resulting inequities for individuals and groups.

We recognize that race is a social construct, not a biological one, and that the term refers to officially recognized racial and ethnic groups. We also realize that racial/ethnic categories differ internationally; for some readers, ethnic, religious, or even "caste" minorities may be disenfranchised groups, subject to the experiences of a "racial minority."

Understanding the different concepts related to race and grant making can be confusing. For example, “diversity” and “inclusion” are important components in a strategy for achieving racial equity, but they do not necessarily lead to changes in outcomes and systems.

In grant making, a racial equity lens is a way of understanding how race creates, defines, and sustains the problems grant makers seek to address. For example, a grant maker working in the field of education recalled learning about the disproportionate use of arrests in minority schools, which gave her insight into how a specific practice toward youth of color contributes to low academic performance. She began to ask questions of educational organizations to see how they were thinking about and addressing the connection between school arrests and academic performance. Looking at the achievement gap through a racial equity lens led her to plant the seeds for new ideas and new grant proposals that could better achieve the educational outcomes her institution was seeking.

- Do you have an example of an “Ah-ha!” moment when thinking about racial inequity or racial imbalance helped you to better understand a problem or situation? How did that insight affect your grant making?

2. How can I use a racial equity lens to be more effective in my grant making?

Our hypothesis is that a racial equity lens is key to effective grant making. A racial equity lens can open up new perspectives on seemingly intractable problems, including profound social inequities. An example is grant making that helped establish the concept of “environmental racism” as critical for understanding toxic hazards in communities, and for gaining new insights into civil rights, occupational health, Native land rights, environmental health, international solidarity, and community empowerment. Another example is grant making that supported groundbreaking work on racial disparities in health and health care.

- Do you have experience with using a racial equity lens in a way that produced better outcomes for a field or community? Can you tell us the “grant making story” behind that example? We’d love to get examples from many fields: health, education, the arts, or elsewhere.

Grant makers have also told us about key moments when a racial equity lens sharpened their grant making focus or their approach to existing program goals. Perhaps you have experiences to fill out their suggestions.

- Taking stock: Have you used “scans” to develop new funding approaches? As one grant maker in sustainable agriculture described: *“We did a survey of Food Policy Councils to see if we should start looking at those to find people of color who were working on these issues in a way that was accountable to their communities.”*

- Revisiting assumptions: Has “new information” gathered with a racial equity lens spawned new ideas and perspectives? One grant maker tells how rethinking her definition of “policy” opened up a new line of grant making: *“We asked, How can we expand our definition of policy beyond traditional legislative work? One group was trying to get a national religious denomination to change its policy on economic development of underutilized land that it owned. This would have a major impact on African American communities in the South. That was a type of “policy” work I might not have been looking out for.”*
- Supporting new voices: What techniques have helped to build a pipeline, support the capacity of people of color organizations, or diversify leadership in a field? One grant maker describes how she moved forward some important racial equity goals: *“My portfolio was teen pregnancy prevention. My strategy was related to documenting and evaluating best practices in the field. One very influential organization—which was white-led, like most of the field—had an African American woman associate director. I met with her to find out her ideas about where the field should be going, what she thought would bring value to the work. She wanted to see more research on social and cultural competence to bring more African American and Latina teens into teen pregnancy clinics. I invited a proposal on that and ended up getting out a significant grant that the associate director headed up. It led to new knowledge and enabled her to take up a larger leadership role in the field at large.”*
- Guidelines and criteria: Have you found ways to think creatively about using existing guidelines or developing new ones? As one grant maker described: *“We established a diversity criterion that makes up about 25% of a grant seeker’s overall score. The criterion requires that the organization work for or benefit communities that experience oppression/discrimination and have that as part of their analysis.”*
- Communication and interaction with the field: How do you talk about racial equity with individual grant seekers with regard to their organizations and their programs?
- Grant monitoring and evaluation: How have you maintained a principled standard on racial equity while acknowledging the different contexts and paths by which progress takes place? As one grant maker described: *“When groups are re-applying for funding we ask them, Have you been to one of the free dismantling racism trainings we offered? If so, how has that helped you? There have been some real success stories where groups showed what they learned and how they tried to act on that, even if it was baby steps. Like an AIDS group that decided to do a conference on minority health disparities or a coal miners group that decided to get the public library to get more black history books.”*

3. How can I prepare myself to manage the challenges and tensions that may arise from using a racial equity lens?

Some grant makers are worried about the challenges and tensions of using a racial equity lens—so much so that they may be discouraged from trying at all. We want to name the most common challenges and tensions and describe how grant makers have managed them effectively. Can you tell us about big or small wins in managing the following tensions?

- Creating grant making programs that focus explicitly on racial equity while encouraging colleagues in other program areas to use a racial equity lens
- Putting forth racial equity goals and guidelines while supporting organizations that may have a long way to go toward fully understanding and embracing racial equity
- Making incremental progress on racial equity within your foundation while facilitating more systemic changes in thinking, structures, and practices (without resorting to “under the radar” tactics with little lasting impact)
- For people of color, playing a leadership role on issues of racial equity while establishing yourself as a leader across a broad range of issues; for white people, playing a leadership role on issues of racial equity while managing your own racial privilege
- Staying focused on racial equity while using other lenses, such as gender, class, or sexuality

4. What institutional structures and process are needed to support racial equity grant making?

We assume that racial equity grant making is most effective when it is built into a foundation’s policies and systems. What policies support racial equity in grant making. Do you have examples in the following categories?

- Statements of commitment to racial equity in foundation mission or reports or other public communications
- Staff/board diversity objectives and policies, internal and for grantees
- Opportunities for racial equity learning for staff
- Incentives for collaboration across programs and other methods to break down organizational “silos”
- Other internal operations and policies that directly or indirectly impact grant making