

Funding Change: A Conversation on Philanthropy's Vision for Health Equity

Webinar Summary and Call to Action



Webinar Focus

The Partners for Advancing Health Equity Collaborative hosted the webinar, *Funding Change: A Conversation on Philanthropy's Vision for Health Equity*, on October 17, 2023. Panelists engaged in discussions about the role of philanthropies to advance health equity, highlighting the need to change their funding processes and priorities to effectively address communities' health issues. This report provides a synthesis of key takeaways, solutions, and action steps identified from the webinar.

Webinar Voices

- › **Caryn Bell**, Associate Director, P4HE, [Tulane School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine](#)
- › **Halima Leak Francis**, Director & Professor of Practice, [Tulane School of Professional Advancement, John Lewis Public Administration Program](#)
- › **Laura Gerald**, President, [Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust](#)
- › **Natasha Phelps**, Equity-Centered Policy Manager, [The Center for Black Health & Equity](#)

Key Resources

- [Redesigning Health Equity Philanthropy](#)
- [Role of Philanthropy in Systems Change](#)
- [Community Engagement](#)

Your Voice

P4HE values collaboration. If there is a resource on this topic that you would like to share with us, provide it [here](#).

Key Takeaways

[Effective collaboration](#) between philanthropies, the community, and outside organizations is essential to building capacity and ensuring sustainability of efforts to advance health equity. Philanthropies must collaborate with community organizations and center lived experience when drafting and providing funding opportunities. To do so, philanthropies should consider [rethinking their funding processes and priorities](#), including shifting focus to [systems change](#) initiatives to address the root causes of health inequities for historically marginalized populations.



Webinar participants indicated the philanthropies should advance health equity through funding diverse projects and grassroots groups, creating space for creativity and innovation, building collaborations with community partners, facilitating sustainability of efforts, and elevating health priorities of communities.

Call To Action



"Philanthropy has changed over time – those who are giving, those in power, the approaches. All the systems and structures behind this practice have changed.

We're at another point in history where we're seeing an opportunity to evolve." Halima Leak Francis, Director & Professor of Practice, Tulane School of Professional Advancement, John Lewis Public Administration Program

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Below we've summarized immediate action steps shared by the panelists and identified by webinar participants to be taken to advance health equity.

> Utilize clear and specific language in funding opportunities.



"Be specific about health equity as a value, a framework, and a lens to which we do our work, and write that down. Often, we'll put out a funding opportunity for people to guess what we're thinking and what we're trying to accomplish. Instead of all that 'guess work,' outline

specifically what we're trying to accomplish." Laura Gerald, President, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, philanthropies have [increased their focus on health equity, racial justice, and health system innovation in programming](#). Organizations rely on the language in grant descriptions to assess whether they would be a good fit for the funding opportunity. Instead of using vague or indirect language in funding opportunities, philanthropies should specifically outline the desired goals and objectives of the funding. This will allow potential applicants to clearly understand funding qualifications. Reducing the "guessing" for potential applicants makes funding opportunities more accessible, leading to more diverse organizations and individuals involved. This approach could potentially increase applications from underrepresented communities who may otherwise have felt discouraged from applying due to unclear funding guidelines.

> Acknowledge the complexity of health equity work and consider progress when evaluating the success of funding.

Traditional evaluation and performance metrics use preconceived ideas about what organizations should achieve with a certain funding allocation, but these may not reflect outcomes that are truly feasible or that represent progress for health equity. The methods in which philanthropies evaluate their funded work should expand beyond traditional success measurements to place value on progress towards health equity. Philanthropies should identify [outcome and performance measures that are driven by progress made toward achieving equity](#). When choosing evaluation methods and [measures of health equity success](#), philanthropies should rely the [expertise of researchers](#) and the community to ensure the desired objectives and outcomes are being assessed.

