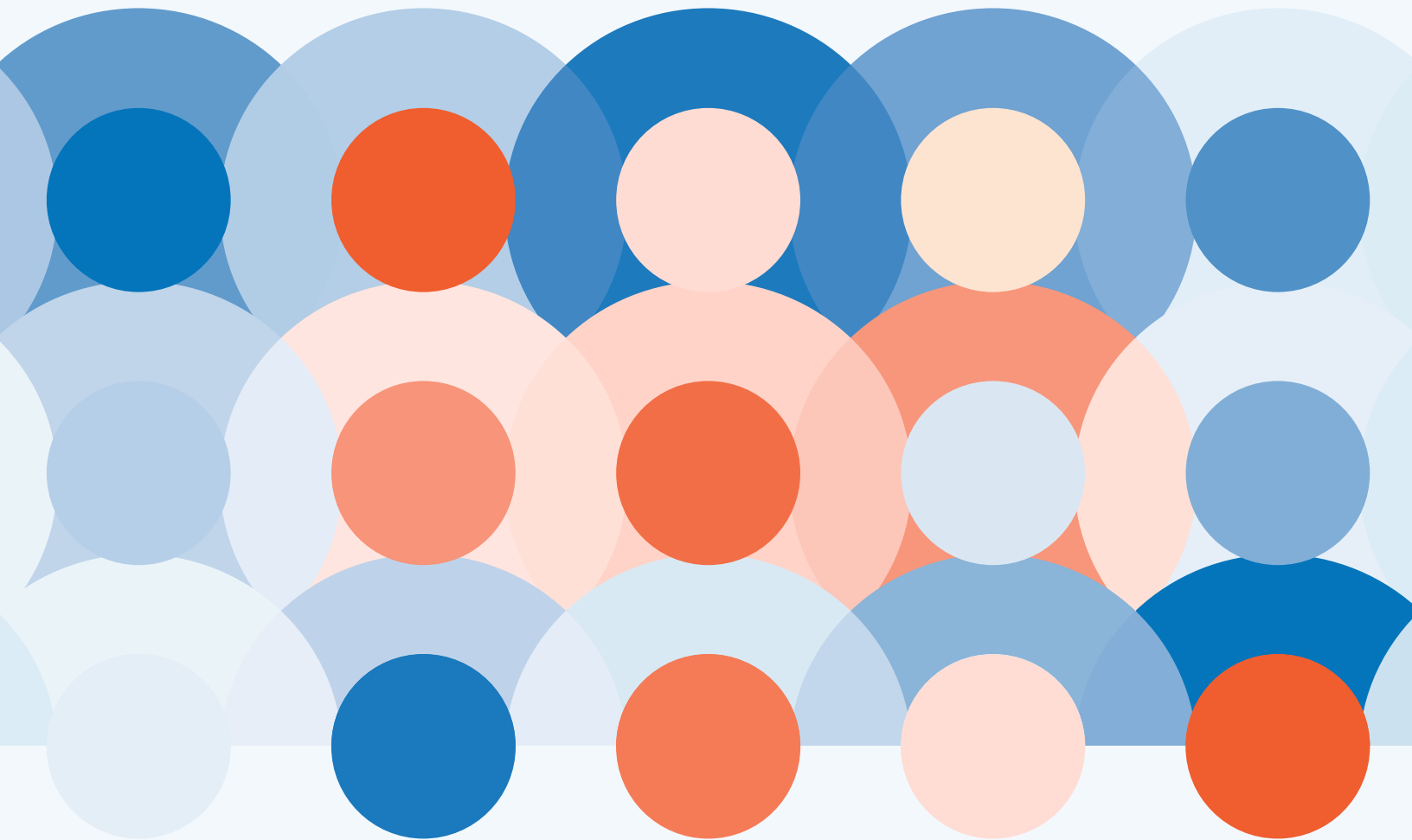


Equity in Grant- making

*A Review of Barriers
and Strategies for
Funders Considering
Improvement
Opportunities*

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What's Inside?

What's here? This report explores research and strategies related to equity in the discretionary grantmaking process based on a systematic review of publicly available literature and interviews with Federal and philanthropic grantmakers. We describe how funders define equity in the context of awarding grants, common barriers and promising action steps to increase equity, and measurement strategies to help funders track their progress.

Why focus on equity in grantmaking? Increasing equity in grantmaking can help diversify the organizations and communities that receive billions of dollars of grant funding each year. By adding these new perspectives and voices, funders may further strengthen the equity of the grant-funded programs themselves.

Who should read this report? We designed this report to support grantmakers examining equity, whether at government agencies (including at Federal, State, and local levels) or foundations. Recognizing grantmaking organizations vary in size, policy area, and scope, we provide findings and suggestions that funders can tailor to meet their context and goals. Our findings focus on domestic (U.S.-based) grantmaking, though international or transnational grantmakers may also find useful insights to adapt with a global focus.

Where do these ideas come from? We reviewed 55 publicly available resources on the topic of equity in grantmaking – such as academic research, journal articles, magazines, reports, and guides – published by government entities and organizations in the philanthropic sector. To further explore themes from the reviewed resources, we interviewed staff from five Federal agencies and three philanthropies supporting or implementing initiatives to increase equity in the grantmaking process.

How do I use this report? We recommend readers begin with the brief background information on the stages of the grantmaking process and then read about the importance of creating a definition of equity in grantmaking to guide the design, implementation, and assessment of improvement initiatives. Readers can then review equity-related barriers facing organizations seeking grant funding and consider action steps to address these challenges and enhance equity. Lastly, readers can review example data and measures to help identify areas for improvement, monitor trends, and assess the impact of initiatives to increase equity in the grantmaking process.

1

Introduction

In 2022, the Department of Labor (DOL) developed its first annual Equity Action Plan¹ to describe how the department administers programs and policies for underserved populations. The plan supported the Executive Order on ***Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.***²



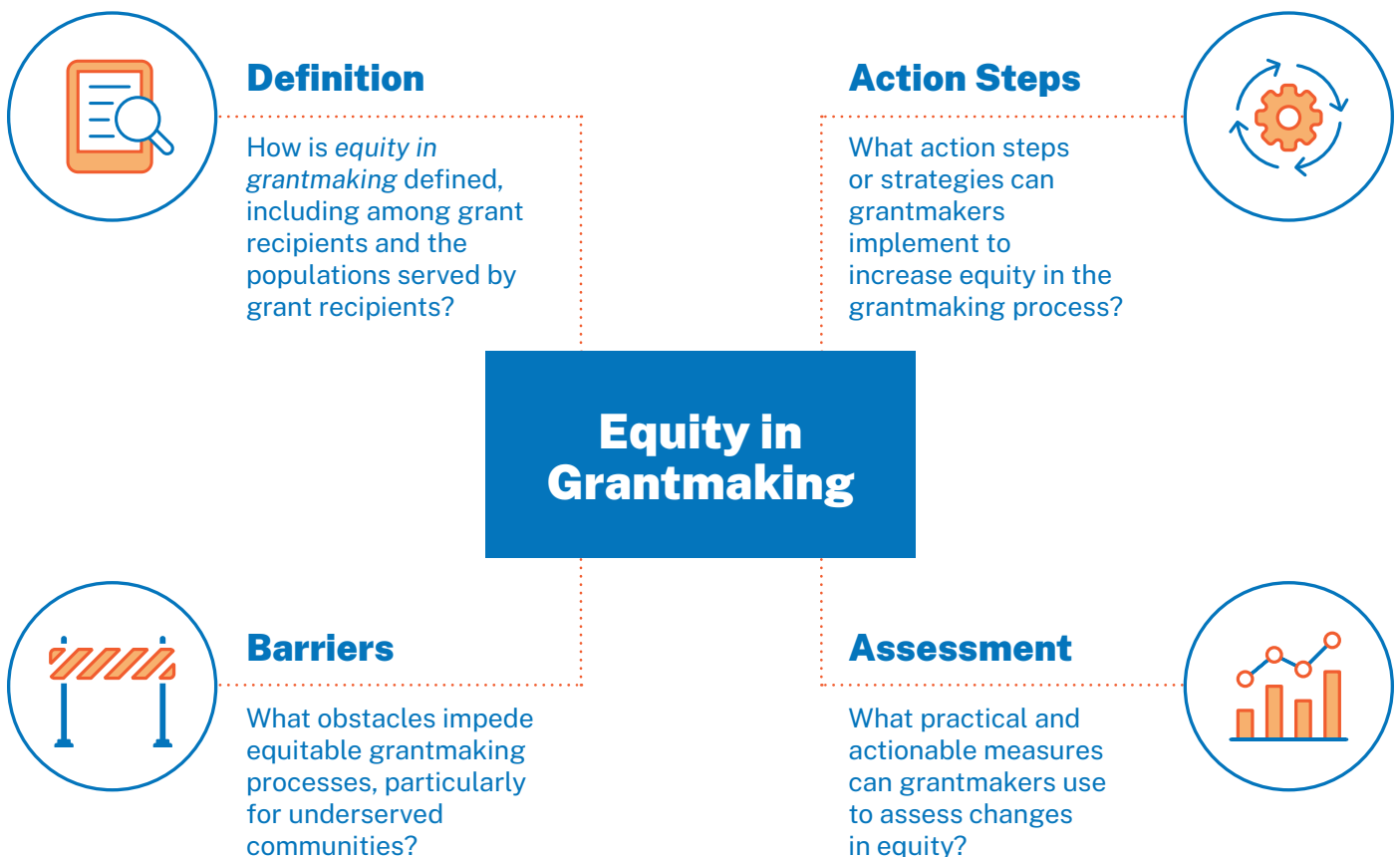
Related to this plan, DOL’s Employment and Training Administration (ETA) is exploring how to broaden the equity impacts of DOL discretionary grantmaking, among both grant recipients and the communities that those recipients serve. In 2023, DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office (CEO), in partnership with the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), commissioned Westat Insight to explore approaches to measuring and increasing equity in its discretionary grantmaking processes. Understanding and increasing equity in grantmaking could lead to more diversity in the types of organizations receiving awards and the perspectives these organizations bring to grant programs, which may further increase equity in the grant-funded programs.

This study explores how grantmakers—such as Federal agencies, State and local government agencies, and the philanthropic sector—define,

assess, and increase equity in their grantmaking process. This study focuses on the funders’ activities and strategies used in the discretionary grantmaking process in recent years. As more data become available, future studies will be able to explore the relative impact of the suggested action steps on the equity of the grant-funded programs’ policy and operations.

This study addresses four research questions, as shown in **exhibit 1**. To answer these research questions, we reviewed publicly available resources and literature and conducted interviews with staff involved in grantmaking from Federal agencies and organizations in the philanthropic sector. Our study focuses on supporting domestic grantmakers’ journey to increase equity in grantmaking, though transnational or international grantmakers may also find useful insights that they could adapt to meet different contexts and a global focus.

Exhibit 1: The study focuses on four research questions regarding equity in grantmaking



This report contributes to a burgeoning body of literature on equity in grantmaking by synthesizing challenges and presenting a broad menu of improvement strategies for grantmaking organizations from existing resources and our own interviews with grantmakers. Given the diversity of funding approaches—including the structure, scale, and scope of grants awarded—there is no one-size-fits-all approach to increasing equity in grantmaking. This report captures a wide array of options from resources and interviews with descriptions of grantmakers’ implementation experiences and lessons learned, as well as feedback grantmakers and researchers have received from grant recipients. We present these findings to support funders also exploring improvement opportunities to enhance equity in their grantmaking.

This report begins by describing **background** (section 2) information on the stages of the grantmaking process and recent initiatives and approaches to increase equity. The **methodology** section (section 3) describes our approach to selecting and analyzing published resources and identifying staff in Federal agencies and the

philanthropic sector to interview to enhance findings from the reviewed resources. The report then highlights how Federal agencies, State and local governments, and the philanthropic sector have **defined equity in grantmaking** (section 4) when considering improvement opportunities.

We then describe research on **barriers and challenges** (section 5) in the grantmaking process that exacerbated inequities and present example **action steps** (section 6) to address these challenges. Finally, we explore the data that grantmakers can use to **measure** (section 7) equity in grantmaking and assess the impact of improvement strategies. The **conclusion** (section 8) highlights key takeaways and strategies and notes opportunities for future research in equity in grantmaking. In **appendix A**, we share example resources and action tools that could provide a helpful starting place for grantmakers considering different equity strategies. In the remainder of the **appendices**, we include the full bibliography of the publicly available resources used in the study and further details on our methodology.



2

Background

Overview of Federal Grantmaking and Equity Efforts

The U.S. Federal Government provided an estimated \$1.1 trillion in grants to State and local governments in 2023.^{3,A} Most of these funds are nondiscretionary, meaning the Federal Government calculates the grants to States and localities based on a funding formula rather than distributing grants based on case-by-case decisions. For example, nondiscretionary grants to States to support Medicaid accounted for an estimated \$607 billion of grantmaking funds in 2023.⁴

^AThis total does not include discretionary grantmaking to nonprofit organizations, which is difficult to determine. For more information, please see Czerwinski, S., Davis, B., Del Toro, P., McGatlin, K., Bednar, L., Belaval, M., Bova, A., Bowser, A., King, M., Morris, D., Chanley, V., Kelly, J., & Robinson, R. (2012). Grants to state and local governments: An overview of federal funding levels and selected challenges (GAO-12-1016). United States Government Accountability Office. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-12-1016>.



