



IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FUNDERS SHARE STORIES OF CHANGE

A Companion Piece to *Foundations Respond to Crisis: Lasting Change?*

Series Creators: Naomi Orensten & Chloe Heskett

In a series of posts on the CEP blog in winter 2022, leaders from eight foundations shared — in their own words — the most important changes they have made at their foundation since 2020 that they plan to sustain going forward. This series shares these funders’ stories in their entirety. It is our hope that the changes described here foster learning and inspire further action.

For years, foundation leaders have known that they could be working differently and in ways that they believe would lead to greater impact. Calls for changes in practice have come for decades, too, from many philanthropic and nonprofit leaders who have asked funders to, for example, provide more flexible and unrestricted funding; streamline and simplify processes; listen to, trust, and support their grantees; and pursue racial equity and racial justice.

But there had been little evidence of change until the spring of 2020, when many foundations shifted their practices as the scale of the COVID-19 crisis became clear.

As described in CEP’s recently released research report, [Foundations Respond to Crisis: Lasting Change?](#), foundation leaders report that their foundations are now working differently than they were in early 2020 — and that they plan to continue most of these changes in a post-pandemic future. Among these changes are a reduction in administrative burdens for grantees, including grant application and reporting requirements, increased unrestricted funding, and new efforts to advance racial equity.

This is not to suggest, obviously, that challenges do not remain. The data reveals continued shifts in practice but it also reveals disconnects, barriers, and additional opportunities for further change — and foundation leaders themselves are quick to acknowledge they still have a lot of work to do.

To foster learning and inspire further action, this series shares examples of how eight foundations — across a range of foundation types, sizes, approaches, and geographies — have made and are making change. In the following pages, foundation leaders, in their own words, respond to the following question: **Since early 2020, what is one of the most important changes that you made at your foundation that you plan to sustain going forward, and why?**

Key Findings from CEP report *Foundations Respond to Crisis: Lasting Change?*

- 

1 → Virtually all foundation leaders say their foundations are working differently now than in early 2020. They most frequently report streamlining processes to reduce the burden on grantees and providing more unrestricted support—changes they say they will sustain.
- 

2 → Even as they acknowledge they have much yet to do, most foundation leaders say that racial equity is a more explicit consideration in how they conduct their work, and many are modifying their practices as a result. This includes changing how they identify applicants, providing more funding to organizations supporting Black and Latino communities, listening more intensively to grantees, funding systems change, and collaborating.
- 

3 → Foundations that have boards with more racial diversity tended to adopt more practices to support grantees and the communities they serve. Yet, nearly half of leaders say that their boards are the biggest impediment to their foundation’s ability to advance racial equity.

We are grateful to the eight foundations sharing their stories of change in this resource. We truly hope that these rich, candid, and detailed examples inspire discussion and support you to consider what changes your foundation can make to be more impactful, to uplift the communities and grantees with whom you work, and to create a better and more just world.

Naomi Orensten, Director, Research, CEP

Chloe Heskett, Editor & Writer, Programming and External Relations, CEP

Discussion Questions

To foundation staff and board members, as you read these stories of change, we encourage you to discuss changes at your foundation and how working differently can help you be more effective and impactful. We invite you to use the below questions as a starting point for reflection and discussion and encourage you to discuss additional questions that these stories raise for you.

1. How is your foundation working different now in comparison to early 2020? What are the most important changes you have made to your work?
2. Is racial equity a more explicit consideration in your work? If yes, in what ways is it more explicit? If not, why not?
3. Which changes are for the better? Which changes do you plan to keep, and why?
4. How do you know whether your efforts are making a difference? How have your grantees experienced those changes?
5. When it comes to working differently and making change at your foundation, what are the main challenges and opportunities for your foundation — both internally and externally?

PARTICIPATING FOUNDATIONS

WALTER & ELISE HAAS FUND



WALTER & ELISE HAAS FUND

Recommitting to Racial Justice

Throughout 2020, the Walter & Elise Haas Fund embraced every opportunity to learn from our Bay Area community about the effects of a global pandemic and a racial justice reckoning. Our grantmaking, both the what and the how, changed in response to the insights from grantees and the communities they serve and in response to deepening connections between us as staff and trustees.