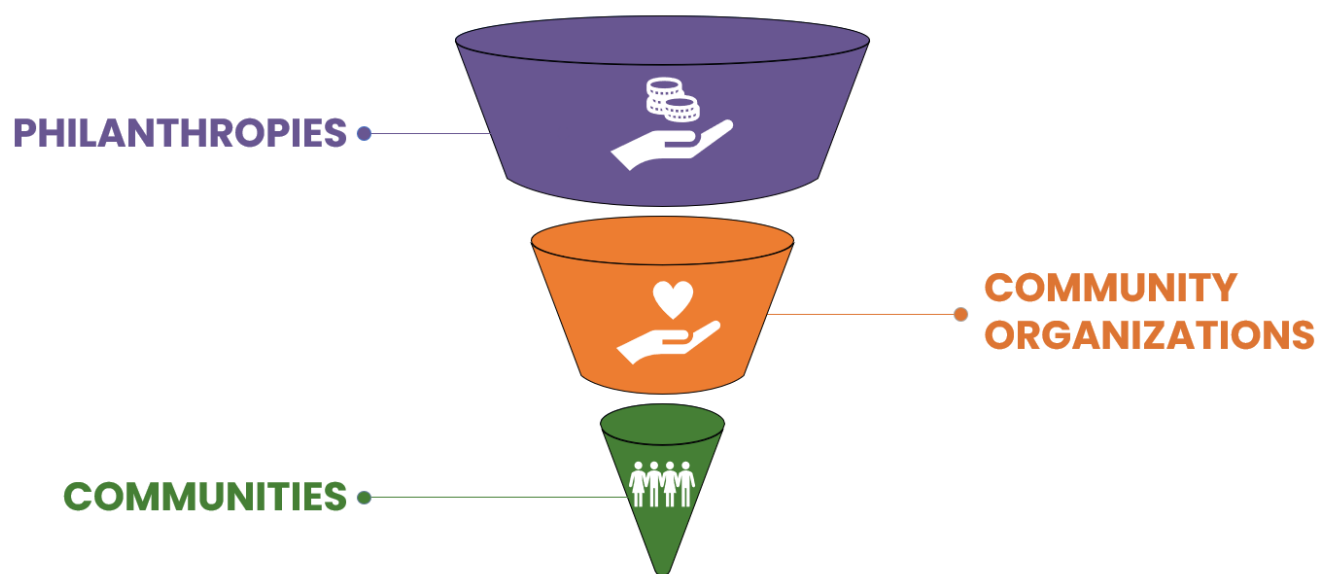


"Funders might, with their evaluation metrics and outcome measures, deem a community-based organization or a project to be a failure. However, there was actually so much work that was not only necessary to reach the main objective of the work, but also may be

immeasurable in traditional ways.” Natasha Phelps, Equity-Centered Policy Manager, The Center for Black Health & Equity

Advancing and measuring health equity is complex, takes time, and involves intersections of systems, entities, and groups. Starting with clear contracts that acknowledge the intricacies of this work will ensure that organizations receiving funding are supported, given grace and understanding. Reevaluate the allocation of funding to prioritize efforts focused on sustainable health equity. Avoid the use of contract language that relies on preconceived metrics of success. This provides written affirmation to the funded organizations that the philanthropy recognizes the large undertaking of health equity work.

Community-Centered Flow of Support



› **Focus on collaboration and ecosystems across sectors, levels, and groups to create systemic change.**



“Collaboration and partnership are evolving [into] more of an ecosystem that acknowledges the mutual dependence that we have on each other to really be able to do the work. [This] may involve some power dynamics that are not necessarily effective as we look to work together [to create] systems level change.” Halima Leak Francis, Director &

Professor of Practice, Tulane School of Professional Advancement, John Lewis Public Administration Program

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The ultimate mechanism for advancing health equity is to dismantle and restructure the current systems that produce health inequities. Due to the interconnectedness of systems and entities involved, systems change and [addressing systemic racism](#) requires collaboration across sectors, levels, and groups. Philanthropies can play an essential role in systems change by [integrating a systems change framework](#) into funding opportunities, selecting organizations and initiatives to fund. Systems change work also must involve [breaking down the power dynamics and imbalances](#) that have historically perpetuated oppressive practices and policies to amplify community voices. Philanthropies need to recognize their place within the larger [ecosystem of advancing health equity](#) to invest in this work most effectively. Such collaboration must also include people from different demographic groups and of different socioeconomic statuses, particularly those from underrepresented and under-resourced communities.