The U.S. Federal Government also distributes billions of dollars in discretionary grantmaking to States, local governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as nonprofit organizations and research institutions. Discretionary grants are awarded directly by a grantmaking office to eligible recipients based on the funders' determination of the applicant most deserving of funding.⁵ Although the U.S. Office of Budget and Management (OMB) cannot determine the exact amount of funding the Federal Government provides NGOs due to data limitations and challenges to reconcile different definitions of grant programs, OMB estimates these grants represent approximately 20 percent of all Federal grant funding in a given year.⁶ Through both discretionary grants (the subject of this study) and nondiscretionary grants (outside the scope of this study), the Federal Government is a significant contributor to the U.S. economy and operations of NGOs nationwide.⁷

The Federal Government has taken steps to advance equity in the implementation of policy and programs, including grantmaking and the related funded programs. In January 2021, the Biden Administration issued [Executive Order 13985](#) to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities.⁸ This Executive Order requires each Federal agency to develop an Equity Action Plan to describe current and planned initiatives to advance equity. Within the order, the White House defines equity as “the consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner, including individuals who belong to communities that often have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander persons and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; women and girls; LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; persons who live in United States Territories; persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality; and individuals who belong to multiple such communities.”⁹



The 23 major Federal agencies release Equity Action Plans annually, and many small and independent agencies also voluntarily release Equity Action Plans.^B Within their 2022 Equity Action Plans,^C many Federal agencies described their commitments and proposed activities to improve equity in the grantmaking or contracting processes. Some agencies described (1) examining the text of solicitations for funding proposals to expand eligibility to include new organizations and streamline proposal requirements and (2) providing technical assistance (TA) on the application process.¹⁰ In addition, agencies noted they were considering their approach to reviewing

and selecting successful applications to increase equity.¹¹ Multiple agencies described efforts to build internal capacity to implement and evaluate efforts to further increase equity in grantmaking, for example, by expanding data collection to enhance analyses.¹² The following text box highlights examples of general approaches Federal agencies use to strengthen equity in their grantmaking processes (see appendix B for the full references). In the next section, we will define four main stages of the grantmaking process commonly used in Federal grantmaking, as well as State, local, and philanthropic grantmaking.

Highlights From Federal Agency Equity Action Plans

- The Department of Transportation introduced two additional considerations for awarding discretionary grants: advancing equity and reducing barriers to opportunity.
- The Department of the Interior noted next steps of building staff capacity and devoting more resources to implement equity initiatives, such as improved outreach and review processes.
- The Department of State created a standard reporting framework to help collect and report on data related to key equity issues. The State Department will also develop, test, and implement a social inclusion analysis tool to ensure equity considerations are incorporated into the design of its programs.
- Many Federal agencies — including the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of the Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Social Security Administration — proposed pathways for Tribal communities to access grants in recognition of historic barriers and lack of access to these opportunities (Balu et al., 2023).

Sources:

U.S. Department of Transportation. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/DOT-E013985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of State. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/State-E013985-equity-summary.pdf>

Balu, R., DeRuiter-Williams, D., Cook, B. J., Baxter, M., & Reginal, T. (2023). Pathways to equity at scale. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/pathways-equity>

^B More details on these Equity Action Plans and links to each agency's Equity Action Plan by year can be found at Performance.gov. (n.d.). Advancing an equitable government: Delivering on the promise of America for all. <https://www.performance.gov/equity/>. Please see appendix B for a list of the specific Equity Action Plans we reviewed for this study.

^C Federal government agencies release updates of action plans at the end of the calendar year rather than the start. Because we completed our analyses in 2023, we used the available 2022 Equity Action Plans. More recent Equity Action Plans are available now and can be found at Performance.gov. (n.d.). Advancing an equitable government: Delivering on the promise of America for all. <https://www.performance.gov/equity/>

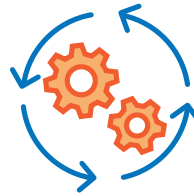
Stages of the Grantmaking Process

For the purposes of this study, we defined four stages of the grantmaking process to describe the funders' activities and decisions (see exhibit 2). The first stage is the **preaward** stage, in which grantmakers design the grant opportunity, including defining the goals of the funding opportunity, selecting the timeline and structure of the funding distribution (including size of the grant, number of grants, payment mechanism), and drafting the call for applications^D with specified requirements for submission.

The next stage is the **collection of applications**, when grantmakers publicize the funding opportunity to attract potential applicants. Grantmakers may also support potential applicants as they prepare proposals and supporting materials. Once the application deadline passes, the grantmaking process reaches the **funding of awards** stage, which includes reviewing applications and deciding which organizations will receive grants. The last stage is the **postaward** stage, which begins when grantmakers announce the awardees and begin monitoring and oversight. Grantmakers may also offer support and TA to grant recipients operating the programs.

These four stages in the grantmaking process include additional steps and considerations if a funder uses passthrough grantmaking to make awards. In passthrough grantmaking, the primary funder first awards funds to an intermediary organization, which then distributes funds to subrecipient organizations (sometimes referred to as subgrantees) to operate the program. When using passthrough grantmaking, both the primary funder and the intermediary organization conduct some grantmaking activities, such as defining the eligibility criteria of awardees, drafting applications and announcements, and distributing funding

Exhibit 2. The four stages of the grantmaking process



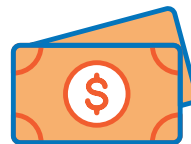
Preaward

- Plan grant opportunity
- Draft funding opportunity announcement



Collection of Applications

- Reach out to potential applicants
- Provide technical assistance to applicants
- Collect applications



Funding of Awards

- Review applications
- Select organizations to award



Postaward

- Respond to applicants
- Monitor and evaluate awardees
- Provide technical assistance to awardees

^D Grantmakers use notice of funding opportunity (NOFO), funding opportunity announcement (FOA), request for proposal (RFP), or notice inviting applicants (NIA). For clarity, we refer to these calls for response to grant opportunities as "applications" throughout.

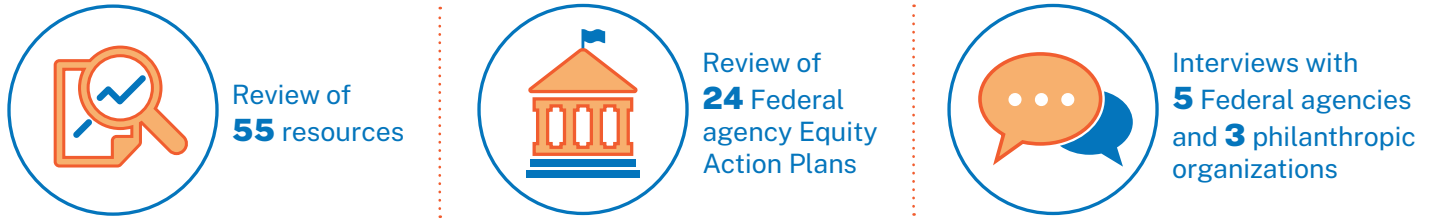
3

Summary of the Methodological Approach

To gather data for our study, we conducted (1) an environmental scan of publicly available literature and resources, (2) reviewed Federal agency Equity Action Plans, and (3) held interviews with Federal agencies and organizations in the philanthropic sector, such as philanthropies and the nonprofit organizations that support them (see exhibit 3). Through both data collection methods, we gathered information about barriers and challenges to equity in grantmaking, recent and planned initiatives to increase equity in the grantmaking process, and opportunities to measure change from those initiatives. Our study approach, summarized in this section and detailed in appendix C, allows for a broad understanding of the breadth and depth of equity concerns in grantmaking and the funders' initiatives to increase equity in their processes.



Exhibit 3. The study used three data collection methods



Note: For more details on the resources reviewed, please see appendix D. To find the Federal agency Equity Action Plans, please see appendix B.

In the environmental scan, we aimed to establish a broad understanding of governmental and philanthropic activities related to equity in grantmaking. We began with an analysis of Federal agencies’ Equity Action Plans and then conducted a systematic, web-based search of publicly available resources related to equity in grantmaking. The environmental scan included both traditional, peer-reviewed journal articles and gray literature (such as magazine articles, reports, podcasts, blog posts, and conference presentations). Ultimately, we reviewed over 100 resources and selected 55 as most valuable to our study, including case studies of implemented initiatives, guides related to potential equity action steps, reports on specific studies, and tools designed to help grantmakers identify next steps. With a diversity of sources, authors, and publishing organizations, the study captures a wide range of perspectives across the United States, including the philanthropic sector and governmental agencies at the Federal, State, and local levels.

To provide additional context and richer detail into some lessons learned and best practices from implementing equity action steps, we interviewed grantmaking staff from the philanthropic sector and Federal agencies.^e We developed a list of potential interviewees based on sources selected in our environmental scan and from consultation with staff at CEO and ETA.^f We then recruited participants by emailing 7 nonfederal organizations and 11 Federal agencies.^g Between November 2023 and January 2024, we interviewed staff from three organizations in the philanthropic sector and five Federal agencies and received written responses from one Federal agency. Though these interviewees do not reflect the full breadth and depth of the U.S. Federal Government or the views of State and local grantmakers, the perspectives include organizations and Federal agencies from numerous policy areas—such as health, education, environment, and labor— to provide additional context for activities that funders have implemented or considered to increase equity. In these interviews, we explored the challenges and opportunities of small versus large grant recipients, considerations for open versus invitation-only grantmaking, and well-established versus and emerging approaches.

^e To find our discussion guides for these interviews, please see appendix E for interviews with Federal agencies and appendix F for interviews with nongovernmental organizations.

^f For further details on how we generated this list, please see appendix C.

^g This study is exempt from OMB approval processes as it did not collect data from 10 or more respondents outside the Federal Government.

4

Defining Equity Within the Context of Grantmaking

Both the reviewed resources and study interviewees emphasize the importance of developing a definition of equity in grantmaking that matches the funders' goals, priorities, and context. Developing a precise, clear definition of equity within the context of the individual organization's grantmaking process enables funders to develop a roadmap and take action to design, implement, and assess the effectiveness of initiatives to increase equity.¹³



In one study, researchers find that, while multiple philanthropies had committed to improving equity and gained a reputation among peers for equity-related work, the funders that developed a “clear definition [of equity] seemed to have codified equity into [their] structure more completely than those that did not have a definition.”¹⁴ In this section of the report, we describe themes in definitions that grantmakers developed to guide discussions of equity in grantmaking and the methods they used to develop these definitions.

Themes in Definitions

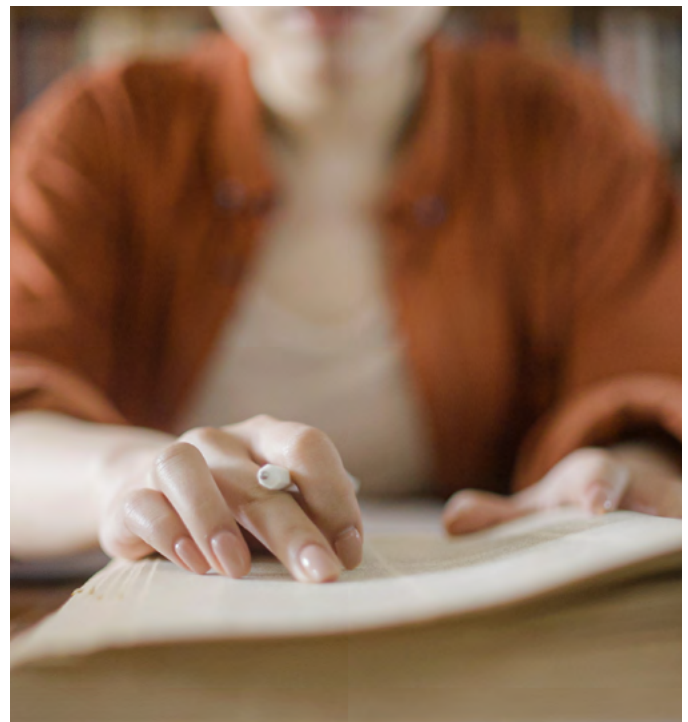
We did not identify a single, common definition for equity in grantmaking among resources and interviews. While some organizations develop definitions specific to the grantmaking process and reflective of their organizational mission, others develop general definitions of equity related to their issue area to guide grantmaking decisions and other organizational activities. Through study interviews, we found multiple grantmaking teams, both in the philanthropic sector and Federal agencies, that have not yet defined the term and instead are prioritizing exploring activities to improve equity, diversity, inclusion, and transparency within and through the grantmaking process.