We came together as staff and board many times in 2020, creating an open forum for connection, reflection, and action. From [listening to community, going on record](#), and as [this blog](#) describes, changing our organizational structure and grantmaking, **the most important change we've made is to ensure our work reflects our intention, explicitly and vigorously, to address justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion**. This change is unfolding in each of us as people and as grantmakers. It can be seen in the (re)design of our grant applications, award letters, and transactions. It can be seen in the prioritizing of reflection and learning with our grantees, on their terms. It can be seen in the work we have done to dismantle our internal hierarchies and in supporting the professional development and continuous learning of all of our staff. And it can be seen in the creation of a new racial justice cohort as well as a new staff role focused on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion across the Fund's grantmaking and operations.



The most important change we've made is to ensure our work reflects our intention, explicitly and vigorously, to address justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

When it came to renewing our commitment to racial justice grantmaking, the way we worked, and what we worked for, it was trust-based practices that resonated with us the most:

- Board members trusted the results of our collective racial justice grantmaking inquiry and allocated from the corpus to fund a racial justice cohort without requiring an inventory of vetted recipients first, ceding decision-making authority to staff.

- We trusted the leadership of then-Program Associate Faiza Bukhari to design the new portfolio. She worked with staff to craft multiyear, general operating support grants to Bay Area Black-led, community-based organizations and coalitions.
- We trusted the cohort was doing the work. No proposals. No written reports. We are privileged to continue to learn how these grantees inspire social transformation through civic education and community organizing and build BIPOC political power by encouraging participation in democratic processes.

The work, the intention, and the trust are here to stay. In 2021:

- We trusted community and expanded the racial justice portfolio to include organizations mobilizing in the Bay Area to end racist attacks against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
- We trusted our Native American elders, using their stories and guidance to walk our entire organization through an understanding of [Bay Area land repatriation](#) and its relationship to our grantmaking. We committed to giving [institutional Shuumi](#), and matching, 2:1, individual Shuumi given by staff, trustees, and descendants.
- We trusted Faiza's leadership. She is now the program lead (we have retired the term "program officer") for both our racial justice grantmaking and our arts grantmaking that builds resilient communities.
- Board members trusted what we learned, sharing staff's resolve to work in solidarity with our community partners towards a shared goal of dismantling anti-Blackness and defeating white supremacy. As a result, our budget for racial justice grantmaking has been doubled for 2022.

We're not finished making changes that matter, changes that advance racial justice, and changes that foster belonging and well-being. Trust us.

Jamie Allison, Executive Director & **Anna Hernandez**, Strategist, Justice, Equity & Learning

When news of the novel coronavirus was disclosed in early 2020, Health Forward Foundation was working to define a new purpose and develop strategies that will guide our work for the foreseeable future. As we witnessed the pervasive inequities highlighted by COVID-19 among people of color, showing greater rates of exposure, infections, and death due to pre-existing disparities in health access, treatment, and economic conditions, we knew that our response must be to accelerate this work to recast our leadership, advocacy, and resources to our new established purpose.

In January 2022 we [announced](#) our new purpose: every day, we work to support and build inclusive, powerful, healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems. This higher call for Health Forward's staff, board of directors, and Community Advisory Committee challenges us to humbly live this purpose, with immense care, deep conviction, and bold action that results in fair and just communities where everyone can be healthy and thrive.

