



DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION Progress Report

2022



PETER & ELIZABETH TOWER FOUNDATION

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Introduction

Equity is a critical piece of our work at the Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation. We pay close attention to the convergence of our focus areas (intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health, and substance use disorders) with systemic issues of racism, sexism, classism, abelism, and more. Because living at the intersection of multiple identities affects people's lives and experiences, aligning our grantmaking with that reality makes us a stronger, more impactful grantmaker.

This report describes the Foundation's efforts to embed diversity, equity, and inclusion into our organization in 2022. We are proud of our accomplishments and recognize that we have further still to go. We look forward to continuing this work in 2023 and sharing what we learn along the way.

Tracy A. Sawicki

Tracy A. Sawicki



We conduct our grantmaking with an equity perspective

Paying attention to systemic inequities that intersect with our four focus areas, makes us a more intentional and just funder.

Progress under this goal

Data Collection: The Tower Foundation recently adjusted grant applications to include demographic data from applicants that looks at the racial identities of the people served by the organization and of organizations' staff and leadership. The challenge at the Foundation has been to summarize this data in a way that it gives us a historical perspective on our investments (e.g., which populations are being disproportionately funded or left out), and supports equity-driven decision making. A team of staff has met throughout 2022 to problem solve these data collection and reporting issues. The team continues to meet to finish the work of creating functional reports that can produce this information for us in realtime in 2023.

Grantmaking Process Changes: Several changes have been made in the spirit of more equitable grantmaking:

- We have made changes to our clarification call process, reducing the number of staff who participate in the calls; keeping applicants on the calls for less time; asking fewer questions to allow for a more conversational tone; and discussing our personal and professional biases as program officers as part of our grant review process.

- We continue to collect demographic data as part of our application process to help us identify which organizations are led by people who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) or organizations that are serving BIPOC populations, as well as leaders who identify as having a disability.

The 2022 Advisory Team, led by young people with lived expertise in our areas of focus, experimented with new ways of asking DEI-related questions of grant applicants, including what intersections applicants focus on (e.g., disability + race), and if the organization's leaders have lived experiences in the area they work. Advisors also prioritized applications that included community voice in the project design and application calls.

Related Investments



- In 2022, The Tower Foundation approved a grant to [Centerboard](#) in Essex County, MA to offer inclusive training and coaching through a cohort model to Essex County service providers working in our focus areas.



- In 2022, the Foundation made a significant investment in the [Institute for Nonprofit Practice](#) (INP), allowing them to expand their BIPOC-centered leadership program into Western New York.



- Following the mass shooting on May 14th in Buffalo, the Tower Foundation contributed financial resources and staff time to the Buffalo Together Community Response Fund.

We advocate for equitable systems

We are explicit about advancing systemic equity for the populations we focus on, and we examine and experiment with ways to improve unjust systems.

Progress under this goal

In 2022, staff began to reflect on the Foundation's Community Change portfolio. We wanted to reflect on our investments from an equity perspective through the lens of the "Power Moves" framework from the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. We asked ourselves, which of these grant partners are sharing power in their communities with the people most affected by the issues? Which of these grant partners have worked to grow power in their communities? And, which of these grant partners have wielded power to advance their causes?

As we enter 2023, the Foundation has put Community Change investments on hold as we revisit this portfolio and consider how we can be more intentional and effective at centering equity in our work.

Related Investments



- The Foundation continues to invest in the Think Bigger Do Good Policy Paper Series, a collaborative project of the Thomas Scattergood Foundation, Peg's Foundation, the Patrick P. Lee Foundation, and Tower. The intent of the series is to produce timely and well-researched papers (available to the public at no cost) that address crucial behavioral health issues and promote effective advocacy. Each paper in the series identifies the problem and recommends clear strategies to advance the delivery of mental health and substance use disorder care.



- The Foundation continues to support several systems change initiatives across our geographies, including grants to: the Center for Public Representation (MA), the Partnership for the Public Good (NY), and Massachusetts Advocates for Children.

We closely resemble the communities that we fund

Our staff and board, and our culture of belonging, show that we value diverse voices.

Progress under this goal

In 2022, The Foundation launched another variation of the Tower Foundation's Advisory Team, advancing our work to bring individuals with diverse identities and lived experiences into our grantmaking. For the first time, the Team designed and implemented its own grantmaking opportunity, named the "Community Experts Fund" from start to finish, ultimately awarding \$200,000 to organizations.

The Foundation also hired an intern to support Advisory Team operations who has lived expertise relating to Foundation funding areas.

Related Investments



- Over the past several years, the Foundation has invested nearly a million dollars in a shared space initiative in Buffalo that brings together multiple providers with the intent to streamline services at a single location and create better options for clients. This project embodies the spirit of this goal by intentionally centering diversity in an underserved community.



- In 2022, the Foundation Board of Trustees approved \$100,000 for the Advisory Team to award at their discretion, a major investment in empowering community members and sharing decision making power. Later in the year, the Board approved an additional \$100,000 to the Community Experts Fund.

We meaningfully engage communities in our work

The Foundation engages and co-creates with community in convenings, feedback, and decision-making.