Some funders focus the definition of equity in grantmaking on the characteristics of organizations applying for grant funds. For example, funders may seek to fund smaller, community-based organizations,¹⁵ less-resourced applicants,¹⁶ or first-time applicants¹⁷ as mechanisms to both increase equity in the organizations that receive grant funding and increase equity in the communities the grant recipients serve. Study interviewees from several Federal agencies described the goal of increasing the number of first-time applicants, smaller organizations, and organizations that operate at the community level. As one of these study interviewees from a Federal agency focused on public health noted, “Ultimately, equity in grants will help us achieve health equity.”

Some organizations develop definitions or goals for equity in grantmaking that are specific to the grantmaking process itself. These funders’ definitions touch on increasing equity through grantmaking activities, such as ensuring awareness

of the funding opportunity, providing support to organizations seeking funding, and selecting grant recipients to fund. Examples include the following:

- A report from the philanthropic sector notes, “Equity speaks to whether grantmaking dollars are deployed in ways that are cognizant of [barriers to opportunities] and how they contribute to the outcome disparities so many funders work to address.”¹⁸
- A coalition of representatives from the philanthropic sector published a report that notes, “Improving equity means promoting justice, impartiality, and fairness within the procedures and processes of institutions or systems, as well as in their distribution of resources.”¹⁹



- A coalition of representatives from the philanthropic sector said, “The pursuit of equity recognizes and accounts for the complex interaction between the dynamics of identity, socio-economic forces, and policy and practice that operate in the environments and contexts in which philanthropic investments occur.”²⁰

Based on the study team’s review of resources and interviews with grantmakers, we found that some grantmakers do not define equity in grantmaking specifically and instead use definitions of equity to guide program design and operations. These funders may define equity using the demographics of the community served through grant programs. Some of the organizations described in reviewed resources mention only racial equity in their definitions, while others use more expansive definitions that include additional community-level demographics, such as socioeconomic status, geography (e.g., urban or rural), gender identity, sexual orientation, and disability. Some organizations explicitly mention the intersectionality of these characteristics:

- A local governmental agency describes equity as advancing “economic opportunities for communities of color through various avenues, including equitable contracting practices, distribution of investments, and grant programs.”²¹
- A report from the philanthropic sector describes equity as “when you can no longer predict an advantage or disadvantage based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ability. An equity framework is a proactive, strategic approach to improving outcomes that accounts for structural differences in opportunities, burdens, and needs in order to advance targeted solutions that fulfill the promise of true equality for all.”²²
- At a summit on racial equity in education, the philanthropic sector describes equity as “giving learners of every race and ethnicity what they need to succeed, regardless of where they start or the challenges they face along the way.”²³



Equity in grantmaking is “making the opportunity for Federal financial assistance equally available to all eligible applicants to deliver successful applicant pool[s], encourage new ideas, and enter hard-to-reach communities.”

— Study interviewee representing a Federal agency

Considerations When Developing Definitions

In addition to documenting how funders define equity in grantmaking, we sought to understand the process by which these funders developed their definitions. When describing their approach to establishing a definition of equity in grantmaking in resources and interviews, several organizations look to definitions from highly visible, well-respected institutions as a starting point to begin adapting the language to the context of their organization’s mission and the grantmaking process. For example, some Federal agencies and the philanthropic sector point to the Biden Administration’s Executive Order 13985.²⁴ A State government entity began with the definition of equity from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a foundation with a portfolio dedicated to advancing equity and inclusion that also publishes resources to support other grantmakers’ equity efforts.^{25, H} Some resources also shared definitions of various types of equity, noted in the following text box, that can support organizations as they develop their definitions of equity.

^H Annie E. Casey’s definition of equity is “the state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial and fair. The concept of equity is synonymous with fairness and justice. To be achieved and sustained, equity needs to be thought of as a structural and systemic concept.” For more details and resources from Annie E. Casey, please see The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2015). Race equity and inclusion action guide. <https://www.aecf.org/resources/race-equity-and-inclusion-action-guide>.

A Conceptual Framework That Can Support the Development of Definitions of Equity in Grantmaking

- **Distributional equity** speaks to a fair distribution of resources and “requires that shares be allocated proportionate to differences”
- **Procedural equity** refers to fairness within the “processes by which social decisions are made”
- **Structural equity** involves “changing an organization’s structures or incentives to improve outcomes”

Sources:

Ashley, S. R. (2012). Is the inequality equitable? An examination of the distributive equity of philanthropic grants to rural communities. *Administration & Society*, 46(6), 684-706. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399712469196>, p.689

Balu, R., DeRuiter-Williams, D., Cook, B. J., Baxter, M., & Reginal, T. (2023). Pathways to equity at scale. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/pathways-equity>, p.5

In contrast, several study interviewees developed their definitions based on input from grantmaking staff at their organization. Working groups made up of grantmaking staff and organization leaders gathered to draft definitions, sometimes in a facilitated discussion guided by an external consultant. One study interviewee from a Federal agency shared that a definition evolved naturally as the agency sought to tie equity in its grantmaking process to equity in its issue area more broadly. The agency’s working group members developed a definition for equity in grantmaking because they were “trying to answer the question: What are we trying to do here?” One study interviewee representing a philanthropy mentioned that conversations about equity included exploration of important and related terms—such as diversity, inclusion, and transparency—which enabled the philanthropy to enhance its program’s mission statement.

Guides on grantmaking with a justice and equity lens suggest that organizations seeking to establish their own definition of equity in grantmaking be clear and precise in their definition. For example, if funders intend to focus on racial equity, they should use and define “racial equity” and not employ the unspecified term of “equity.”²⁶ In addition, funders should be cognizant that “racial equity” may be interpreted to focus on Black and Hispanic populations. If a grantmaker intends to support specific communities to align with the funder’s organizational mission or the grant’s purpose, the funder should name those communities.²⁷ If the intent is to remain inclusive of all groups, funders may find a broad term more useful. One study interviewee representing a Federal agency noted that, in a recent grant opportunity, their agency referred to the project’s intent to understand systemic racism in context and purposefully did not specify racial or ethnic groups. This approach encouraged applicants from communities that the agency may not have thought to name in its definition.

5

Barriers to Increasing Equity

Across our environmental scan, resources highlighted biases in the grantmaking process. Resources describe how grantmaking has favored organizations that are large,²⁸ that are White led,²⁹ or that have previously received grant funding.³⁰ Additional resources describe disadvantages facing organizations that are small in scale;³¹ that lack experience applying for grants or operate with minimal infrastructure;³² or that are Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC) led or serve marginalized communities.³³ Understanding the barriers and challenges these different organizations face is crucial to helping funders identify strategies to further increase equity in grantmaking. In the remainder of this section, we highlight barriers to increasing equity within the four stages of grantmaking.



Preaward

Grantmakers may design grant opportunities without input from potential applicants or the population they intend to serve through the grant program. As a result, grant opportunities may not reflect the needs or goals of the potential applicants or the community served, discouraging some organizations from applying. A study of a local government agency’s grantmaking process finds a funding opportunity had few certified BIPOC-led, women-led, and small organizations apply because the agency did not engage potential applicants when designing the program to ensure the grant structure considered their funding needs and organizational capabilities.³⁴ Another study notes funders sometimes adopt a “top-down approach” to innovation by designing programs without soliciting and integrating insight from organizations on the ground.³⁵ One study interviewee representing a philanthropy noted that their organization recommends funders consider equity beginning with program design and development of the grant opportunity announcement to avoid entrenching systemic inequities in the community.

The structure of the grants, such as the size and duration, can discourage smaller organizations and BIPOC-led organizations from applying for and accessing grants.

Large award sizes, for example, present barriers for small organizations that are not equipped to implement work at this scale.³⁶ However, awards that are too small or focused on specific activities can also be a barrier. Many small organizations and BIPOC-led organizations do not have access to resources that cover resource gaps or overhead costs, which means they may be unable to apply for grants that narrowly fund project activities and that do not include resources for overhead expenses. Short-term, restricted grants prevent these organizations from accessing the stable funding needed to maintain operations.³⁷

Long and complex grant applications require time-intensive responses and are particularly challenging for new applicants, small organizations, and BIPOC-led organizations.

Grant applications and requests for proposals require more time and resources if they ask for complex responses, such as long narrative responses or detailed supporting documentation. Small, BIPOC-led, and less-resourced organizations may struggle with complex applications and proposal requests, particularly if they lack funds to hire dedicated grant writers.³⁸ Numerous studies exploring the barriers in the grantmaking process find that complex applications or burdensome requests for proposals lead organizations to stop seeking funding³⁹ because the time investment distracts from the organizations’ primary work and does not guarantee financial support.⁴⁰ Long and complex requests ultimately favor previously successful grant recipients and large organizations with established tools and staff who can quickly and efficiently respond to grant opportunities.⁴¹



“I have given up on grant pursuits because of the energetic cost to devoting time and effort in applying without guaranteed income or support. For a small team, devoting dedicated time for grant writing means the work we are passionate about doing doesn’t get done and the impacts we are seeking aren’t met.”

— Grant recipient quoted in Giancola, S., & Karpyn, A. (2021). *Minority perspectives on equitable giving in philanthropy: Survey results*. University of Delaware Center for Research in Education and Social Policy. p.22



Collection of Applications

Small and less-resourced organizations may not have staff availability and infrastructure capacity to complete high-quality, compliant applications.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office investigated barriers facing organizations applying for Federal grants and finds that limitations in human capital, organizational capacity, and financial management systems affect the likelihood of a grant applicant’s success.⁴² Smaller organizations with limited resources to invest in grant applications may struggle to complete applications within short timeframes, develop proposals that effectively communicate their ideas, or complete required attachments.⁴³ Organizations that cannot afford to hire dedicated grant writers or contract with external grant experts will not have familiarity with funders’ criteria and the unwritten conventions of grants, such as “specific language and terms that reviewers look for in grant applications.”⁴⁴

Invitation-only funding opportunities disadvantage applicants that are not part of the same social circle as funders or that experience interpersonal bias.

Organizations outside a funder’s socioeconomic networks⁴⁵ and BIPOC-led organizations both have inequitable access to funding relationships.⁴⁶ Particularly when applying for grants from philanthropies, staff at organizations seeking grant funds find they need to invest in relationship building, sometimes for years, which is unfunded work.⁴⁷ Compounding the challenge of accessing exclusive social networks, BIPOC-led organizations may encounter institutional racism and interpersonal bias—bias between individuals with different identities that results in mistrust and microaggressions—when building connections with grantmaking staff, which stunts or completely inhibits these relationships.⁴⁸



“Many of these smaller organizations mentioned the frustration they felt to be applying to grants to help build their capacity and infrastructure and being denied because they do not have the infrastructure in place to complete grant applications to state agencies’ standards”

—Gullickson, N., Jones, W., Sand, L., & Yan, J. (2021). Equity in Minnesota state grantmaking. University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs, p.21 <https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/229543>



Funding of Awards

Studies show reviewers of grant applications may bring biases and preference for familiar programmatic strategies, perhaps overlooking proposals designed to respond to community needs.⁴⁹ Funders may gravitate toward familiar programmatic strategies because staff do not understand or are not aware of culturally responsive approaches that incorporate knowledge of and responsiveness to the values, practices, and histories of specific communities.⁵⁰ As a result, these funders may be less likely to award grants to support culturally relevant practices in proposals from BIPOC-led applicants with close relationships with the communities served.⁵¹ If the funder designed the grant program without any community input, the application may explicitly ask applicants to use funder-designated approaches not grounded in community needs.⁵² In a study on minority perspectives on equity in the grantmaking process, one grant applicant notes, in their experience, organizations using community-driven approaches must conform to the funder’s approach and “speak the language and think in the way funders do” to be successful.⁵³

Funders tend to award funds to organizations they deem to be stable, but common indicators of stability reflect biases for a specific type of organization. Studies

find funders’ preference for stability puts small organizations and BIPOC-led organizations at a disadvantage if they cannot invest in activities to establish reputations and engender trust.⁵⁴ These studies note indicators of stability such as hierarchical management structure and activities, steady and existing financial support, and a clear track record of success with grant awards. For instance, funders may view organizations as risky or unstable if they are led by people of color conducting grassroots organizing, a less hierarchical community advocacy and change strategy.⁵⁵ A participant in a University of Delaware study shared, as a Black leader, they have found a “lack of trust” in the funding relationship because of their leadership style. There are “too many hooks to a white supremacist approach to ‘proving’ worthiness and not trusting that a Black leader who does things very differently, speaks unequivocally, takes a different pace, is really the kind of Black person that the organization wants to fund.”⁵⁶

A lack of diverse perspectives among reviewers can create bias in selecting awardees.

A 2016 study found 67.7 percent of foundation program officers are White, and 91.6 percent of foundations are led by White people.⁵⁷ Review panels drawn from grantmaking staff may be largely White and unfamiliar with culturally relevant approaches or biased.⁵⁸ Some funders engage community reviewers to diversify the review panels and incorporate broader perspectives into decision making but are not clear on how they weigh scores from these community reviewers compared with grantmaking staff.⁵⁹

Funders may not provide constructive feedback to unsuccessful applicants, limiting their ability to learn from the application process and improve future applications.

