

Better Health for All: The Role of Philanthropy in Advancing Health Equity Webinar Summary and Call to Action



Webinar Focus

The Partners for Advancing Health Equity Collaborative and Grantmakers in Health (GIH) hosted the webinar, *Better Health for All: The Role of Philanthropy in Advancing Health Equity* on September 18, 2024. Panelists engaged in discussions about the role of philanthropy in health equity work, highlighting the importance of engaging communities in devising and implementing funding initiatives. This report provides a synthesis of key takeaways, solutions, and action steps identified from the webinar.

Webinar Voices

- › **Caryn Bell**, Associate Director, P4HE, [Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine, Tulane University](#)
- › **Cara James**, President and CEO, [Grantmakers in Health](#)
- › **Thomas LaVeist**, Dean and Weatherford Chair in Health Equity, [Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Tulane University](#)
- › **Alonzo Plough**, Chief Science Officer and Vice President of Research-Evaluation-Learning, [The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#)

Key Resources

- [Trust-Based Philanthropy](#)
- [Funding to Target Determinants of Health](#)
- [Philanthropy Advocacy Playbook](#)

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

Funding and philanthropy partners are critical for the development, execution, and sustainability of initiatives to advance health equity. This webinar kicked off a four-part virtual learning series, hosted in collaboration with the P4HE Collaborative and GIH, on ways to collectively move toward an inclusive approach to health philanthropy. Health funders encounter various challenges to build trust and partner with community organizations, including power imbalances and limitations to sustain efforts on their own. To address these challenges, philanthropies must center communities and partner with cross-sector organizations in order to uplift communities' health priorities, target determinants of health, and contribute to greater systemic change.



Attendees shared their thoughts on what advancing health equity means to them, including **collaboration, policy, advocacy, narrative change, action, funding, inclusion, and innovation.**

Call To Action



“Advancing health equity [involves] working at every level of the socioecological model...Philanthropy can sit at the intersection of all these sectors to connect people, to share ideas and lessons, to promote what works, and to fund in the gaps.” Cara James, President and CEO, Grantmakers in Health

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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.

› Target determinants of health by employing cross-sector collaborations in funding health equity efforts.

