TOWARD A CULTURE OF EQUITY

An Institutional Support Framework

THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT
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A recent field scan of foundations that are embracing equity as a primary focus affirmed: incorporating an equity lens entails not only integrating equity into foundation's grantmaking, but also fostering a broader "culture of equity" to support this grantmaking.[1] Few, however, have clearly articulated their vision for what such a culture of equity looks like for them, or how to approach benchmarking progress towards this vision.

TCE'S EVOLVING CULTURE OF EQUITY

Since its founding, The California Endowment (TCE) has placed a strong value on diversity. As clearly laid out in its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) statement, TCE believes that "diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential to organizational effectiveness and excellence, and that program strategies and services are enhanced when organizations are reflective of communities being served." Further, TCE is dedicated to eliminating the health outcome disparities that are the physical manifestation of the oppression and exclusion facing many marginalized communities and is therefore committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in its grantmaking and operational activities.

As such, TCE has engaged in purposeful reflection on its journey toward becoming a stronger diversity, equity and inclusion organization. Beginning in 2008, every two to three years, it has conducted a DEI audit to benchmark their progress and identify opportunities for further growth and development. With each audit, TCE's Board of Directors and internal teams discuss findings, create action steps, and establish revised goals for itself into the future. In addition, TCE externally shares findings from each audit with philanthropic colleagues, as an opportunity to reflect on deepened philanthropic practice to support diversity, equity, and inclusion at the field level.

Formally engaging in an audit every three years has allowed TCE to ensure alignment to the values and principles of diversity, equity and inclusion that are at the core of its mission. By collectively reflecting on TCE's progress, barriers, and blind spots related to diversity, equity and inclusion, the audit process has also intentionally fostered a culture of continuous improvement where TCE challenges itself to do better—for the field, for its staff, and for the diverse communities to whom it is ultimately accountable.

> *We need to hold that mirror up in terms of what kind of internal culture we want to have that's not finger pointing, but that really helps build capacity for us to be better employees, better representatives of the foundation, better stewards of the funds that are so precious that California expects and needs from us.*
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> - TCE Staff

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[1] *The Road to Achieving Equity: Findings and Lessons from a Field Scan of Foundations That Are Embracing Equity as a Primary Focus.* Putnam Consulting Group for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, September 2016.

FRAMEWORK OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR ADVANCING DEI

Underlying and guiding TCE's audit process is an Institutional Support Framework for Advancing DEI. The framework helps to document key areas of progress, as well as identify areas that warrant attention within TCE's evolving culture of equity. Developed by Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to understand and analyze how institutional contexts support equity-focused work, this framework draws from SPR's work with a wide range of foundations and community-based organizations over the past two decades. It was based on literature on organizational changes critical for the sustainable implementation of diversity principles, and was updated in the last year based on new thinking about intersectionality and DEI practice.

Shared on the next page, the framework includes four interrelated areas. For each element of the framework, we offer some questions for other funders to considers at they reflect on their own development in these areas:

SHARED VISION

A well-articulated vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion is a critical institutional foundation for advancing DEI, as is a clear framework and shared language for stakeholders from across the foundation to discuss and engage with this vision. A foundation will want to endeavor to reach not just understanding and buy-in from multiple levels of the organization, but also a shared analysis of how aspects of diversity, equity and inclusion are integrally tied to implementation of a foundation's mission. This shared analysis should specifically include shared understanding of intersectionality and how layered power dynamics can compound the complexity of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion goals.

> **Funder Considerations:** What is our vision for diversity, equity and inclusion? What are the core values and assumptions in which this this vision is rooted? How is our DEI vision articulated as inherently a part of advancing our organizational mission? Do leaders, staff, and grantees have a clear, shared framework and language to engage with this vision? Or, to name, interrogate, and address structures, policies and practices that result in the persistence of inequities?