A lack of feedback can be incredibly discouraging for rejected applicants, especially if the application process was complex, time-consuming, and lengthy.⁶⁰ For BIPOC-led applicants newer to the application process, a funder’s lack of feedback serves to emphasize the lack of entry points and insight that would improve their chances of a successful application.⁶¹



Postaward

Reporting requirements related to monitoring and evaluation that do not match the capacity or mission of smaller, less-resourced, and BIPOC-led grant recipients make it difficult for these organizations to remain in compliance. Smaller and less-resourced grant recipients have limited organizational capacity to comply with intensive reporting requirements.⁶² In addition, BIPOC-led or BIPOC-serving organizations may find that funders’ reporting requirements and metrics inadequately reflect the community’s understanding of what constitutes a successful program. Some researchers find that funders may create White-centric definitions of success—a definition of success or strategic priority that is not culturally responsive and driven instead by a White perspective—that are not relevant to the grant recipient’s activities and are biased.⁶³ Both cases make it difficult for grant recipients to meet requirements, which imperils their current grant and their ability to sustain funding or be successful in future applications.⁶⁴

Funders and grant recipients may be interested in collecting data to inform equity-related analyses but lack the internal systems or human resources to collect these data. Collecting equity-related data, such as person-level demographic data, from grant recipients or from participants in grant programs can be challenging. Many organizations have not developed the internal capacity, systems, or technical skills needed to collect these data, even if the organization is generally proficient at collecting other data.⁶⁵ The Equity Task Force at the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board, for example, finds that “current infrastructure, staffing, and systems for collecting and analyzing [workforce] data in Illinois are not designed to support robust analysis of disaggregated data necessary to advance equity.”⁶⁶



6

Action Steps to Increase Equity

Understanding Federal and philanthropic grantmakers' recent action steps to increase equity in the grantmaking process can provide a starting point for funders examining their approaches for opportunities to improve and those looking for new strategies. In this section, we describe themes and examples from the reviewed resources and interviews for each stage of grantmaking. We highlight funders' experiences and promising practices that aim to increase equity across the four stages of the grantmaking process. The funders' selected strategies reflect the context of their organization — such as their scale of operations, mission, policy sector, and capacity — as they continue the journey to improving their grantmaking processes.





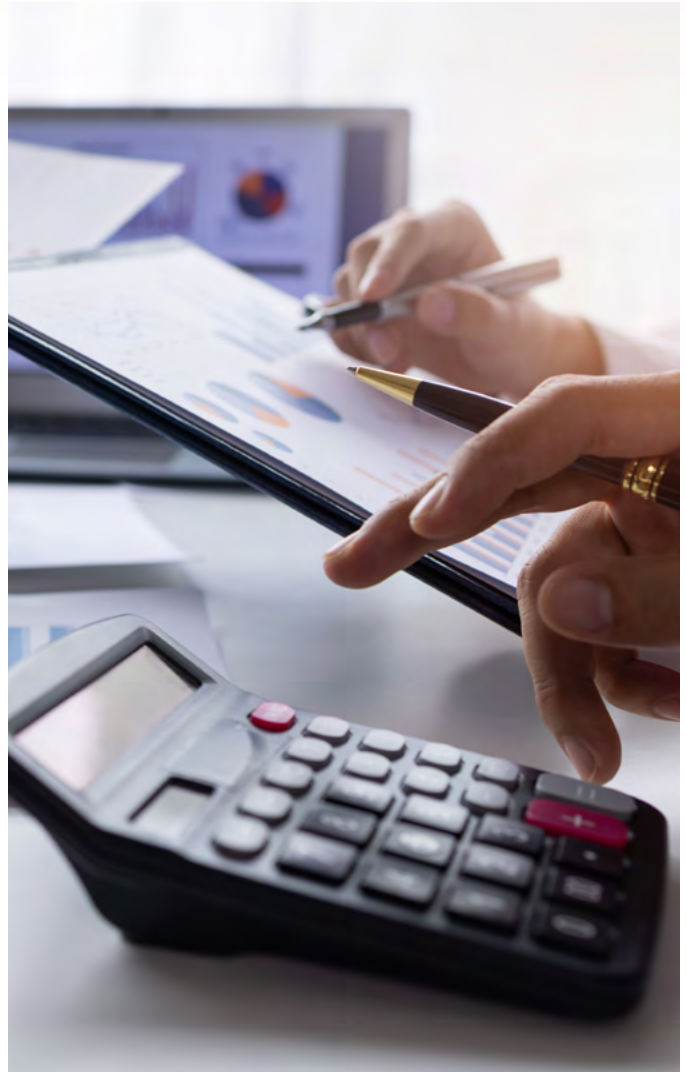
Preaward

Designing grants to provide multiyear funding with flexible budget requirements supports small and BIPOC-led organizations.

Resources describe how long-term awards without strict spending restrictions can provide both funding stability and flexibility to grant awardees.⁶⁷ Grants that include financial support for overhead expenses and infrastructure development are particularly helpful for small and BIPOC-led organizations that lack diverse funding streams or reserves for these costs.⁶⁸

Passthrough funding using a subgrant design may expand the reach of grant programs to small and BIPOC-led organizations.

Passthrough funding involves providing large grants to intermediary organizations that then distribute smaller subgrants (sometimes called regrants or subawards) to other organizations or partners. This strategy can enable funders to indirectly engage new organizations by leveraging the intermediary's networks and staff capacity, expand programs to additional geographic areas, and extend program operations to more communities.⁶⁹ However, the passthrough funding strategy limits relationship building and direct communications between subgrantees and funders, which can also limit information sharing between grantmakers and on-the-ground program activities.⁷⁰



Funders using passthrough grants face important design questions to ensure this process increases equity. A study interviewee representing a philanthropy raised a concern related to whether regranteeing increases equity or whether it simply uses an intermediary while maintaining the status quo: “Are the same organizations receiving the grants even through the re-grantor?” They noted that funders using passthrough funding to increase equity can stipulate requirements for indirect grantmaking, such as having the intermediary organization share details on its intended subawards to the funder for final approval. Funders should provide the organization making the passthrough grants with adequate funding to ensure staff can effectively complete the labor-intensive work of equitable regranteeing.⁷¹ The text box includes self-reflection questions to support funders considering passthrough grantmaking to increase equity.

Self-Reflection Questions for Funders Considering Passthrough Grantmaking

- **Who is suggesting the idea of pass-through granting?** If the funder is driving this approach, do community organizations agree on the value of the strategy?
- **Does the passthrough funding help the funder reach organizations that truly could not be supported directly?** Has the funder considered tradeoffs to this approach, such as the lack of a direct relationship between the on-the-ground organization and funding entities?
- **Does passthrough funding enhance the ability of the funder to equitably distribute funds?** Could a pass-through organization better perform the time-intensive, burdensome process of equitably providing many small grants or managing risks from these grants? Is the funder adequately compensating the pass-through organization so pass-through staff can take on this work?
- **Is the intermediary organization well positioned to build, maintain, and cultivate relationships with smaller and BIPOC-led organizations?** Does it have existing relationships and trust in that space? Does it understand the harm that has been done in these communities, and is it able to move in these spaces?

Source:

Adapted from Sen, R., & Villarosa, L. (2019). *Grantmaking with a racial justice lens: A practical guide*. Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity. https://racialequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/GWARJL_15.pdf, with additional recommendations from study team interviewees

Clearly describing grant eligibility requirements and expanding eligibility when possible can attract new types of organizations. Several resources recommend increasing access to grant opportunities by expanding and clearly describing eligibility requirements.⁷² To consider whether and how to expand eligibility requirements, funders can review the legal requirements for a program. For example, in one report, a Federal agency realized nonprofit organizations such as labor unions and neighborhood associations could be legally eligible for a grant opportunity and recommends that agencies actively consider these types of organizations when establishing eligibility for new and existing programs.⁷³ If a funder expands eligibility, the funder can then proactively conduct outreach to any newly eligible groups to let them know about the opportunity.

A two-step application process may help applicants better understand their eligibility, though it increases the cost and timeline to distribute funding. A preapplication eligibility form, for example, can clearly convey grant requirements to applicants and reduce the risk of ineligible applicants devoting time to unsuccessful applications.⁷⁴ A study interviewee representing a philanthropy described their organization's strategy of requesting a short letter of interest (LOI) from applicants as a preliminary step before they submit the full application. This approach enables the philanthropy to notify applicants of their eligibility or whether their brief project description does not meet the program goals. The study interviewee's organization felt this LOI approach helped organizations concerned about spending time and resources on a likely unsuccessful grant application.

A streamlined application or proposal structure with fewer required elements reduces the burden of responding, which might encourage small and BIPOC-led organizations to apply. In the resources and interviews, both Federal and philanthropic grantmakers highlight recent efforts to simplify applications. These funders limit the number of questions and required attachments by focusing on the information necessary to make funding decisions.⁷⁵ Some funders shorten the page length or word count in narrative response sections and make components of the application optional.⁷⁶ One study interviewee representing a Federal agency described reviewing its application to remove requests for data that applicants could collect and submit after the award, once they receive funding. Other study interviewees noted that streamlining application materials can complicate efforts to fully evaluate applications. As one study interviewee representing a philanthropy shared, “How do you minimize the amount of requested information and ensure that you’re still doing your fiduciary responsibility, while still not making it so onerous that people don’t apply?”



Using plain language makes grant applications more accessible and reduces burden on applicants. Resources reflecting on applicant feedback provide recommendations on how funders can simplify the language in their applications.⁷⁷ Many study interviewees representing Federal funders noted that jargon, complicated boilerplate language, and lack of white space make applications difficult to read, understand, and complete. Several of these study interviewees’ Federal agencies recently created plain-language templates to guide the development of funding announcements and applications. Study interviewees representing one Federal agency have already observed how these new, readable materials can result in a wider range of applicants. Some study interviewees representing Federal agencies sought to expand the use of the simpler application language by creating resources and training materials for project officers and grants management staff on implementing these changes.



“At first, we heard all the typical pushback ... why would we want to dumb-down our notices? Folks who are writing applications are fitting it in with all the work they need to do. It is in our best interest to encourage more applications, more thorough, complete, and well-thought applications. One way to do that is to make it easier for somebody to quickly absorb the information [in the funding notice] and decide — are they going to apply for this grant?”

— Study interviewee representing a Federal agency

Designing grant opportunities with input from potential applicants and community representatives can encourage more diverse and community-based organizations to apply.

Funders, grant applicants, and researchers agree that grantmakers benefit from incorporating multiple perspectives when designing the grant opportunity to center the voices of people with lived experience.⁷⁸ Sources describe several approaches to engaging the community, such as the following:

- Cocreating proposals with community representatives⁷⁹
- Soliciting feedback from cultural groups on the application's language and process⁸⁰
- Engaging people with lived experience to help guide funding priorities and decisions⁸²
- Holding regular consultative sessions with community representatives throughout the grantmaking process⁸¹
- Using participatory grantmaking techniques to open the process of decision making and program design to community members beyond foundation staff⁸³

One study interviewee representing a philanthropy noted that a community-based codesign process improves the design of the grant program and can serve as an outreach method to increase community buy-in and attract community-based organizations as applicants.

Grant opportunity announcements that describe the funders' commitment to increasing equity can encourage grant applicants to center equity in their proposed plan. Resources and study interviewees recommend funders be explicit about their equity-related goals in the grant announcement (sometimes called funding opportunity announcements, notices of funding opportunities, requests for proposals, or notices inviting applicants) to indicate the funders' values.⁸⁴ Some resources also suggest funders request that applicants explain how their proposal helps meet the funder's equity goals.⁸⁵ A reviewed resource, study interviewees representing Federal agencies, and study interviewees representing philanthropies noted they have also requested applicants include certain equity strategies, such as requiring grant recipients to implement initiatives that are culturally responsive⁸⁶ or include lived-experience partners in the initiative's design.

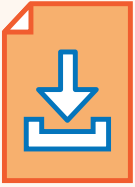
Example of Equity-Related Grant Criteria

The National Science Foundation recently included the following criteria in a grant opportunity focused on racial equity in science, technology, engineering, and math education:

- All proposals should conceptualize systemic racism within the context of their proposal and describe how the proposed work will advance scholarship of racial equity and address systemic racism. ...
- All proposals should be led by or in authentic partnership with those who experience inequities caused by systemic racism.
- All proposals should center the voices, knowledge, and experiences of those who experience inequities caused by systemic racism.”

Source:

U.S. National Science Foundation. (2022). NSF 22-634: Racial Equity in STEM Education (EDU Racial Equity) program solicitation. Retrieved February 9 from <https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/racial-equity-stem-education-ehr-racial-equity/nsf22-634/solicitation>, p.1



Collection of Applications

Open calls for applications facilitate more equitable access to funding announcements and potentially a greater diversity of awardees.

Compared with invitation-only or sole-source opportunities, open calls—public calls for applications to which any eligible organization can apply—encourage more submissions and a wider pool of potential applicants. Several study interviewees representing philanthropies shared how organizations increasingly use open calls for grant proposals to expand the applicant pool beyond the grantmakers’ existing network and connections. One study interviewee representing philanthropies noted that, when their organization had previously used invitation-only grants, *“there [was] more opportunity for bias, and unsurprisingly, we fund the people we know, and we fund the folks who do the work consistently. ... More foundations are looking into what is happening in the [application] process ... [and] trying to have more open calls.”*

Investing in a comprehensive outreach strategy may increase awareness of the opportunity and result in more applicants with diverse organizational characteristics and proposed ideas.