Progress under this goal

The Tower Foundation's Advisory Team is an example of meaningful involvement of communities in our work. The team, made up of young people with lived expertise in our focus areas and from across the geographies where we fund, fully designed its own grantmaking process, named the "Community Experts Fund," and owned the decision making process associated with that grant opportunity.

In 2022, the Tower Foundation convened seven members of its [DEI Learning Network](#) for a retreat in Syracuse, NY. This network has existed since 2020, offering peer support and learning around DEI-related topics, leveraging skills of the group.

Related Investments



In 2022, the Foundation made several investments related to this goal, including an in-person retreat for the DEI Learning Network, a grantmaking and implementation budget for the Community Experts Fund, and emergency funding for a critical BIPOC-led and serving organization in Western New York.

We prioritize learning about diversity, inclusion, and equity and apply what we learn

We are committed to learning and growing at the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and systemic levels to promote a culture of belonging internally and externally. We are data-informed and use our communications platform to advance racial equity.

Progress under this goal

Communications: In 2022, the Foundation completed an audit of our website to look for places to integrate our equity work. Updates to the Foundation's website to incorporate this DEI language are underway.

Staff Development: In 2022, the Tower Foundation staff continued to participate in, and share the facilitation responsibilities of meeting twice monthly to discuss topics related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Board Development: Foundation Board members participated in DEI-related discussions at each 2022 Board meeting.

Working Together: Two years ago, the Foundation developed a set of working norms. It has taken years of practice, but in 2022, our working norms were consistently used to begin meetings both at the staff and Board levels.

Related Investments



- The Foundation continued to support Individual staff and Board member professional development focused on DEI topics.



- Many approved Strengthening Partner Capacity grants focused on internal organizational DEI-related work in 2022.



Reflections

by Chuck Colston

The journey toward advancing equity is not free from bumps in the road and/or twists and turns. Even with organizational buy-in, incorporating DEI is no “piece of cake” and requires us to think differently about what it means to truly be inclusive; do we have fair grantmaking processes; are we reaching a diverse pool of organizations? Here are a few of my reflections on our early learnings from our work at the Tower Foundation from my perspective as a co-leader on this work:

- The path toward becoming an equitable grantmaker requires the use of both hearts and minds. Along this path, there will be moments that energize you and others that might feel more deflating. Keeping a balance in perspectives is essential to not only making progress but also recognizing the wins. Is the glass half full or half empty?
- The discussion about race challenged us to ask a set of different questions at the Foundation. Are we focusing too much on race? Are we not paying enough attention to race? Do organizations that are White-led still see their goals overlapping with those of the Foundation? Who is not at the table and who should be at the table? As an organization, while we’ve made some progress; our initial discussions about race were quite uncomfortable. We know that diversity, equity, and inclusion is not only about race. Research shows us how race compounds and intersects with other societal issues and/or identities. But we also know that race is a key predictor for health outcomes. A 2020 CDC survey found overdose deaths increased by 44 percent for Black people and 39 percent for Native American people. Latino children with developmental delays are 78 percent less likely than their White peers to have their need for early intervention services identified.

Reflections Continued

- Intentional reflection time is essential to this journey. We could have done a better job in coming back to the reason we care about equity throughout the journey - reminding ourselves and others. Why does this matter for you as an individual? How does this benefit the Foundation's operations and grantmaking?
- It took us longer than anticipated to figure out what to do with the demographic data that was collected. The last thing we wanted to do was put the strain on organizations to collect and share data and for us to not use it. The task of organizing and formatting the data from our 2021 and 2022 grant cycles was time-consuming. However, this initial work makes it much easier to integrate data for future grant cycles. We are now taking steps to share the compiled demographic data with the Foundation board and community.
- Establishing the right pace and balance is helpful for team synergy. As a team we explored whether we: might be going too fast, might be going too slow, trying to take on too much, or should be having deeper discussions. While it was not always easy; it was helpful to hear these different viewpoints and gain a sense of what's working/not working.
- In 2021, the Foundation hired a DEI consultant who developed an organizational strategy for incorporating DEI at the Foundation. In 2022 we continued to move the work forward, this time on our own, and have realized that we probably will lean on an external facilitator for a portion of our staff DEI work in the coming year.

One thing is certain: this work is not linear. Our work will continue to evolve in 2023 and we look forward to sharing with you our progress and reflections on these next steps.

Next Steps

Whereas in 2020 and 2021, the Tower Foundation focused much of its equity efforts on learning and strategizing, in 2022, the Foundation shifted its focus to integrating this work into our day-to-day operations. As we set our sights on 2023, the following priorities have emerged:

- We will reflect on indicators of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as it relates to our grantmaking, and specifically consider how diversity informs our decision making.
- We will continue to build upon the success of the Community Experts Fund by supporting the 2023 Advisory Team through the process of building and implementing a grant process in which they themselves are the decision makers. We will also explore ways that we can make this engagement even more meaningful for our Advisors and the Foundation.
- We plan to spread some of the lessons learned from our Advisory Team into our other grantmaking by inviting young people with lived expertise into our Programs & Services grant review process as "Community Grant Associates." These CGAs will work alongside of Tower Program Officers to review grants and make recommendations to the Board of Trustees.
- The reflective work we are taking on with our Community Change portfolio allows us to take on important questions related to equity: In what ways do our community change investments position us to support systemic equity?