As we continue to respond to the pandemic and determine how we deploy our leadership, advocacy, and resources, our [focus](#) has shifted to solutions and policies that address racism built into our systems and that build wealth to improve our region's long-term health and wellness. A sample of the purpose driven actions, both internal and external, that Health Forward is leading and supporting include the following:

- **Establishing [The Office of Race and Reconciliation](#):** A [partnership](#) with local government and citizens with lived experience to redress historical and current disinvestments in the city of Kansas City, Missouri (KCMO) as well as to reconcile race inequities in KCMO city policy and practice. Health Forward's goal with this partnership is to reduce the uneven deployment of city resources, disinvestment, systemic racism, and address other social influencers of health, thereby reduce the resulting disparities in health faced by residents of color.
- **Launching the [Kansas City Health Equity Learning Action Network](#):** Health Forward and the Kansas City Health Collaborative (KCHC) in partnership with the Institute of Healthcare Improvement (IHI) have convened the region's health ecosystem (including, for example, Health Systems, Public Health, Community-Based Organizations, physicians, and people with lived experience) to assert a common agenda and collectively address the factors that lead to inequalities in health access, treatment, and optimal health outcomes.



Every day, we work to support and build inclusive, powerful, healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems.

- **Prioritizing Racial Equity in Asset Management:** We understand that all facets of Health Forward must advance racial equity and economic inclusion. In partnership with the Finance and Investment Committee of our board, in 2021 we aligned our investment policy with this aim, which calls for including race and ethnicity information in the selection of the Foundation asset fund managers. As a start, \$60M is now managed by black and brown majority owned, underrepresented fund managers. This represents approximately seven percent of the total investment portfolio.
- **Focusing on Race, Ethnicity and Language Data (R.E.L.):** Health Forward is prioritizing and promoting the collection, understanding, and use of R.E.L data in quality improvement (i.e., screening, prevention, and treatment). The Foundation, along with partners, urged the governors of Kansas and Missouri to ensure that state and local health departments, public and private health care institutions, and public and private laboratories standardize, collect, and share race, ethnicity, and zip code data with the respective departments of health. A foundation priority, we believe that complete and accurate R.E.L. data are critical to improvements in access to care, ensuring effective and timely treatment, and advancing health equity.

Graciela Couchonnal, Ph.D., Vice President of Strategy and Impact



Helping Ourselves First – So We Can Help Others

[Lumina Foundation](#) decided about seven years ago to put racial equity at the heart of our work. This had always been important to us, but now it takes center stage. It is our mission as we help all Americans get a fair shot at learning, earning, and contributing their talents.

So, we began internal discussion sessions to dive deeper into how racial equity and justice issues affect not only our grantees – but also our own staff. This led to some difficult but valuable conversations, followed by inspiring blogs and videos that shared our personal histories and struggles with racism. My [story](#), and those of my colleagues [Scott Jenkins](#) and [Paola Santana](#), made a huge impact.



We began internal discussion sessions to dive deeper into how racial equity and justice issues affect not only our grantees – but also our own staff.

Then, the COVID-19 crisis hit. We took a step back from these efforts as we focused on pressing health, safety and logistical needs from our remote locations. We made quick improvements to ease the burden on our grantees, including opening an online grantee portal, instituting electronic payments, and helping to find fiscal partners when needed. We also expanded our [Racial Equity and Justice Fund](#) in the wake of the [tragic, senseless killing of George Floyd](#).

All of this was crucial and necessary. But what about our internal progress?

Recently, we gathered together as a staff again. We engaged in a long-overdue discussion about whiteness – from privilege to microaggressions to outright disparity – and how it manifests in our internal culture, particularly for colleagues who are Black, Indigenous or people of color. During this meeting, we realized that while we instituted vital changes for our grantees and partners during the pandemic, we neglected to give the same attention to how we operate and engage with each other every day.

And – that matters a lot because if we are to help Americans build better lives through the power of learning, we must first help ourselves.

So, it would be easy for me to describe how we've begun preliminary discussions with our partners about their commitment and growth around racial equity. That is truly a step forward. But I'd add that we also need to do more to receive and act on feedback from our partners.

And it would be easy to describe the progress we've made on racial equity, diversity and inclusion. We've launched new and innovative initiatives and partnerships to break down [barriers that prevent](#) students of color from getting the valuable credentials and degrees they deserve. And we've hosted high-level "[Equity First](#)" webinars with leaders and policymakers, where we explore the causes and solutions to structural racism in education.

Yes, we've made real progress. But there is still a long way to go.