Numerous sources emphasized the importance of comprehensive, wide-reaching outreach to encourage a broader range of applicants, despite the time and cost involved.⁸⁷ These outreach strategies require an investment of time and resources by grantmaking staff. To best support its staff, a study interviewee representing a Federal agency described how their office developed outreach and communication guides with best practices for project officers to broadcast a new funding opportunity to a wide range of potential applicants. Examples of broadcasting and outreach strategies include the following, from resources and study interviewees:

- Developing culturally responsive messaging that considers nuances in values and context when crafting outreach messages to encourage a variety of organizations to see themselves as applicants⁸⁸
- Sharing funding announcements on social media
- Sending the funding opportunity announcement to email listservs of potential applicants
- Engaging organizations working in the focus area, but which are not eligible for the award themselves, to disseminate information about the opportunity to potential applicants

Investing in early, focused outreach and support for organizations that have not typically been awarded funding can increase equity in the types of organizations awarded.

Early outreach to engage organizations operating within communities of interest to the grantmaker can increase engagement with funding opportunities for smaller organizations that cannot afford to monitor grant announcements or organizations inexperienced with the grantmaking process.⁸⁹ Focused outreach can increase the likelihood that these organizations apply.⁹⁰ For instance, one resource shared an example from the Akonadi Foundation, a foundation focused on racial justice organizing and policy advocacy. This foundation invests in targeted outreach strategies to reach potential grant applicants who may not be fluent in English or who struggle to navigate websites. The Akonadi Foundation finds this outreach helps these organizations apply for and receive funding, which then helps the foundation achieve its goal of reaching marginalized communities through funding.⁹¹

Multiple study interviewees representing different Federal agencies described engaging Historically Black Colleges and Universities (known as HBCUs), Tribal- and minority-serving organizations, organizations in specific geographies (e.g., rural areas or States that have not received funding), and first-time applicants or organizations that have been unsuccessful in past applications. Study interviewees representing Federal agencies as well as study interviewees representing philanthropies suggested conducting this outreach as early as possible to better support organizations in preparing a response to the funding opportunity.

Example of Pilot Testing an Outreach and Engagement Strategy

A Federal agency began a pilot test of an intensive outreach program with 12 minority-serving educational institutions (including HBCUs and Tribal colleges) that received little funding from previous applications. The agency then organized mentorship relationships between each institution and Federal offices with related expertise and aligned research missions. In addition, the agency engaged the institutions monthly to check on the mentorship relationship. The agency hopes the focused engagement and support for these institutions will help them to continue to build capacity to develop grant proposals, leading them to submit responses to more grant applications and win awards.

Source:

Study interviewee representing a Federal agency

TA can help potential grant applicants better navigate the application process and develop high-quality proposals. Resources, study interviewees representing Federal agencies, and study interviewees representing philanthropies emphasized the value of providing TA to small or BIPOC-led organizations and new applicants.⁹² A study of grant applicants' perspectives on grant application processes finds that many forms of TA—such as access to resources and coaching on the application process—helped them feel more prepared to apply.⁹³ One study suggests funders provide this TA as early as possible to best support applicants during the proposal process.⁹⁴ Some funders proactively address the challenges and concerns of underrepresented subgroups of potential applicants by establishing focused TA resources to better ensure the ability of these potential applicants to apply.⁹⁵

Funders use a variety of TA methods to support potential applicants. Many studies recommend individualized support through one-on-one conversations, coaching, or mentorship.⁹⁶ Group-oriented TA options include webinars⁹⁷ and written resources or guidance documents.⁹⁸ Some grantmakers share examples of previously successful applications, which can provide a concrete model of best practices.⁹⁹ Others provide feedback from a preliminary review of draft applications.¹⁰⁰

A study interviewee representing a Federal agency shared that its TA strategy includes resources, guidance documents, and one-on-one support. To support its effort to award first-time applicants, this agency also does compliance checks on applications, lets organizations know what materials or information they may be missing, and then gives these applicants time to correct these errors. A study interviewee representing a different Federal agency noted that part of its TA includes translating TA resources, such as webinars, into different languages to increase access to underrepresented groups.



“Part of our equity agenda was to make the [TA] trainings more accessible to a wider audience and in Spanish. Spanish language is a broad audience we’re trying to capture in terms of our grant applications.”

— Study interviewee representing a Federal agency

Lengthening the timeline to respond to grant opportunities and being flexible with deadlines when appropriate can encourage more organizations to complete applications and enable resource-limited organizations to develop higher quality applications.

A study interviewee representing a Federal agency described extending the application timeline for competitive grant opportunities after reviewing factors such as public awareness of the funding opportunity, time required for applicants to compose high-quality responses, and the complexity of applications. This agency balanced the extended application window with the need to quickly distribute awards to implement programs. When setting their application timeline, funders may consider a planning phase for grant applicants, which they could pair with TA events and resources to provide applicants with both time and supports to enhance their proposals.¹⁰¹ Grantmakers can also be flexible with the submission deadline when potential applicants have pressing responsibilities, such as responding to a natural disaster or community emergency.¹⁰²



“Our job is to get the money out the door. It is not to penalize organizations for dealing with a real-world event.”

— Black program officer quoted in Sen, R., & Villarosa, L. (2019). Grantmaking with a racial justice lens: A practical guide. Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity. https://racialequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/GWARJL_15.pdf, p.34



Funding of Awards

Diversifying review panels introduces new perspectives and can focus award decisions on proposals that address community needs. Funders diversify their reviewers to provide different perspectives and experience in the selection of successful applicants, with consideration for race, background, experience, age, and gender.¹⁰³ To expand the types of individuals who serve on review panels, some funders explore engaging new individuals from outside the organization or identify existing staff members who could contribute to decision making, if given support and proper training.¹⁰⁴ Funders can recruit community members and people with lived experience to serve as reviewers.¹⁰⁵ When possible, funders should consider a committee approach so that multiple reviewers can be in conversation with one another, discussing viewpoints and building on perspectives.¹⁰⁶

Equity-focused review questions can encourage the panel to reflect on how applicants incorporate equity considerations into their proposals. Reviewed resources, study interviewees from Federal agencies, and study interviewees representing philanthropies suggested integrating equity-related review questions into the award process to select grant recipient organizations prepared to implement programs that address systemic inequities. Example equity review questions include the following:

- Does the applicant understand the root causes of the problem it is trying to solve and the underlying inequities?¹⁰⁷
- Can the applicant advance equity efforts?¹⁰⁸
- Does the applicant provide equitable and fair compensation for community partners?¹⁰⁹
- Does the applicant have a proven track record of delivering culturally responsive services?¹¹⁰

Strategies such as training and revised scoring protocols may help reviewers overcome implicit bias. Implicit bias refers to the “attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner,” blind spots that can lead to both positive and negative assessments not intended by the individual.¹¹¹ Funders implement many approaches to mitigate implicit bias in the review process to prevent unintentional assessments and scoring biases, including comprehensive training for reviewers on scoring processes and on recognizing, interrupting, and redirecting implicit biases when they arise.¹¹² Some funders also use rubrics or review questions to mitigate scoring biases or conduct blinded peer review, where identifying details about the applicant are hidden from the reviewer.¹¹³ Depending on the number of grant applicants, some funders introduce interviews with grant applicants and community partners to supplement the written proposal and better understand organizations’ mission and approach.¹¹⁴ Funders that invest in reviewer training and scoring rubrics recommend regularly reflecting with staff on how inequities may be embedded in these processes and reviewing what is and is not working.¹¹⁵

Providing feedback from the review process can help unsuccessful applicants learn and improve, which will especially benefit applicants newer to the grant process.

Research suggests constructive feedback encourages unsuccessful applicants to prepare and apply again, rather than give up on funding opportunities.¹¹⁶ Funders may provide general feedback, such as listing the top three most common mistakes they observed during the review process.¹¹⁷ Alternatively, funders may provide detailed feedback about an organization’s application to highlight strategies to improve future responses to grant opportunities.¹¹⁸



“You need to ask yourself if you are really advancing the people who you say we want to help or still funding those you know or who have the social network to get in the room.”

— Grantmakers for Education summit panelist quoted in Grantmakers for Education. (2018). Taking action on racial equity: How grantmakers are becoming change-makers. Grantmakers for Education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED595121.pdf>, p.7





Postaward

Determining monitoring and evaluation metrics with input from grant recipients helps funders create more equitable measures of success. Some funders have reexamined their evaluation practices to ensure tools and procedures are accessible and meaningful to the funder, the grant recipient, and the community the program serves.¹¹⁹ To establish equitable standards and measures, funders can work in partnership with grant recipients to define measures of success and identify sources of related data.¹²⁰ A study interviewee representing a Federal agency highlighted early plans to collect data that better represent grant recipients’ achievements and challenges, particularly as the agency diversifies the types of organizations that receive funding. Several study interviewees representing different Federal agencies also noted they were grappling with the monitoring and evaluation process to better align with their equity goals, while still fulfilling their duty to provide oversight of funds.



“We’re reassessing how we do postaward oversight and how we assess risk as an agency. ... A lot of our postaward monitoring and oversight capabilities have been focused on what our traditional portfolio composition has been. ... We want to give ... funds to institutions that otherwise are not as familiar with how to manage federal funding. How do we support that mission? We don’t really have the answer yet, but we’re reflecting a lot on it.”

— Study interviewee representing a Federal agency

TA for program operations can help grant recipients build capacity, enabling smaller organizations, BIPOC-led organizations, and new grant recipients to overcome barriers to accessing larger and sustained funding.

Numerous sources emphasize the value of funder-provided TA after awarding grants to help recipients navigate postaward processes and build a track record to help them maintain funding.¹²¹ Some funders provide TA to build the grant recipients’ organizational capacity, such as fundraising support, board development, and business planning for sustainable operations.¹²² Others provide

networking and peer learning opportunities—such as communities of practice, convenings, and conferences—to share best practices and enhance implementation processes.¹²³ One funder describes providing grant administrative support, such as training on postaward grant processes and cheat sheets on common grantmaking terms.¹²⁴ Others provide monitoring and evaluation support, including training materials and example tools such as sample surveys or interview questions.¹²⁵ When implementing TA strategies, funders can incorporate grant recipient feedback to ensure TA meets their needs and matches the goals of the programs.¹²⁶

7

Measuring Equity in Grantmaking

As grantmakers seek to further increase equity in grantmaking, process and outcome measures can highlight areas for improvement and support assessments on whether the implemented initiatives are associated with meaningful changes. Across our environmental scan and interviews, we found little consistency in measures different funders use to assess equity in the grantmaking process. Instead, grantmakers have been creating their own metrics for tracking and analyses, using readily available data or establishing new mechanisms to collect data from grant applications, awardees, and existing sources. When considering data to measure equity in grantmaking, study interviewees spoke to the need for timely and accurate data while not dissuading prospective applicants or overburdening awardees. As one study interviewee representing a philanthropy shared, “We don’t collect information that we don’t know how to use.” This section compiles insights from the reviewed resources and study interviewees to highlight potential grantmaking data elements that funders can use, helpful data sources for these elements, and example analyses employing these measures and data.



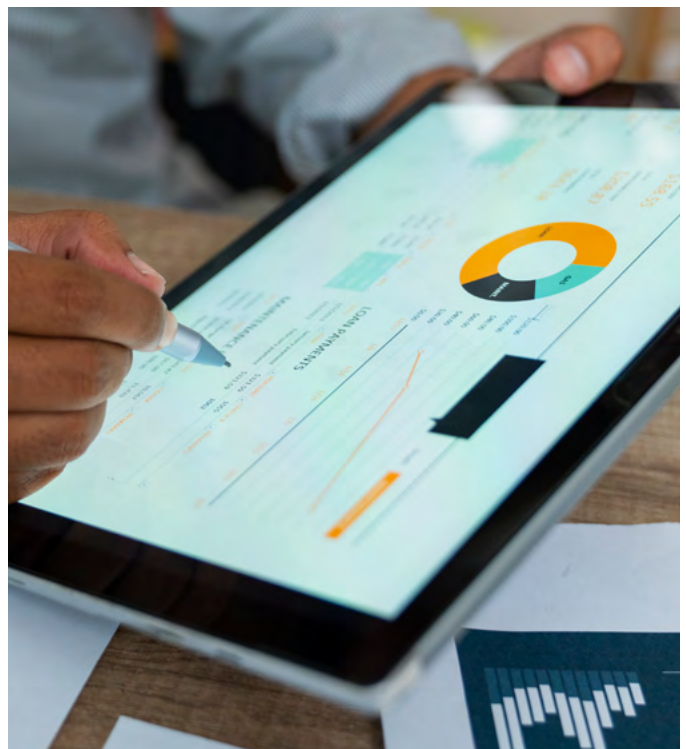
Priority Data Elements

To measure and track changes in equity, grantmakers identify data elements related to their definition of equity and related goals. Grantmakers often use data on organizational characteristics to understand trends in the types of organizations that apply for or receive grants. For example, reviewed resources suggest collecting and analyzing demographic data from the organization's leadership team or board members, specifically their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, educational attainment, religion, disability status, or socioeconomic status, to identify potential biases in whom the grantmaker chooses to fund.¹²⁷ Study interviewees representing various Federal agencies spoke to gathering data on the type of organization—for example, whether the organization is an HBCU. Many of these study interviewees also described collecting data on whether the organization is a new applicant or awardee to indicate the organization may have little experience receiving funding from that grantmaker and may benefit from additional outreach or TA to develop an application.