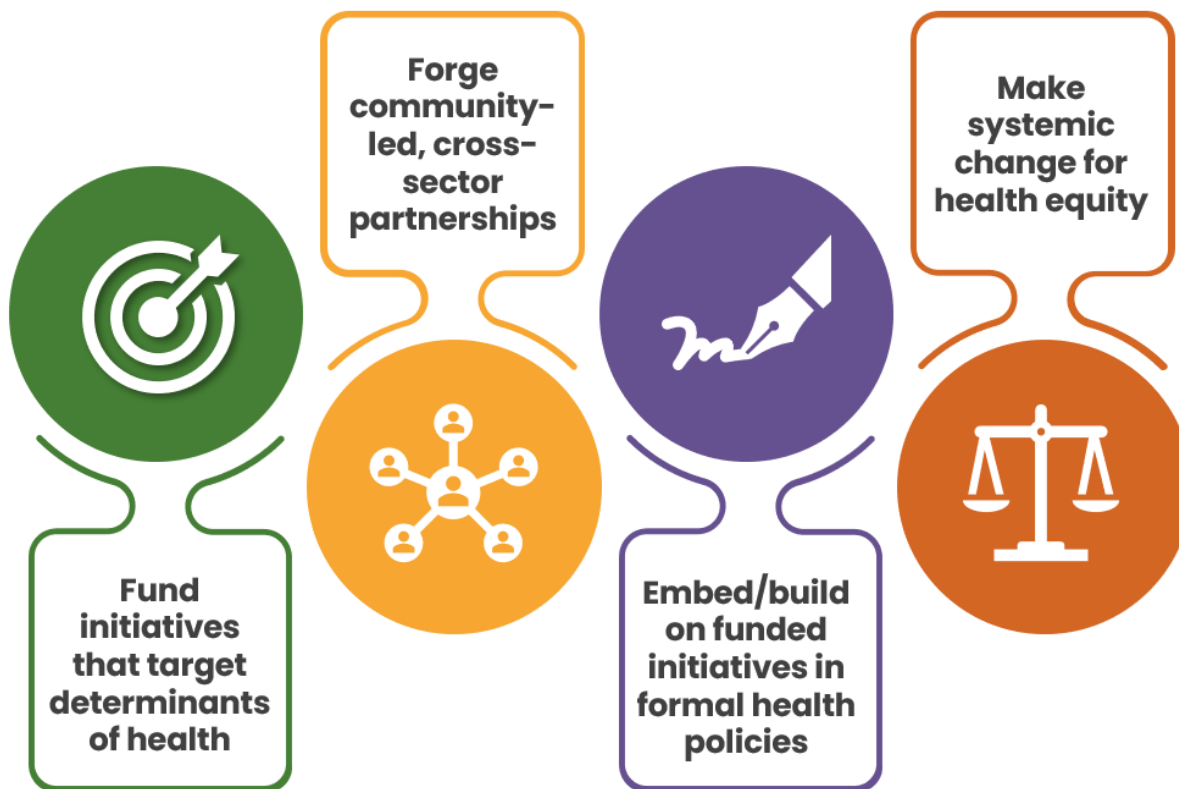


"We have to understand the root causes of the current health equity issues, and we shouldn't overlook the history, policy decisions, and structural decisions that led to health inequity... Getting to the root causes and changing these conditions in communities [is] going to

involve other sectors." Alonzo Plough, Chief Science Officer and Vice President of Research-Evaluation-Learning, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Philanthropies must go beyond funding initiatives that narrowly focus on addressing the health issues alone by also providing funding to efforts that [target the social and structural factors](#) that cause and perpetuate health issues and inequities. Conversations around determinants of health have taken prominence as more people are understanding the significant effects that not only one's [social conditions](#) (e.g., economic status, education, social and community context, neighborhood, and healthcare), but also various [structural conditions](#) (e.g., policies, institutions, and systems), can have on the health of an individual and communities. The root causes of health inequity stem from a long [history of injustice and oppression](#) of marginalized communities, and it's time to take ownership and right these wrongs by [providing overdue resources and support](#) to improve their health outcomes. Funders should consider ways to allocate funds or offer entire grants to work that will tackle the root causes of health inequities to truly advance health equity. To make widespread change for health across society, organizations from all sectors must be engaged to correct the social and structural factors that contribute to health inequities. Collaborate across different sectors, intentionally including communities in drafting funding opportunities to examine and confront the root causes of health concerns through cross-sectoral perspectives. Funders can enforce requirements in grants for selected grantees to [establish and utilize formal partnerships across sectors](#) so that they may work together and leverage each other's expertise, resources, and vantage point on health equity efforts stated in the grant. Collaborators can [pool resources together](#) from philanthropies and other entities, such as the private sector, [government agencies](#), and universities, to jointly fund local, state, and national work aimed at addressing determinants of health. Forging partnerships across sectors to design and implement funding opportunities will help to target compounding health inequities and their root causes by going directly to the sources of the conditions harming communities' health and calling in the affiliated entities to be part of the solution.

From Funding to Systemic Change



> **Fund initiatives to create and change policies in pursuit of greater systemic change and sustainable solutions for health equity.**



“I do think policy is a very important tool because of the systems we have. Structural racism and injustices are contributing to the bad outcomes that we have to health inequities. So, we do have to think about: how do we change those systems?” Cara James, President and CEO,

Grantmakers in Health

Philanthropies should not only fund initiatives and organizations that carry out health programs and services aimed at directly serving communities but should also contribute to the creation and changing of policies to support systemic change and sustainability. In recent years, there have been shifts in the philanthropy space to focus on [policies as a tool for change](#) in response to the growing