As we head into a brand new year and beyond, we know how to move forward. We realize that difficult discussions are inherent in every effort toward racial equity. As funders and leaders of positive change for America's students, we must go beyond discussions to bold actions – both internal and external.

Only then will we create the lasting changes needed for a brighter, more equitable future.

Susan D. Johnson, Ph.D., Director of Operations and Grants Administration

Like many Foundations, we responded to the [Call to Action issued by the Council on Foundations](#) that encouraged philanthropy to make changes that would support our nonprofit partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mary Black Foundation implemented many changes to meet the commitments in the pledge, including:

- Loosening or eliminating restrictions on current grants
- Making new grants unrestricted
- Reducing/postponing reporting requirements & site visits
- Contributing to community-based emergency response funds
- Communicating proactively and regularly with nonprofit partners
- Committing to listening to partners to inform decision making
- Supporting grants advocating for public policy change
- Considering making some or all of these emergency practices permanent

Prior to March 2020, many of our grants were already general operating support. However, in response to the pandemic, we converted those that were not to unrestricted grants, including grants that were for events that had to be cancelled. We listened to our nonprofit partners and increased our giving to exceed our annual payout amount in order to support basic needs, growing mental health concerns, and healthcare and education gaps that widened due to the pandemic.

We listened to the needs voiced by our partners, but we also paid attention to who we weren't hearing from. After reviewing grant requests, our team of staff asked ourselves, "Who did not submit a request for funding?" In many cases, nonprofit leaders were too busy addressing the immediate needs of their organization and/or the people they serve to take the time to ask for help. These tended to be smaller organizations that provide direct services to historically disadvantaged communities. In those cases, we provided unsolicited, general operating support grants.

We also sped up our grantmaking process and pivoted from our usual grantmaking focus to address immediate needs. For example, we used a rapid response grant to fund a COVID relief effort established by the local United Way to assist people most impacted by the health, social, and economic impacts of the pandemic with basic needs like food and shelter. We also contributed to a small business recovery fund that provided forgivable loans to

small businesses that were not eligible or did not have the capacity to apply for the Paycheck Protection Program and other federal relief. Many of these businesses were woman- or minority-owned.

As a local funder serving one county in South Carolina, we have deep partnerships with our funded organizations. In some cases, we have been working together for 25 years. We rely heavily on check-ins and site visits as a way to build relationship with and listen to our nonprofit partners. While we paused all site visits for most of 2020, one of the most important things we did during the height of the pandemic was to check-in on the wellbeing of our partners. We wanted to hear not only what we as a funder could do to support their organizations, but also how their teams were doing as individual people living and working through a pandemic. Based on their responses, we began offering Caring Conversations, facilitated virtual self-care sessions open to all nonprofit and social service sector staff members.



We listened to the needs voiced by our partners, but we also paid attention to who we weren't hearing from.

I'm proud of the way the board of trustees and staff of the Mary Black Foundation have supported our community through the pandemic. While these changes — and many more — were put in place during a crisis, the value we have seen has led to their becoming permanent changes in our practice.

Molly Talbot-Metz, MPH, President/CEO

In 2018, Mortenson Family Foundation’s Board, a nine member all-family board, embedded a commitment to equity into the Foundation’s newly revamped mission statement. Two years later, at the outset of 2020, we knew that we needed to do more to respond to the dual crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd here in Minneapolis, where the Foundation is based. It was a catalyst for our board to make eight firm commitments of change to ensure we center racial equity in our work.

These eight commitments of change, described in more detail [here](#), signified a deepening of the mission statement created in 2018 and an acceleration in its implementation. These changes included increased funding to organizations led by and for community and leaders of color, more funding to changing systems, and increasing the percentage of our investments managed by and for BIPOC communities.

One key change has been a radical reimagining of our grantmaking committees: we invited community members to join these committees, historically composed exclusively of board members.

Our Foundation doesn’t have absolute wisdom on advancing equity; we are still learning much as we implement change. However, as we have prioritized partnership and sharing power with the community we serve, we would like to share what we have learned along the way.