Some grantmakers are focused on increasing equity in the communities and populations served by grant funding. To measure progress toward this goal, funders can collect data on the individuals participating in the grant-funded programs or, in the case of grant applications, the geographic region where the proposed program would operate.¹²⁸ Collecting detailed data, disaggregated by demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, disability, gender, and sexual orientation, can enhance analyses. When appropriate, grantmakers may collect additional data on participants that reflect the focus of the grant program. For example, a study of workforce development programs in Kentucky recommends collecting data on subpopulations of underserved workers, such as unemployed persons, veterans, foreign-born individuals, homeless individuals, and foster youth.¹²⁹

Potential Data Sources

Once funders select the data elements they will use to explore equity in their grantmaking processes, they need to determine sources for these data. Some grantmakers use grant applicants or recipients as their data source and request equity-related data from organizations in the application or during the monitoring process after awarding funding. While collecting these data directly from organizations can be an efficient strategy for grantmakers, the data requests may create a barrier to increasing equity in grantmaking if providing such data is burdensome.¹³⁰ Overly burdensome data requests during the application phase, when organizations have no assurance of receiving funding, may dissuade potential applicants.¹³¹ Organizations may struggle to gather accurate data on the demographics of the population they currently serve, or would serve through grant-funded programs, and submit incomplete or outdated data.¹³²



Reviewed resources and study interviewees suggested the following tips for funders interested in collecting demographic data:

- Explain the “why” behind the data request. Grantmakers that explain the reason these data enhance decision making and the expected analyses can build trust and support among the organizations providing these data.¹³³ A study from the philanthropic sector noted that submission of demographic data can cause some individuals to raise concerns about privacy or how their data will be used. This is particularly true if the data request focuses on underserved communities and communities that have experienced historical or ongoing injustices.
- Examine the response categories. When requesting demographic information on grant applicants’ or recipients’ leadership or staff, provide options that match how staff may describe themselves. Some funders use similar response categories as U.S. Census surveys.¹³⁴ However, these categories may be too narrow, as some individuals identify outside these standard categories.¹³⁵ To better capture variation and allow participants to best describe themselves, funders can enable grant applicants to self-identify with an option of “other, please describe.”¹³⁶

- Provide an opt-out option. Funders requesting personal demographic data about the organization’s leadership or staff (rather than aggregated community-level data) should include the ability for respondents to opt out.¹³⁷ A study interviewee representing a Federal agency suggested including an opt-out option for each personal demographic question to encourage grant applicants to review each question rather than opt out of the data collection entirely; this approach can increase the response rate.

Funders may also use publicly available data to better understand equity in grantmaking. For example, one resource described using data from the Internal Revenue Service Form 990-PF, a tax return form filed by private foundations in the United States, to understand nonprofits’ grant funding and administrative expenses.¹³⁸ A study interviewee representing a Federal agency suggested finding organizations’ size and revenue through online tools, such as www.grants.gov and www.research.gov. Some grantmakers use Federal survey data, such as the American Community Survey or the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, to understand the communities grant recipients serve.¹³⁹ While public data may be more readily available to funders, these datasets do not reflect funders’ specific program or grant goals and may meet only some of their data needs.

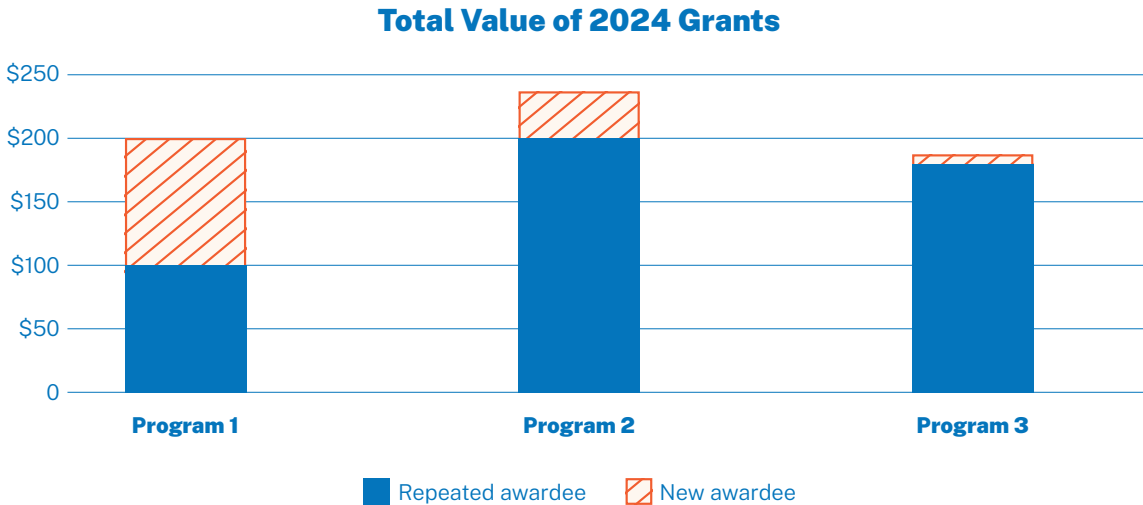


Example Analyses

Having acquired data related to the priority measures, funders then consider the types of analyses that can help identify areas for improvement or assess whether implemented strategies have been helpful. For example, one study interviewee representing a Federal agency noted the agency tracks the race and ethnicity of principal investigators to understand whether it is awarding a similar percentage of grants to Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White applicants. In exhibit 4, we offer a hypothetical example analysis that would support funders exploring the effectiveness of strategies to increase the number of new organizations awarded funding, which multiple

study interviewees noted as a goal. This analysis demonstrates how comparisons of the number and size of awarded grants reveal opportunities to provide additional support for organizations new to grantmaking (called “new awardees” in the exhibit). In this theoretical example, Program 2 distributes multiple grants to new awardees, but awardees with previous success winning grants (called “repeated awardees” in the exhibit) receive much larger grants. In contrast, Program 3 awards most grant funding to repeated awardees and almost no grants to new awardees.¹⁴⁰

Exhibit 4. A hypothetical analysis of awards to repeated versus new awardees can demonstrate which type of applicants have been awarded grants and how substantive these grants are



Note: These hypothetical tables are based on similar analyses in Gullickson et al., 2021.

Across the reviewed resources and study interviews, grantmakers described how they use analyses of equity data to identify types of organizations that encounter barriers in the grant processes. Resources suggest analyzing characteristics of organizations that had been awarded grants to identify inequities in the number and duration of grants, by organizational size or demographics of organizations' leadership.¹⁴¹ Examples of analyses include the following:

- A study interviewee representing a Federal agency noted it tracks organizations that expressed interest in a funding opportunity and have not been awarded a grant previously to calculate the percentage that submit an application and the percentage awarded funding. These analyses highlight the agency's progress in attracting and supporting new organizations in the grantmaking process.
- A foundation using a two-stage application process, in which applicants submit an LOI and the funder may then invite the applicant to provide a full proposal, examines the invitation and funding rates for its grant program. Evaluators analyze these rates across organization type (such as community organization or academic institution) and racial demographics of the organizations' leadership. These analyses help the foundation identify where specific groups face barriers during the grant process.¹⁴²
- Resources suggest examining the percentage of grant funding that supports different types of activities, such as service delivery, advocacy work, and other systemic change strategies. Examining these percentages can help funders determine whether they are providing the type of funding small, community-based, and BIPOC-led organizations need to implement long-term strategies for change.¹⁴³



8

Conclusion

The journey to increase equity in grantmaking requires continuous reflection to implement, assess, and refine approaches. Within the many publicly available resources we reviewed, grantmakers and researchers described strategies to solicit feedback from applicants and awardees, adjust their approaches based on experience, and define measures to assess progress. Study interviewees from a Federal agency described regularly convening staff across project areas in a workgroup focused on grants equity to identify new challenges and brainstorm improvements to processes. Some resources include action-oriented tools to aid others with the development of their approach to increase equity in grantmaking. In appendix A, we describe example tools designed to assist funders and applicants to select and implement strategies that increase equity in grantmaking and reflect their policy and organizational context.

“

“We brainstorm together about how to overcome [challenges]. We meet as a group, come up with and give input on [strategies], and synthesize information and provide ideas back to [different project offices].”

— Study interviewee representing a Federal agency

When selecting strategies to increase equity, grantmakers may invest time and resources to communicate the new approach to potential applicants and build trust, particularly with organizations and groups that provide services to underrepresented communities. For example, reviewed resources encourage funders to expand the networks they use to announce new funding opportunities and participate in community events. These trust-building activities may encourage new organizations to apply for grant programs and create space to provide feedback on challenging or inequitable aspects of the grantmaking process. Study interviewees also emphasized the value of continued internal communications with funding staff to build organizational motivation to implement and refine equity initiatives. Communication efforts include describing goals and progress, holding training sessions to increase awareness of action steps, and sharing tools to streamline implementation and affect change.

By implementing strategies to increase equity in grantmaking, funders take a critical step toward addressing systemic inequities in the type of organizations, individuals, and communities that receive grant funding. Through their improvement of the grantmaking process, funders may enhance the equity of the grant-funded programs themselves. This report describes many new and promising action steps. Future research can develop an evidence base on the impact of these initiatives by continuing to center the voices of applicants, recipients, and the community that grant programs serve. Continued research will further empower grantmakers to identify effective strategies and increase equity in their processes.

About This Project

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Appendix A.

Example Resources or Tools for Further Exploration of Equity in Grantmaking

| Resource | Stage(s) of grantmaking | Primary audience | Description | Suggested use |
|--|--|------------------|--|--|
| <u>D5's Self-Assessment for Foundation Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)</u> , D5 Coalition ^a | 1. Preaward 3. Awarding of funding | Funders | Self-assessment checklist to reflect on opportunities to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion across five “strategic action arenas,” including grantmaking; the checklist considers four dimensions of DEI: gender, race, LGBT, and disability | Reflect on DEI-related policies and practices to guide internal discussions and identify opportunities for change |
| <u>Strategies for Driving Equity in Grantmaking Practice</u> , PEAK Grantmaking ^b | 3. Awarding of funding 4. Postaward | Funders | Action planner to identify strategic and operational changes in the grantmaking approach; includes key questions and suggested action steps for implementation | Enhance strategies to reduce bias in the decision-making process and use demographic data to measure equity |
| <u>Driving Equity with Demographic Data</u> , PEAK Grantmaking ^c | 1. Preaward 2. Applications 3. Awarding of funding 4. Postaward | Funders | Action planner on how to collect, process, and use demographic data to enhance grantmaking practices | Develop a strategy to use demographic data in grantmaking processes based on suggested action steps, with discussion related to accompanying self-reflection questions |
| <u>Decision-Making Tree for Prioritizing Racial Equity in Resource Allocation</u> , Bain et al. ^d | 1. Preaward 3. Awarding of funding | Funders | Description of the experience to create and use a decision-making tree to prioritize BIPOC communities in a grantmaking program | Consider an example of how one organization used a racial equity lens to inform development of a decision-making tool for a grant program |

^a D5 Coalition. (2016). *D5's self-assessment for foundation diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI)*. <https://www.d5coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/DEI-Self-Assessment-10.28.13.pdf>

^b PEAK Grantmaking. (2020). *Strategies for driving equity in grantmaking practice: Principles for peak grantmaking*. <https://www.peakgrantmaking.org/resource/strategies-for-driving-equity-in-grantmaking/>

^c PEAK Grantmaking. (2021). *Driving equity with demographic data: Principles for peak grantmaking*. <https://www.peakgrantmaking.org/resource/driving-equity-with-demographic-data/>

^d Bain, J., Harden, N., & Heim, S. (2020). Decision-making tree for prioritizing racial equity in resource allocation. *The Journal of Extension*, 58(5), 5.

| Resource | Stage(s) of grantmaking | Primary audience | Description | Suggested use |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <u>Re-Tool: Racial Equity in the Panel Process</u> , Savage et al. ^e | 2. Applications 3. Awarding of funding | Funders | Tool with guiding questions and recommendations to increase racial equity in the grant applicant review process | Consider discussion questions and suggested action steps to address racial bias through each phase of the panel process |
| <u>Strategies for National and State Groups to Equitably Identify People With Lived Experience</u> , U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) ^f | 1. Preaward 2. Applications 3. Awarding of funding 4. Postaward | Funders, grant applicants and recipients | Tip sheet to engage people with lived experience in developing programs, policies, and research to reflect the perspectives and needs of the communities served | Identify and engage people with lived experience by making a plan, working with partners, and using a variety of advertising methods |
| <u>Tips for Engaging Diverse Partners</u> , HHS ASPE ^g | 1. Preaward 2. Applications 4. Postaward | Grant applicants and recipients | Tip sheet on building relationships and enhancing engagement with partners and community members that bring diverse viewpoints and perspectives | Develop and inform plans to provide outreach and sustain relationships with a broader coalition of partners |
| <u>Ready for Equity in Workforce Development: Racial Equity Readiness Assessment Tool</u> , Race Forward and the Center for Social Inclusion ^h | 4. Postaward | Grant applicants and recipients | Assessment tool to help grant applicants (particularly workforce development organizations) identify strength areas and improvement opportunities along five core principles related to racial equity | Self-assess progress to increase racial equity using a systematic approach to identify opportunities for improvement |

^e Savage, E. (2019). *Re-tool: Racial equity in the panel process*. The Jerome Foundation. <https://www.jeromefdn.org/announcing-re-tool-racial-equity-panel-process>

^f Guerrero Ramirez, G., Amos, L., Mastri, A., Ruggiero, R., Jean-Baptiste, D., Wheatley, N., McKinney, T., Prior, K., De Leon, R., Sandoval-Lunn, M., Sutton, W., Washington, E., Erickson, L., & Benton, A. (2022). *Strategies for national and state groups to equitably identify people with lived experience*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

^g Fei, E., Amos, L., Bradley, K., Jacobs Johnson, C., Aikens, N., O'Neill, S., Baumgartner, S., Haile, G., Ruggiero, R., Balliet, D., Love, C., Marquez Benbow, L., Martinez, S., Jefferson, B., & Benton, A. (2022). *Tips for engaging diverse partners*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/934dada0240465383fb5bee435b57395/Tips-Engaging-Diverse-Partners.pdf>

^h Race Forward, & Center for Social Inclusion. (2018). *Ready for equity in workforce development: Racial equity readiness assessment tool*.