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realizations of the widespread structural racism and injustices that marginalized communities endure as a result of a legacy of unfair and oppressive policies and systems. Investing resources into work and organizations that are committed to advocating for policies to improve health outcomes for all is an essential strategy for continued progress. Engage with and amplify [advocacy groups](#) and grassroots organizations who have experience promoting policy creation and change to learn about how funders can best support their efforts. Cross-sector collaborations can also employ the expertise of [researchers](#) and policy analysts, alongside government agencies, who can inform the development of policies and assess their impact on health and determinants of health. One approach is to consider how existing programs funded by philanthropies and their strategies could be embedded into legislation. An example of this is the [Medicare Diabetes Prevention Program](#), which promotes structural recognition of smaller-scale innovative and successful initiatives. Philanthropies are often seen as the primary funding organizations that are expected to fund everything, but this is not a feasible assumption because they do not have unlimited resources and are unable to sustain efforts on their own long-term. To supplement funding, garner support from additional funding organizations and the private sector who share common goals for advancing health equity. Establish [public-private partnerships](#) where government agencies and the private sector join forces to facilitate the enactment of health projects and policies. And as always, ensure that community voices are centered and amplified in policies to advance health equity as they are the ones directly impacted by structural decisions each and every day. Collaboration across sectors will encourage organizations and people to work together to uplift and sponsor health equity initiatives, mobilizing progress on designing and implementing equitable policies. Just like any other sector, philanthropy organizations [cannot make systemic change by themselves](#). In order to tackle the root causes of health inequities through policy creation and change, organizations from all sectors must share power with communities while also coming together to leverage each other's resources, expertise, and perspectives to enshrine health equity into law, [reinforcing sustainability](#) of their collective efforts.

› Authentically engage with communities to inform the development of funding opportunities aimed at advancing health equity.



“As funders, we need to always learn [from] our community partners. [We should] not come up with our own programmatic abstractions and overlay them on the community, but [should] come up with a collaborative understanding of what might be the best way to resolve the current implications of historical and structural factors that marginalize communities.” Alonzo Plough, Chief Science Officer and Vice President of Research-Evaluation-Learning, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

In order to fund initiatives seeking to advance health equity for all, funders must understand and uplift the health needs and priorities of communities and [share decision-making power](#) with them. Philanthropies typically publish funding opportunities for health initiatives that showcase the health issues and leverage the strategies they believe are crucial to reducing inequities. However, funders' views often do not align with the perspectives of communities. Communities and the organizations directly serving them are the experts on the most pressing health issues affecting them and on the necessary solutions. To correct this misalignment of priorities, funders should [authentically engage](#) communities by employing a [participatory discourse approach](#) that allows communities' lived experiences to inform the development of funding opportunities instead of relying on the potentially uninformed viewpoints of philanthropies. Building these vital relationships requires cultural humility, active listening, and a genuine desire to [foster trust](#). Funders should utilize [trust-based philanthropy](#) to foster collaboration, redistribute power, and dismantle structural barriers to accessing resources. Funders should position communities as [co-creators](#) for funding opportunities so that they can decide on specific health concerns and solutions that the funding should be used for. When distributing funding to organizations from various sectors for health initiatives, encourage them to [seek out and engage community organizations](#), as leaders and partners in their grant efforts. Cross-sector collaborations in the philanthropy space should actively structure their efforts so that communities are key decision-makers in the funding process, ensuring they are directly involved in writing funding opportunities and deciding how funds should be spent, thereby [dismantling traditional hierarchies of authority](#). Designing and implementing funding opportunities that center the voices and priorities of communities will be the most impactful and transformative in progressing toward health equity for all.

Checklist for Developing Funding Opportunities



- ✓ **Engage Communities in Funding Design**
- ✓ **Target Determinants of Health**
- ✓ **Be Less Prescriptive on Use of Funds**
- ✓ **Shift Power to Communities for Decision-making**
- ✓ **Ensure Clarity, Transparency, & Accessibility**
- ✓ **Adjust Impact Measurements as Needed**

› Build capacity for communities through transparent, accessible, and flexible funding opportunities for health equity initiatives.

With communities as co-creators of funding opportunities, funders must also support community-based organizations in [building capacity for their efforts](#) to promote health equity for the populations they directly serve. Private funders and philanthropic organizations possess greater flexibility and encounter fewer restrictions compared to government agencies, which operate under more stringent constraints. However, philanthropies sometimes gear funding opportunities toward institutions, such as colleges and national health organizations, who have more experience, connections, and staff capacity to successfully apply for grants and conduct grant activities. Community-based organizations often encounter [barriers to accessing funds](#), including a lack of necessary resources to effectively manage grants and being less versed in interpreting and responding to unclear language and requirements in grant applications. This disparity perpetuates [funders' reliance on established institutions](#) who may be more experienced with grants but are less connected to the communities they seek to serve, compared to community-based organizations. To combat this disparity, philanthropies should intentionally consider and implement strategies to [increase transparency and accessibility](#) in funding opportunities. Funders should utilize clear language in grant applications, create space for questions and clarification from applicants, and provide additional resources to aid understanding of grant requirements so that inexperienced applicants can feel confident in their submissions. Explicitly encourage community-based organizations to apply for funding opportunities by underscoring this interest in the application, [conducting outreach](#) with these organizations to spread awareness of funding opportunities, particularly in underserved areas, and requiring other types of applicants to partner with community-based organizations, bolstering their efforts.