To start, you have to begin

We began with just one of our grantmaking committees — the Sustaining Environmental Systems Committee, which makes grantmaking decisions for our environmental program area. Without knowing exactly what shape the new committees would take or how this would change the work of the grantmaking committees, we began.

Invest in relationship building

We put a lot of thought into how we were going to do community outreach. The environment portfolio has a focus on water quality, so we reached out to those whose work touches on water quality, from farmers to environmental educators to Native users and environment justice protectors. In addition to sector diversity, we were intentional about ensuring significant race and gender diversity. We took time to build meaningful relationships, slowed down to talk and listen in carefully crafted conversations that created space for relationship building, and stayed open to various possibilities. This relational approach is deepening our thinking about how we do our work, in addition to what we do. For example, while we have historically only funded 501(c)(3)s, we are now

thinking about expanding funding to other types of entities or individuals. Out of respect for these leaders’ time and expertise, we also intentionally compensated them.

Bring your board along with you

Together with our board and staff, we held seven focus groups with more than 70 community members. Something remarkable happened very quickly in this process: as the members of the board on the environment grantmaking committee listened and learned first-hand, heard new and diverse perspectives in real time (including critical feedback that could only be delivered because trust was established), and connected with community members, they became even more deeply invested in the change we are making. And, in turn, this increasing commitment to sharing power and working in partnership with the community ensures that this change is lasting — that it will become a fundamental part of how the Foundation does business.



We have prioritized partnership and sharing power with the community we serve.

Patience, persistence, and the freedom to fail

Shifting the way that we make grant decisions — changing fundamentally the structure and process of the work we do — is taking patience, persistence, and iteration. We were — and are — creating the systems as we implement the systems, and as we set out to make these changes we gave ourselves the ‘freedom to fail.’ There were many points along the way when we might have said, “This is too hard.” Instead, we said, “Let’s figure out how we can push through.”

We don’t need all the answers to move the work on our racial equity commitments forward. We do need to balance the urgency of the work and ensuring the work is lasting.

Donna Dalton, Executive Director, **Danyelle O’Hara**, Community Relationship Officer - Sustaining Environmental Systems and Strengthening Developing Communities, and **Ambar Hanson**, Community Relationship Officer - Expanding Opportunities for Children and Families

Building The Plane While Flying It

Timing is everything. In January 2020, Rose Community Foundation — with new executive leadership and an eager board and staff — unveiled its first [new strategic plan](#) since the Foundation’s creation 25 years prior. We intended to pause our grantmaking for at least two quarters to operationalize the new plan. Less than two months later, COVID-19 shut down the world, and we could not sit on the sidelines.

Crises are not without opportunities. While many of the changes we’ve made were envisioned by our new plan, the crises of the past two years greatly accelerated our rate of change. We were able to shed longstanding practices that no longer served us or our community and lean into our new commitments and aspirations more quickly, deeply, and flexibly than we had imagined possible.



We were able to shed longstanding practices that no longer served us or our community and lean into our new commitments and aspirations more quickly, deeply, and flexibly than we had imagined possible.

We had already committed to shifting from a knowing organization to a learning organization, and COVID required us to quickly immerse ourselves in learning a landscape replete with new terminology, new concerns, and new partners. Propelled by the pandemic’s disparate impacts on communities of color — as well as the nationwide dialogue on racial justice following George Floyd’s murder — we embarked on a series of 50+ “listening and learning” conversations with [BIPOC-led and -serving grassroots organizations](#), which ultimately culminated in new learnings, new relationships, and new grantees.

Our strategic plan aimed to dismantle our longstanding grantmaking silos and rearrange our work in pursuit of equity/justice and inclusion/engagement, and the events of the past two years accelerated this evolution. Pre-2020 data showed that our region’s prosperity was not experienced equitably, with vast disparities occurring along racial, gender, and geographic lines. COVID-19 shone a bright light on those disparities — and exacerbated them — across a wide range of issues. We prioritized populations most disparately

impacted by the pandemic and racial injustice in our community grantmaking while expanding our investments in the policy and advocacy arena.