"If you work for an under-resourced organization, in a space that is not usually prioritized or for a community that's not prioritized, you're kind of hit with this double whammy of being under-resourced and underfunded and still being expected to do the work that has such a strong impact on our broader community." Halima Leak Francis, Director & Professor

of Practice, Tulane School of Professional Advancement, John Lewis Public Administration Program

Historically, health inequities have disproportionately impacted marginalized racial and ethnic groups, low-income communities, women, nonbinary and transgender people, and people with disabilities, among other groups. In addition to considering the health outcomes of each individual group, it is also crucial to be aware of and consider the even greater health disparities for [people with intersectional identities](#) of various marginalized groups, such as [transgender women of color](#). Philanthropies should incorporate the health needs of marginalized groups in funding opportunities and encourage organizations from underrepresented communities to apply.

> Form coalitions with a variety of organizations and experts to inform the development of funding opportunities and execute funding initiatives.

[Researchers and subject matter experts](#) can provide insights to philanthropies regarding the needs of health equity issues, funding trends, and impactful philanthropic practices. [Form funding collaboratives with other philanthropies and foundations](#) to pool resources and act collectively to achieve greater impact. Additionally, there is potential for [philanthropies and local or state government to collaborate](#) by jointly funding programs and services, conducting policy analysis and data collection, and expanding reach of public programs to advance health equity. Engage with health care professionals, such as [nurses](#), to [innovate health care practices](#) that promote health equity. Collaborate with [advocacy groups](#) and [policymakers](#) that can provide avenues for funding to

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contribute to the implementation of policies to improve health outcomes for all. Perhaps most importantly, work directly with the communities that suffer health inequities to identify funding needs.

› **Align funding opportunities, priorities, and allocations with community needs and sustainability.**



“Philanthropies [need] to start by listening. [Meet] the community where they are and do funding in those areas.” Laura Gerald, President, Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust

It is essential for philanthropies to [meet communities where they are](#) in order to authentically engage with them and efficiently fund initiatives that will actually address the root causes of health inequities. Their allocations and priorities of funding to certain efforts may be [misaligned with the true needs of communities](#) facing health inequities. [Ask communities](#) how philanthropies can best help to improve health outcomes through funding. Be an active and open listener, seeking to deeply understand their perspectives on the most pressing health issues in their communities and to build trusting relationships. Invest in community-based organizations that have the closest proximity to the community in need and can provide practical and informed leadership, expertise, and ideas for the best approaches to advance health equity. Such [community engagements](#) and investments will empower the populations that are impacted by health inequities and committed to the prosperity of their community. The role of philanthropies is to build capacity for funded organizations to [carry out initiatives to advance health equity](#). This capacity building can include [pooling additional funding from outside organizations and institutions, supporting the education and training grantee staff, and investing in technological infrastructure](#). Bridge connections between community organizations and local government agencies, health care professionals, advocacy groups, researchers, policymakers, and more to enhance their work.



“[We can] change how the process and how this work is done so that the resources can get to the people who are doing the work on the ground to heal our communities in a sustainable and lasting way - so that we can have thriving existences rather than constantly being

focused on fixing what's broken.” Halima Leak Francis, Director & Professor of Practice, Tulane School of Professional Advancement, John Lewis Public Administration Program

Demonstrate [willingness to participate](#) and to work through solutions alongside communities. Improving health outcomes for all often involves discomfort, challenges, and setbacks as solutions are not always clear and require lots of time to execute thoughtful initiatives. There are many interconnected social determinants of health and life circumstances that must be addressed to advance health equity, presenting large undertakings given the often-inadequate funding provided.

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It is important for philanthropies to exemplify their readiness, dedication, tenacity to the funded organizations and the individuals involved in health equity work. Help address multiple factors and issues contributing to health equities at once by [creating channels to braid cross-sector funding sources](#) to ease the workload challenges that grantees face. [Invest in community-driven impact efforts](#) that can strengthen the work already being done in the pursuit of health equity.