AUTHORIZING ENVIRONMENT

Another core institutional support is an authorizing environment that supports engagement in DEI work with the foundation's strong commitment and backing. Visible and engaged leadership on DEI issues is typically a key facilitator in a strong foundation authorizing environment, as is formal articulation of a DEI commitment, clear measurable DEI goals, and dedicated DEI resources. Within foundation contexts, a clear sense of accountability to the diverse communities and constituencies that they ultimately represent and serve is another facilitator in fostering an authentic DEI- authorizing culture.

Funder Considerations: To what extent is diversity, equity, and inclusion work at our organization being driven from the top (versus assigned to an individual or department)? How is our commitment to DEI formally communicated? How have we expressed this commitment in terms of dedicated staffing, resources, and accountability vehicles? Do our staff feel that this is an inclusive culture where they feel authorized to promote DEI goals on behalf of the larger organization? Do they feel comfortable talking about DEI in multiple organizational contexts and at all levels? Do they feel safe to vocalize DEI concerns?

TCE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

SHARED VISION

- Clear vision for DEI and its connection to TCE's mission
- Clear frameworks and shared language to advance DEI
- Understanding & buy-in across multiple levels of the organization
- Shared analysis about DEI and the larger context of barriers to advancing Health Equity and Health Justice for California's communities.

AUTHORIZING ENVIRONMENT

- Engagement of top-level leaders
- Explicit commitment to DEI in formal documentation and dedicated DEI resources
- Clear measurable, organizational DEI goals
- Supportive foundation culture for engaging in DEI work
- Clear lines of accountability to community constituencies for advancing DEI priorities

POLICIES & STRUCTURES

- Policies and processes to promote diversity among board, staff, investment advisors, vendors, grantees, etc.
- Policies and guidance to promote equity and inclusion in Foundation programming and operations
- Examination of potential biases in established policies and processes
- Capacity to track, benchmark, and analyze DEI data

STAFF PRACTICE

- Sense of personal connection with TCE DEI vision & values
- Availability of organizational resources for personal development
- Clarity around specific operationalization of DEI within defined job responsibilities
- Connection to community of practice/relationships to explore, engage, and deepen DEI understanding & skills

ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES & PROCESSES

Reinforcing a foundation's shared vision and authorizing environment is a third core institutional support: the organizational structures, policies, and processes that support implementation of DEI values. The degree to which foundations may choose to be prescriptive in this area will range, but may include formal DEI policies or guiding documents, or specific processes and criteria aimed to ensure diversity in hiring, grantmaking, or investments. Strong foundation practice will always also include organizational capacity to track, benchmark, and analyze data to ensure progress towards DEI goals and/or potential unintended biases in established policies and processes.

> **Funder Considerations:** To what extent have we put in place polices and processes that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion? For example, do we have policy guidance around board and staff diversity? Diversity in hiring and promotion? Vendor selection? Asset investments? Grantee staff and boards? Do we have the data systems to effectively track diversity over time? Beyond diversity, how do our policies and processes attend to voice and *power* within our culture? How do they acknowledge and address structural racism embedded within our organization and communities?

STAFF PRACTICE

Staff practice is the fourth and final element of the framework. It was put in place to acknowledge that—even with a strong shared vision and authorizing environment supported by robust organizational structures and processes—there is an element of an individual's personal readiness to engage and operationalize DEI values in their respective job responsibilities. As such, focusing on staff practice is included as institutional support that provides a means to develop and deepen individual understanding and skills, through ongoing trainings and communities of practice that allow safe space for DEI dialogue and skill building.

> **Funder Considerations:** How does our organization promote opportunities for staff across the organization—including program staff, operations staff, executive staff, board members—to deeply reflect on their own practice related to advancement of DEI in their respective positions? How have we thought through optimal learning and engagement opportunities that honor individual contexts, cultures, roles, and readiness?

TCE'S MOST RECENT DIVERSITY EQUITY AND INCLUSION AUDIT

TCE's most recent Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Audit was released in December 2017. The Audit benchmarks diversity of TCE staff, board, grantees and vendors, as well as captures TCE's evolution as an organization along these four institutional supports. An Executive Summary and the full report of the audit is publicly available on TCE's website at www.calendow.org.