We had already declared inclusion to be one of our core values and strategic goals, and the crises combined with intentionality and technology to transform the way nonprofit organizations interact with us. Wanting to lower the barriers of access and open the door to relevant new organizations, we launched the Foundation’s first large-scale open RFP — accelerating our pivot toward competitive, open, and transparent grant cycles that allow us to better understand and impact the ecosystems in which we are funding.

Colorado foundations collaborate often, but the pandemic amplified that partnership ethos even more. Numerous pooled funds targeting specific populations or issues emerged at multiple foundations, and we supported nearly every one. We also partnered with The Denver Foundation and Community First Foundation to launch a zero-interest [Metro Denver Nonprofit Loan Fund](#) prioritizing BIPOC-led/serving nonprofits, who — as a group — had not fared well in the federal pandemic emergency loan program or, historically, in the commercial banking markets. And we are now partnering with Governor Jared Polis to house a [Colorado Afghan Evacuee Support Fund](#) to raise and deploy philanthropic resources to the organizations assisting local Afghan evacuees.

As a community foundation, an important component of our partnership landscape is our donor-advised fundholders. While our DAFs have always been highly active, the crises of the past two years provided unprecedented opportunities to activate these donor partnerships even more — from hosting frequent webinars and virtual panels to invitations to leverage their philanthropy by supporting our COVID response and racial justice pooled funds to opportunities to review grant applications curated to align with their interests and the community’s urgent needs.

The strength of a strategic plan is tested by how it informs and performs in times of rapid change and unanticipated needs. External events forced us to build our new plane while flying it, but also provided the tailwinds to propel us to our intended destinations faster.

Lindy Eichenbaum Lent, President and CEO

Every year, philanthropy produces new strategies and research on what it takes to transform communities outside our office walls — but it’s tougher to shine the light of these lessons into our own processes. Real, durable change requires urgency of action, but takes time to reveal its results.

For nearly fifteen years, Segal Family Foundation (SFF) has iterated on what it means to be an American-funded foundation that works in Sub-Saharan Africa. In early years, our process was a familiar story: American staff with experience working in our focus countries made site visits, aggregated recommendations of promising organizations, and ultimately, made grant decisions. For its first few years, SFF made project-based grants, within sector focus areas, and often to organizations helmed by Americans. By the start of 2020, we were singing a different tune. SFF made only unrestricted grants and was shifting our nonprofit partners to multi-year agreements. All of our grant decisions were being made by African staff in country offices, and African-led organizations made up 75% of our community of over 200 partners. Though this represented a huge leap in practice, the pandemic allowed us to yet again re-examine our perspective on how we could better deliver on the belief that [funding in Africa must be African-led](#).

While our methodology had changed substantially over the years, the structure of our team still reflected our original founding. We often spent time trying to explain to other funders and even our own partners that our grant decisions and support services were not emanating from our New Jersey office. It became clear that to sustainably practice a different type of philanthropy, we needed to codify it with changes to our organogram.

In practice, SFF has been a place-based funder for many years, but starting in 2021, we shifted to a ‘hubs model,’ formally placing our Africa offices in Dar Es Salaam, Kampala, Kigali, Lilongwe and Nairobi at the heart of strategy and budget decisions. Each hub, with the guidance of our partner community and network of regional advisors, autonomously manages its own set of grant priorities and support programs based on the social impact opportunities and challenges in the countries they work in. “Grantmaking as a process of deploying capital is all well and good,” reflected our director of strategy, Dedo Baranshamaje, “but change making is all the things beyond money — relationships, advice, trust, sharing resources. The hubs model makes clear how we can provide value through the gathering of these connections. For us it’s about institutionally reorganizing our resources and people to serve organizations by doubling down our investment and

trust in local networks.” Placing hubs at the heart of our organogram puts front and center our greatest collaborative value proposition to our friends in philanthropy — trustworthy, real-time intel and networks that can only be gained through expert local teams.



For us it’s about institutionally reorganizing our resources and people to serve organizations by doubling down our investment and trust in local networks.