“Community-based organizations are the people who are sticking around. These are the people living in their community. It’s them, their family, and their community being impacted [by health inequities]. That’s the sustainability. Invest in them.” Natasha Phelps, Equity-Centered Policy

Manager, The Center for Black Health & Equity

Philanthropies must consider [ways to promote sustainability of health equity work](#) through their funding of community-based organizations that prioritize their communities’ health needs. Allow more funding to go towards infrastructure that will help to sustain health equity initiatives, especially for under-resourced communities that otherwise may not have access or leverage to do so. Philanthropies can be perpetual funders for the advancement of health equity if they prove they are committed to centering community voices to improve health outcomes for all.

Funding Ideas to Advance Health Equity



Deeper Dive

Funding Narrative Change

In 2022, the [Convergence Partnership](#), a nationwide funder collaborative that aims to advance racial justice and health equity, published a [report](#) on the need to fund narrative change. [Narrative change](#) is the process of challenging, altering, or replacing socially constructed stories, ideas, and connotations about certain issues in order to make systemic change, promoting justice and equity. The findings indicate that narrative change and power-building work is important but complicated with several things to consider, such as the involvement of narrative experts, whether to use a “top down” or “bottom up” approach, and [the relationship between culture change and narrative change](#). Many respondents demonstrated their eagerness to learn more about narrative change work, keeping in mind the long-term investment required, the need for greater alignment within and across philanthropies, and the importance of considering audiences. The authors recommend a framework for philanthropies and practitioners to build and execute narrative change strategies through mass media (e.g., journalism and nonfiction media), mass culture (e.g., TV, film, and music), and mass movements (e.g., organizing and collective action). They also outline the following three challenges to overcome to promote further investment in narrative change: the lack of clarity regarding the relationship between short-term strategic communications and long-term narrative change strategies; the need for accessible [narrative models](#) that can be easily replicated; and the lack of methods for [measuring the effectiveness of narrative change efforts](#). This resource can be used in collaborations between philanthropies, other organizations, and communities in order to incorporate narrative change ideals and strategies into funding opportunities and health equity initiatives.

Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust's Equity Framework

In 2023, the [Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust](#), a philanthropy that aims to improve health, education, and economic outcomes for marginalized communities in Forsyth County and across North Carolina, published an [equity framework](#) that outlines their approach to centering equity in their funding. The Trust discusses the definitions of racial equity and racism and delves into the history of [political disenfranchisement](#), and [education](#), [health](#), and economic inequities for Black communities in North Carolina. Then, the Trust presents their two approaches to [addressing policy](#) and systems change in North Carolina through philanthropy, both seeking to amplify community voices. The first approach involves listening to the needs and perspectives of people in the community impacted by health inequities and helping them to then build capacity, map systems, implement changes, and link to state level efforts to produce systems change. Meanwhile, the second approach engages communities to shape and develop state policies from the beginning in order to create change at the system level. The Trust suggests that such approaches allow for communities' direct involvement

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in the process of changing policies and systems, centering their health needs and the impacts of systemic racism on health inequities. The framework also notes the importance of collaborating with data experts, [communications personnel](#), agencies, policymakers, and more to help facilitate the efforts to dismantle systemic racism as communities cannot and should not do this work on their own. This resource can serve as inspiration for how philanthropies can engage with communities and other organizations to prioritize racial equity in initiatives to advance health equity.

About P4HE

The P4HE Collaborative harmonizes goals, advances learning, and facilitates collaboration to improve health equity. It is led by the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and is part of the Tulane Institute for Innovations in Health Equity. Support for this program is provided by ICF. Funding is provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Foster

the co-creation and spread of knowledge.



Sharpen

our research tools to focus on solutions, facts and stories.



Disrupt

traditional research approaches.



Harmonize

our voices.



Challenge

the status quo.



Shine

light on practices that are indefensible, irrational and inconsistent.

To learn more about these issues, or Partners for Health Equity's calls to action, a resource library including a full recording of this, and all previous P4HE Webinars, can be found on the P4HE [website](#).