Appendix B.

Federal Equity Action Plans

This section lists the 24 Equity Action Plan summaries, published in 2022, that we reviewed for the study. To find updates to these Equity Action Plans for 2023 and beyond, please visit <https://www.performance.gov/equity/>, which includes a comprehensive list of each Equity Action Plan by agency and year.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NASA-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

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U.S. Agency for International Development. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/USAID-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/USDA-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of Commerce. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/DOC-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

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U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/DHS-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/HUD-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of the Interior. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/DOI-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of Justice. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/DOJ-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of State. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/State-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of Transportation. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/DOT-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of Treasury. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Treasury-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/VA-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EPA-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

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U.S. General Services Administration. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/GSA-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Office of Personnel Management. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/OPM-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Small Business Administration. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/SBA-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

U.S. Social Security Administration. (2022). Equity action plan summary. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/SSA-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf>

Appendix C.

Detailed Methodological Approach

To gather data for our study, we conducted (1) an environmental scan of publicly available literature and resources and (2) held interviews with Federal agency and philanthropy staff involved in the grantmaking process. The following sections include details on each of these activities for reference.

Environmental Scan

We began the environmental scan with an analysis of Federal agencies' Equity Action Plans to understand Federal-level activities to increase equity. We analyzed 24 agencies' Equity Action Plans, which they developed as a requirement of Executive Order 13895.¹ Our review considered strategies related to the four themes of our research questions—defining equity, measuring equity, increasing equity, and assessing equity—and information related to barriers to equity in the grantmaking process.

We also conducted a thorough web-based search of academic and gray literature to establish a broad understanding of governmental and philanthropic activities related to equity in grantmaking in peer-reviewed and gray literature. We first established criteria for review and inclusion in the study:

- Resource discusses equity in the **grantmaking process**, rather than equity challenges or achievements in the grant-funded programs and initiatives
- Resource focuses on **implementation and action steps** related to improving the grantmaking process
- Resource reflects experiences and approaches of **U.S.-based** grantmakers providing grants to U.S.-based organizations
- Resource was **released recently** (meaning in the past 10 years) or a seminal source published more than 10 years ago that is frequently cited in resources or recommended by interviewees

Because we intended to capture a wide array of resources and gray literature in an evolving field, we did not specify a type of study design or methodology that was eligible for inclusion.

We then identified resources using Google Scholar and conducted searches in June through August 2023 using the following terms:

1. “equity” + “grantmaking”
2. “equity” + “grants”
3. “equity” + “metrics”
4. “equity” + “measures”
5. “equity” + “grants” + “measures”
6. “equity” + “grantmaking” + “metric”
7. “state” + “grantmaking” + “equity”

Based on an initial review of resource abstracts, descriptions, or introductions and their alignment with our criteria for the study, we downloaded over 100 resources for a full review. Because we conducted a preliminary review based on resource abstracts, descriptions, or introductions, it is possible that we overlooked resources that may have had relevance to the research project. To help avoid this risk, we downloaded resources for full review when abstracts were ambiguous or we could not confirm whether the source met the inclusion criteria.

¹ We include the Equity Action Plans reviewed for this study in appendix B. The Equity Action Plans can also be found at the following website, as of June 20, 2023: The White House. (n.d.). Advancing equity and racial justice through the federal government. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/equity/#equity-plan-snapshots>.

When a resource met our inclusion criteria after the full review, we also examined its citations to identify potential additional resources that may merit a full review. If we found multiple resources that met our inclusion criteria produced by, or referencing, a particular organization, we explored that organization’s website for public statements, reports, blog posts, or other resources to review as well. We supplemented these resources with suggestions from study interviewees. Through this process, we identified additional gray literature for review according to our inclusion criteria. Ultimately, we identified 55 resources to include in the study based on our criteria and search of Google Scholar, citations, organizational websites, and study interviewee recommendations. Exhibit C.1 catalogs the included resources by the type of publishing entity.

Exhibit C.1 Breakdown of resources in the environmental scan, by type of publisher

| Publishing entity type | Count |
|---|-----------|
| Nonprofit organization | 14 |
| Federal governmental agency | 11 |
| Coalition of philanthropy professionals | 10 |
| Peer-reviewed journal | 8 |
| Think tank, research center, or research firm | 5 |
| Local government or local government network | 3 |
| Foundation | 2 |
| Magazine | 2 |
| Total | 55 |

For each identified source, we extracted and documented the following information into a standardized Excel spreadsheet:

- Background information including the author, title, type of resource (such as report, blog post, or transcript of congressional testimony), release/publication date
- Primary data source and analysis method
- Analysis limitations
- Equity in grantmaking definition statements
- Goal statements related to equity in grantmaking
- Example metrics, targets, and data sources used to measure equity in grantmaking
- Conclusions of the resource
- Description of approach and process to increasing equity in grantmaking during the preaward stage, collection of applications stage, awarding of funding stage, and postaward stage
- Identified barriers for grant applicants and recipients at the preaward stage, collection of applications stage, awarding of funding stage, and postaward stage
- Description of the results of the approach to increase equity, if applicable
- Actionable steps to implement and assess the approach to increase equity
- Key quotations

Interviews

To provide additional context and details on initiatives to increase equity in grantmaking and to identify lessons learned and best practices from implementing these initiatives, we then held interviews with grantmaking staff from the philanthropic sector and government institutions. Because of the time-bound nature of the study, we were only able to conduct a limited number of interviews, and we did not intend interviewees to be representative of all grantmaking contexts, focus areas, or staff. To guide these interviews, we created a discussion guide for semi-structured conversations, customized to reflect small nuances in the Federal or foundation perspectives, such as the existence of Executive Order 13985 to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities that guides the work of Federal grantmakers (see appendices E and F). The questions in the guide followed the four themes in the study research questions. The study team received approval for these interview guides from contract representatives at CEO before conducting interviews.

To identify potential interviewees who could speak to Federal grantmaking, we first selected staff from agencies that described specific approaches to increase equity in grantmaking in their Equity Action Plans. We then cross-referenced this list of agencies with participants recommended to us by DOL ETA staff with representatives who serve on an interagency Federal working group focused on increasing equity in grantmaking who have been involved in research studies, panel presentations, or other efforts to improve equity in the grantmaking process. Whenever possible, we selected potential interviewees who work in different focus areas to capture a broader array of strategies and experiences.

We also identified potential interviewees who work in grantmaking in the philanthropic sector, including foundations and nonprofit organizations supporting foundations, by reviewing the resources in the environmental scan. We noted any organizations that authored numerous resources or were featured in descriptions of innovative strategies. We also included individuals working in this sector, recommended by DOL CEO and ETA staff, who have been involved in panel presentations.

Having developed a list of potential interviewees, we recruited participants by emailing 7 nonfederal organizations and 11 Federal agencies.^j Between November 2023 and January 2024, we interviewed staff from three organizations in the philanthropic sector and five Federal agencies using a virtual conference platform. Three of these interviews were with individuals, and five of these interviews were group interviews conducted with multiple representatives of the same organization. Across these interviews, we interviewed a total of 19 representatives (15 representing Federal agencies and 4 from the philanthropic sector) whose job duties include drafting funding opportunity announcements, drafting applications, providing TA during applications, conducting monitoring and oversight of grant recipients, overseeing the entirety of their organization's grantmaking, or collaborating with other funders to increase equity in grantmaking. These individuals work with organizations that provide grants to advance work in health, education, climate, or scientific research. While we were able to capture some diversity in job duties and grantmaking focus, our sample is limited and not generalizable.

Four organizations in the philanthropic sector and six Federal agencies ultimately did not respond or responded outside of our data collection window.

^j This study is exempt from OMB approval processes as it did not collect data from 10 or more respondents outside the Federal Government.

We conducted interviews for 1 hour, with the same study team member leading each interview to ensure the quality and consistency of the data collection. Each interview included a notetaker. The study team also recorded the interview, and the notetaker reviewed the recording to ensure that the interview notes were complete and accurate and that they captured exact quotes. The interviewer and an additional study team member reviewed all notes for clarity and accuracy and to ensure the level of detail was consistent across each interview.

To analyze interview data and begin to triangulate findings with our environmental scan, we created an Excel database that built on the schema we used for our environmental scan. We then extracted responses from interviews into the following categories for consistency in analysis:

- Equity in grantmaking definition statements
- Process to create a definition of equity in grantmaking
- Goal statements or key metrics related to equity in grantmaking
- Description of how this definition of equity in grantmaking enhances the grantmaking process
- Description of approach and process to increasing equity in grantmaking during the preaward stage
- Description of approach and process to increase equity in grantmaking during the collection of applications stage
- Description of approach and process to increase equity in grantmaking during the awarding of funding stage
- Description of approach and process to increase equity in grantmaking during the postaward stage

- General recommendations for others related to action steps to increase equity in grantmaking
- Description of grant applicant or recipient-submitted data related to equity the institution uses and its suggestions for collecting these data
- Data related to equity not submitted by the grant applicant or recipient the institution uses and its data source
- Description of how the organization uses equity-related data
- Whether the organization is considering changes to the equity-related data it requests from grant applicants
- Other suggestions related to data or measurement to inform equity in grantmaking
- Other suggestions, reflections, or takeaways
- Key quotations

One study team member validated all interview analyses and extraction to ensure we included all relevant findings and for consistency in extraction.

Data Analysis

To analyze and triangulate data from resources and the interviews, the study team created an analysis document that categorized findings into four areas: definitions of equity in grantmaking, measuring equity in grantmaking, barriers to achieving equity in grantmaking, and action steps to increase equity in grantmaking. The study team sorted all extracted information from the resources and the interviews into these categories and further separated findings on barriers and action steps into the four stages of grantmaking (preaward, collection of applications, awarding of funding, postaward). The study team then reviewed the document to identify emergent themes in findings.

Study Limitations

Cultural understanding of equity and the study of equity in grantmaking are rapidly evolving, and because of the time-bound nature of the study, our findings may not always reflect the most current practices or challenges. While we attempted to capture some current practices through interviews with grantmakers, our sample size is small, representing only eight organizations. These interviews are not intended to be representative and instead provide only a snapshot of what some funders are planning or implementing to increase equity in their specific grantmaking contexts.

Throughout this report, we primarily use qualitative data from study interviews and from the environmental scan, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or populations. While some of the resources included in our study use quantitative data to help understand equity in grantmaking, these resources are specific to individual funders and may not be applicable to other grantmakers. The field as a whole would benefit from further research to help quantify barriers, grantmakers' use of different strategies, and the effect of these strategies on equity. As a result, we present our findings only as examples of what other grantmakers have considered to increase equity and what feedback they have heard from grant applicants and recipients on how to do so, not as rigorously tested models that could be replicated by all funders in every context.

Appendix D.

Bibliography of the 55 Environmental Scan Resources

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Appendix E.

Discussion Guide for Federal Interviewees

Introduction

Hello, thank you again for agreeing to speak with us today. My name is [interviewer] from Westat Insight, and my colleague is [colleague]. We are part of the team conducting research on increasing equity in grantmaking for the Department of Labor’s Chief Evaluation Office, in partnership with the Employment and Training Administration (or ETA).

