

Authentic Community Engagement in a Time of Crisis

During the spring of 2020, Grantmakers for Education held four master classes centered around the theme of authentic community engagement. Family voice and community voice are areas of growing interest among education grantmakers. Yet as leaders in positions of privilege, grantmakers must learn together how to navigate power and racial dynamics en route to empowering communities that have been marginalized in the past. Against the backdrop of a global pandemic and national demonstrations for justice for Black Americans, these conversations shed light on the importance of honest connection and community leadership.

How Should Philanthropy Create More Inclusive Spaces?



GFE Executive Director Celine Coggins and Aprendes Foundation Director Nicole Rodriguez Leach invited participants to explore how funders can better engage with and learn from leaders and communities outside of the grantmaking space. Solving big social problems requires the participation and voices of a diverse set of actors, especially those working closest to the challenge.

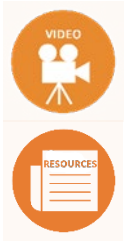


Practices at grantmaking institutions are often designed to downplay the value of proximate knowledge. As grantmakers, we can come from a place of service to help communities stand in their own power. During the program, funders shared insights on what they've learned to build deeper, more trusting relationships with the communities they serve, such as:

- Acknowledging the grantor-grantee power dynamic.
- Taking the time to listen to community stakeholders and inviting them to be strategic partners.
- Being transparent with grantmaking processes and streamlining those processes where possible.

Listening to and Learning from Leaders of Color in the COVID-19 Crisis

Over the past several years, many grantmakers have begun to prioritize racial equity in their grantmaking. Xiomara Padamsee, founder and CEO of Promise 54, Layla Avila, CEO and executive director of Education Leaders of Color, and Nick Donohue, president and CEO of Nellie Mae Education Foundation discussed the experience of leaders of color in this crisis moment, and how philanthropy can effectively respond. Lessons learned in this crisis moment and prior, include:



- Relate to grantees in terms of complex and dynamic human relationships, not financial transactions.
- Take bold action by shifting grantmaking practices, e.g.: support general operating expenses and loosen reporting requirements.
- Continue to fund new communities. Communities of color are funded less often, so putting a moratorium on new grantees perpetuates the funding gap.
- Think about how the wealth of your foundation was accumulated and adjust your grantmaking to benefit those from whom it came.

The Power of Collaboration with Proximate Leaders

This class focused on building shared pathways for nurturing meaningful relationships and partnerships with a diverse network of grantees. Tulaine Montgomery and Shruti Sehra, both managing partners at New Profit, shared a framework for philanthropy for building trust and familiarity with proximate leaders and led a discussion with participants. Key points included:



- Because of the current conditions, we, as a nation, have reached a unique point of collective readiness to understand and support to systemic change.
- Philanthropy can impact systemic change by creating space for truth-telling, reconciling positive and negative impacts we've had on ourselves and others, redesigning methods that incorporate proximate knowledge, and incorporating ongoing equity practices and norms.
- Proximate leaders bring not only experience with challenges, but solutions and innovations.

Authenticity, Efficacy and Equity in Virtual Community Engagement

In the final class of the series, Rhonda Broussard and Lesley Brown Rawlings from Beloved Community were joined by Tiffany Cheng Nyaggah of NewSchools Venture Fund to lead a discussion centered around the guiding values of diversity, equity and inclusion, and how to apply those values in a virtual setting. Takeaways included:



- Define your strategy for community engagement, communicate that strategy to your constituents, then follow through with action.
- In each part of your community engagement work, you need to be prepared to give away power.
- Apply principles of diversity, equity and inclusion to three areas of your work: your internal team, grantees, and your external partners.
- Successful virtual engagement requires taking extra time to connect and using multiple tools such as polls, information video chats, small group break-outs, and mailing cards.