For any foundation, shifting grant practices in a more equitable direction is not durable without concretely altering processes and staffing involved. Put plainly by our executive director, Andy Bryant, “Instituting the hubs model is simply the formal recognition that SFF, indeed international development, works best when it places maximum agency in the hands of proximate leaders — from our staff to our grantees to the subject matter experts who support both.” Many philanthropists and foundations grapple with the question “How can we deliver the greatest impact possible?” Within our team, that has evolved to the more granular “How can we ensure that we meaningfully support communities to self-determine what great impact looks like?” It’s a question that challenges us to understand where to step back, and when to shift our ways of working. The redistribution of power and authority to more appropriate holders is not a checkbox exercise — it requires our consistent re-examination and willingness to change.

Cher-Wen DeWitt, Director of Partnerships

Investing in a New Day for Women & Girls

Since early 2020, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota (WFMN) has been putting equity and justice into practice as we listen and learn, co-create, and adapt to catalyze change and make a new day for ourselves, our children, and future generations.

We have invested in responsive strategies — outlined below — to address short-term urgencies while building capacity for the long-term, both internally and with community partners. These strategies ensure communities experiencing the greatest barriers have what they need to survive the pandemic and thrive in the long run. And because our ability to thrive is linked, this will help make sure that all Minnesotans experience economic, social, and physical well-being, both now and into the future.

1. Invest in COVID-19 Women & Girls Response Fund:

Since launching the COVID-19 Women and Girls Response Fund, WFMN made more than \$1 million in emergency grants to 80 organizations across the state to address the needs of women and girls experiencing gender-based violence, to support older women, and to provide short-term financial support for everyday needs.

More than 83 percent of all COVID-19 Women & Girls Response Fund grantmaking supports organizations led by women of color and Indigenous women, including undocumented women, Muslim women, immigrant women, young women, LGBTQ+ people, and women in greater Minnesota, representing our ethos that **people most impacted by inequity hold the solutions to lead us to lasting change.**

2. Leverage WFMN Investments for Greater Impact:

Since early 2020, we have increased flexibility in our grantmaking practices and expanded our investments in healing and capacity-building to sustain community partners for the long term.

- 100% of WFMN grants are being directed to general operations, allowing nonprofits greater flexibility in a time of uncertainty and heightened need, and for the long-term.
- We stand with grantee-partners as their programming and program outcomes change.
- We are dedicated to investing in community through multi-year grantmaking whenever possible.

3. Connect with Community & Listen for Transformation:

Since our inception in 1983, we have invested in research as a key lever to change systems, attitudes, and policies to benefit all Minnesota women and girls. As a statewide community foundation, we listen to better understand the lives of women and girls within communities, identify assets and barriers, and fund community-led solutions. In early 2020, we launched a series of online engagements called the [Road to Transformation](#) to connect and hold space with communities to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 and related, underlying issues on women, girls, and families. Through nine Listening Sessions in 2021, Minnesota women, girls, and gender-expansive people discussed the impacts of COVID-19, racial injustice, economic inequities, incarceration, and additional crises, and shared their solutions to create a state where they and their families can thrive.



People most impacted by inequity hold the solutions to lead us to lasting change.

We are sharing our learnings from the [Road to Transformation Listening Series](#) to amplify and center women, girls, and their families. Further, our Listening Sessions informed our new strategic plan that strengthens our identity and practice of being an anti-racist community foundation boldly driving systems change for gender and racial justice.

- ### 4. Transform Systems:
- As a systems-change philanthropy, we are deepening our investment in civic engagement and policy efforts that address the underlying socioeconomic inequities that need to be transformed, including racism, gender-based violence, and gaps in leadership and representation. We know policy is central to transforming our inequitable systems, and so in addition to grantmaking and funding research, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota is at the State Capitol every year driving a policy agenda that centers women and girls, including Black, Indigenous, and women of color, LGBTQ+ people, and women and girls with disabilities in the fight for safety, economic justice, health, and leadership for whole community well-being.

Gloria Perez, President and CEO