For more insights and action steps on the role of philanthropy in advancing health equity, check out these P4HE learning engagements:

- [P4HE 2022 Summit Breakout Session: Advancing Health Equity Through Equitable Grantmaking](#)
- [P4HE October 2023 Webinar: Funding Change: A Conversation on Philanthropy's Vision for Health Equity](#)
- [P4HE November 2023 Webinar: Shifting power: Understanding community building for health equity](#)
- [P4HE Resource Spotlight: The Role of Philanthropy in Advancing Health Equity](#)
- [P4HE Resource Spotlight: Power Sharing in Grantmaking](#)



“We have this very dynamic ecosystem of community-based organizations that are doing some of the most innovative things that I have ever seen...We need to make sure that we’re devoting sufficient resources to help these organizations have the capacity to manage

the grants effectively.” Thomas LaVeist, Dean and Weatherford Chair in Health Equity, Celia

Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, Tulane University

Organizations from various sectors, including those with experience as grantees, should also contribute to increasing the transparency and accessibility of funding opportunities for health equity work and [offer resources and supports](#) to supplement community-based organizations in their applications for grants and implementation of funding. Community-based organizations are uniquely positioned to understand community health needs, enhancing their ability to implement funding to best serve communities. They possess valuable insights into the specific health challenges faced, their beliefs and perceptions regarding effective solutions to address health disparities, and the reality of the slow progress and long-term commitment in pursuit of health equity, which cannot always be captured within funding opportunities. With this in mind, sections on use of funding within grant applications should [be less prescriptive and more general and flexible](#). This approach gives community grantees more discretion and freedom to carry out activities that will truly serve their needs. Similarly, reconsider and adjust evaluation requirements for how community grantees [measure and report](#) on their impacts and successes under the grant so that they may speak to the important progress they have made, no matter the magnitude or the way it materialized. Cross-sector collaborations should prioritize creating transparent, accessible funding opportunities by fostering community involvement and supporting health equity initiatives with flexibility and inclusivity.

Deeper Dive

Trust-Based Philanthropy

Trust-based philanthropy is an approach to philanthropy, built on trust, transparency, and relationship-building, that addresses power imbalances between funders and communities by redistributing power to communities and the organizations serving them. The [Trust-Based Philanthropy Project](#) developed a guide, [the 6 Grantmaking Practices of Trust-Based Philanthropy](#), to inform funders of how to apply this approach. The six practices outlined in this guide include:

- Give multi-year unrestricted funding
- Do the homework
- Simplify and streamline paperwork

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- Be transparent and responsive
- Solicit and act on feedback
- Offer support beyond the check

Philanthropies, along with their cross-sector partners, can leverage this guide in collaborating on developing and implementing funding initiatives to advance health equity.

Philanthropy Advocacy Playbook

The [Alliance for Justice](#) developed a [Philanthropy Advocacy Playbook](#) that seeks to inform foundations of how to contribute to advocacy for meaningful policy change. The playbook offers best practices, tips, resources, examples, and templates to help foundations navigate their role in the advocacy and policymaking space. Some sections of the playbook include:

- Dispelled myths about foundations in policy advocacy work
- Guidelines for legality of actions by foundations supporting grantees' advocacy and for lobbying
- Ways foundations can engage in advocacy themselves
- Considerations for choosing a policy advocacy approach
- Considerations for evaluating grantees' advocacy and progress
- Tips to advocate effectively
- Tips to get buy-in from the foundation's board for advocacy work

In collaborations with organizations from various sectors, philanthropies can utilize this playbook to collectively develop plans and strategies on actions to take to support advocacy for policy creation and change that aim to improve health outcomes for all.

About P4HE

The P4HE Collaborative harmonizes goals, advances learning, and facilitates collaboration to improve health equity. It is led by the Tulane University Celia Scott Weatherhead 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. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of 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](#).