Our study builds upon ETA’s ongoing analysis of equity in their grantmaking by learning how other grantmakers—including foundations, State government agencies, and other Federal agencies—assess and increase equity in their grantmaking processes. This call is part of a series of conversations with staff from organizations that have explored, and perhaps implemented efforts, to increase the equity in grantmaking.

We’re excited to learn more about your work and experience. We’re going to ask you about:

- **Your agency’s or division’s definition of equity in the context of grantmaking**
- **Steps already taken (or planning to take) to increase equity in grantmaking**
- **Data and analyses used to measure equity in grantmaking**

Informed Consent

As a reminder, your participation in this discussion is completely voluntary. If there is a question you would like to skip, just let us know. This discussion will last no more than 1 hour. We will take notes as we go along. With your permission, we would like to record this conversation. The recording will be used to back up our note taking and ensure we fully captured your comments and ideas. We will not share the recording or notes with anyone outside the study team, and we will destroy both at the conclusion of the study.

At the end of our study, we will write a summary of our research—including what we have learned from discussions with you and other experts in the field. The Department of Labor intends to make this report public so it can benefit other Federal agencies and grantmakers. We may use excerpts from what you share today in this report or other related summary reports, but we will anonymize your comments by citing quotes as from “a program officer at a federal agency,” for example. If there is anything you would like to share with us but would like to be fully anonymous—for example, shared without a description of the type of organization or role—please let us know, and we will do so.

Do we have your permission to proceed with the conversation? Can we start recording?

Before we start, do you have any questions about today’s discussion or about the study as a whole?

Defining Equity in Grantmaking

To begin our conversation, we're hoping to learn more about how different Federal agencies have approached equity in grantmaking. We read the Equity Action Plan for your agency and Executive Order 13985 before this call. We'd like to learn about how different agencies have applied this definition to their grantmaking. Also, we can put the definition of equity from this EO into the comments section of the meeting platform, if that is useful for this conversation

[Text for typed comment, as needed] “the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals” and noted equity based on race and ethnicity; religion; sexual orientation and gender; disability; locality—rural or urban; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.”

1. How does [agency], or your group within [agency], define equity in the grantmaking process?
 - Probe: Definition focuses more on equity among grantees or communities served by the grantees, or both?
 - Probe: Definition mentions specific demographic groups and why that focus (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, geography, disability)
 - What was the process to develop this definition? Were there key contributors in drafting the definition or useful resources that provided inspiration or reference?
 - Can you share the definition with us?
2. [If they have a definition in Q1] How does this definition enhance the grantmaking process? For example, is the definition included in a NOFO (Notice of Funding Opportunity) or FOA (Funding Opportunity Announcement) to increase awareness among applicants or used to inform review criteria to select grant awardees?

Increasing Equity in Grantmaking

That's helpful context, thank you. Now we have a few questions on approaches to increase equity in the grantmaking process. Please describe completed activities, as well as those you considered but have not put into action yet. We're interested in all ideas!

3. What steps has [agency] taken to increase equity in any phase of the grantmaking process?
 - Probe: preaward phase including feedback on drafts of the funding application or defining the scope of the program
 - Probe: application process including targeted outreach and recruitment announcements, advertisements or webinars, technical assistance
 - Probe: awarding funding including antibias training for reviewers
 - Probe: postaward including streamlining monitoring and data submission requirements
 - Did you find the activities to be helpful in the effort to increase equity? Would you suggest these activities to other grantmakers? If not, why?
 - Were there best practices or lessons learned from implementing these activities?
4. Do your [agency's] NOFOs or FOAs include requests for information about applicants' approaches to increase equity (sometimes called an “equity plan”)?
 - If so, do you feel the responses to these questions have been insightful and/or indicated a meaningful focus on equity improvement?

5. Are there other actions your [agency] is planning to implement or considered to improve equity in the grantmaking process?

- Probe: Setting goals for measured change in equity
- If planning to implement, what is the timeline?
- If considered and paused or declined, have you identified challenges or concerns with these potential activities?

Measuring Equity in Grantmaking

To identify gaps or improvements in equity within grantmaking, we look to data and measures, which can be tricky. We'd like to ask about how your agency is using (or hopes to use) data to measure equity in grantmaking.

We have a few questions about data gathered, and then we will turn to analyses based on those data.

6. What data related to equity in grantmaking does your agency typically collect from grant applicants?

- Probe: For example, operating budget of an organization, the location of the populations served by the grant, how many staff members, demographics of the organization's board or leadership team
- Do you collect other equity-related data after the application submission phase? (For example, through postaward monitoring requirements or grantee surveys)

7. Do you use publicly available or restricted data sources to analyze equity in grantmaking?

- Probe: specific data source and specific variables (e.g., 1099 data)
- For restricted data sources from your own agency, do you have suggestions to gain access?

- For data from other agencies, can you talk about the process to complete an MOU [memorandum of understanding]?
- Do these other data sources link or crosswalk to the grantees' application data? If so, which variable supports the linkage? (For example, EIN or employer identification number)

8. Is [agency] considering changes to the equity-related data requested from grant applicants? If so, what changes, and why?

- Probe: For example, operating budget of an organization, the location of the populations served by the grant, how many staff members, demographics of the organization's board or leadership team

Turning to questions about analyses based on the collected data:

9. Are there data you have considered collecting but ultimately decided against it? Why?

10. What kinds of analyses of equity in grantmaking has your organization completed using the data sources we just discussed? What have you learned from these analyses?

- Probe: We're particularly interested in examples of graphs or tables that other Federal agencies have used to better understand the equity in their grantmaking processes. Do you have an example of analyses results that you could share with us?

11. What advice do you have for Federal agencies looking to collect and analyze data to assess equity in grantmaking?

- Probe: variables you would or would not recommend using or analyses that were particularly helpful for decision making

Concluding Questions

Thank you so much for your time and for being willing to get into the weeds with us on all things data. We have three concluding questions to ask you before we wrap up.

12. We know [agency] has a lot of knowledge and experience working on equity in grantmaking. For others who are starting their work in this area, are there resources or tools that you would recommend to them?
13. We asked about your advice on data, but we would also like to know if you have more general advice or lessons learned for Federal agencies looking to increase equity in their grantmaking?
14. Lastly, are there other staff members at [agency] that you would recommend we speak to on this topic? Or staff members at other Federal agencies?
 - Probe: Who? Why? Contact info?

Thank you again; we greatly appreciate your time and expertise in this area.

Appendix F.

Discussion Guide for Foundations and Nonprofits

Introduction

Hello, thank you again for agreeing to speak with us today. My name is [interviewer] from Westat Insight, and my colleague is [colleague]. We are part of the team conducting research on increasing equity in grantmaking for the Department of Labor’s (or DOL) Chief Evaluation Office, in partnership with the Employment and Training Administration.

Our study builds upon DOL’s ongoing analysis of equity in their grantmaking by learning how other grantmakers—including foundations, State government agencies, and other Federal agencies—assess and increase equity in their grantmaking processes. This call is part of a series of conversations with staff from organizations that have explored, and perhaps implemented efforts, to increase the equity in grantmaking.

We’re excited to learn more about your work and experience and how your organization [increases/supports increases to] equity in grantmaking. We’re going to ask you about:

- **Your organization’s definition of equity in the context of grantmaking**
- **Steps [taken/recommended] to increase equity in grantmaking**
- **Data and analyses [used/suggested] to measure equity in grantmaking**

Informed Consent

As a reminder, your participation in this discussion is completely voluntary. If there is a question you would like to skip, just let us know. This discussion will last no more than 1 hour. We will take notes as we go along. With your permission, we would like to record this conversation. The recordings will be used to back up our note taking and ensure we fully captured your comments and ideas. We will not share the recording or notes with anyone outside the study team, and we will destroy both at the conclusion of the study.

At the end of our study, we will write a summary of our research—including what we have learned from discussions with you and other experts in the field. The Department of Labor intends to make this report public so it can benefit other grantmakers. We may use excerpts from what you share today in this report or other related summary reports, but we will anonymize your comments by citing quotes as from [“project director at a foundation” or “program manager at a nonprofit that consults with grantmakers”], for example. If there is anything you would like to share with us but would like to be fully anonymous—for example, shared without a description of the type of organization or role—please let us know, and we will do so.

Do we have your permission to proceed with the conversation? Can we start recording?

Before we start, do you have any questions about today’s discussion or about the study as a whole?

Defining Equity in Grantmaking

- 1. [For grantmakers]** Does [foundation name] have a definition for equity within the context of grantmaking?
 - Probe: Definition focuses more on equity among grantees, communities served by the grantees, or both?
 - Probe: Definition mentions specific demographic groups and why that focus (e.g., race/ethnicity gender, geography, disability)
 - What was the process to develop this definition? Were there key contributors in drafting the definition or useful resources that provided inspiration or reference?
 - Can you share the definition with us?
- 2. [For nonprofits consulting with grantmakers]** We understand that your organization has supported foundations to explore approaches to increase equity of their grantmaking processes. What common themes have you seen in the foundations' definitions of equity in grantmaking?
 - Probe: Definition focuses more on equity among grantees, communities served by the grantees, or both?
 - Probe: Definition mentions specific demographic groups and why that focus (e.g., race/ethnicity gender, geography, disability)
 - What was the foundation's general process to develop a definition? Were there key contributors in drafting the definition or useful resources that provided inspiration or reference?
 - Can you share, or point us to, an example definition?

- 3. [If they mention having a definition in Q1]** How does this definition enhance the grantmaking process? For example, is the definition included in a grant announcement to increase awareness among applicants or used to inform review criteria to select grant awardees?

Increasing Equity in Grantmaking

That's helpful context, thank you. Now we have a few questions on approaches to increase equity in the grantmaking process. Please describe completed activities, as well as those you considered but have not put into action yet. We're interested in all ideas!

- 4. What steps has your organization [taken/ encouraged foundations to complete] to increase equity in the grantmaking process?**
 - Probe: preaward phase including feedback on drafts of the funding application or defining the scope of the program
 - Probe: application process including targeted outreach and recruitment announcements, advertisements or webinars, technical assistance
 - Probe: awarding funding including antibiotics training for reviewers)
 - Probe: postaward including streamlining monitoring and data submission requirements
 - Did you find the activities to be helpful in the effort to increase equity? Would you suggest these activities to other grantmakers? If not, why?
 - Were there best practices or lessons learned from implementing these activities?

5. [For grantmakers] Do your grant solicitations include requests for information about applicants' approaches to increase equity (sometimes called an "equity plan")?

- If so, do you feel the responses to these questions been insightful and/or indicated a meaningful focus on equity improvement?

6. Are there other actions your organization has considered [recommending to foundations] to improve equity in the grantmaking process?

- Probe: Setting goals for measured change in equity
- Have you identified challenges or concerns with these potential activities?

Measuring Equity and Increases in Equity in Grantmaking

To identify gaps or improvements in equity within grantmaking, we look to data and measures, which can be tricky. We'd like to ask about your organization's experience with data collection and analysis related to equity in grantmaking.

7. What data related to equity in grantmaking does your organization typically [collect/recommend that grantmakers collect] from potential grantees through the application process?

- Probe: for example, operating budget of an organization, the location of the populations served by the grant, how many staff members, demographics of the organization's board or leadership team
- Do you [collect/recommend collecting] other equity-related data after the application submission phase? (For example, through postaward monitoring requirements or grantee surveys)

8. Do you [use/recommend using] publicly available or other private data sources to analyze equity in grantmaking?

- Probe: specific data source and specific variables
- For private data sources, do you have suggestions to gain access?
- Do these other data sources link or crosswalk to the grantees' application data? If so, which variable supports the linkage? (For example, EIN or employer identification number)

9. [For grantmakers] Is your organization considering future changes to the equity-related data requested from grant applicants? If so, what changes and why?

- Probe: for example, operating budget of an organization, the location of the populations served by the grant, how many staff members, demographics of the organization's board or leadership team

10. Are there data you have considered [collecting/recommending that grantmakers collect] but ultimately decided against? Why?

11. What kinds of analyses of equity in grantmaking has your organizations [completed /recommended] using the data sources we just discussed? What have you learned from these analyses?

- Probe: We're particularly interested in examples of graphs or tables that grantmakers have used to better understand the equity in their grantmaking processes. Do you have an example of analyses results that you could share with us?

12. What advice do you have for grantmakers looking to collect and analyze data to assess equity in grantmaking?

- Probe: variables you would or would not recommend using or analyses that were particularly helpful for decision making

Conclusion

Thank you so much for your time and for being willing to get into the weeds with us on all things data. We have three concluding questions to ask you before we wrap up.

13. We know you have a lot of knowledge and experience working on equity in grantmaking. For others who are just starting their work in this area, are there resources or tools that you would recommend to them?

14. We asked about your advice on data, but we would also like to know if you have more general advice or lessons learned for grantmakers who are looking to increase equity in their grantmaking?

15. Lastly, are there other organizations – nonprofits, foundations, government entities – who you would recommend that we also speak to?
 - Probe: Who? Why? Contact info?

Thank you again; we greatly appreciate your time and expertise in this area.

Appendix G.

Endnotes

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