



MIND THE GAP:

Exploring the Role of
Diversity and Racial Equity in
Leanly Staffed Foundations

**Reflection Questions
& Implementation Ideas**



exponent
philanthropy

INTRODUCTION



Racial equity is an essential part of philanthropy, and lean funders are increasingly focused on it, yet foundation boards and staff are still disproportionately White.¹ The two primary factors holding back philanthropy's efforts to help advance social change are rooted in race:

- Understanding the role of race in the problems philanthropists are trying to solve
- The significance of race when it comes to how philanthropists identify leaders and find solutions²

Understanding the demographic makeup of foundation boards and staff is important context. It is even more important to reflect on if, why, and how your foundation contributes to this demographic disparity in philanthropy. There is not one right way to approach this problem, and no simple answer or definitive next step for foundations to take. Instead, we encourage you to take time with your foundation board and staff to reflect on your internal and external practices.

The following questions and statements are for lean funders who want to actively address racial equity at their foundations and in their work. These questions will help you identify areas of strength and opportunities for increasing your impact.

¹ For more data and context, see the *2021 Foundation Operations and Management Report* and *Mind the Gap: Exploring the role of Diversity and Racial Equity in Lean Philanthropy - 2021 Edition*.

² Dorsey, C., Bradach, J., & Kim, P. (2020, May). *Racial equity and philanthropy: Disparities in funding leaders of color leave impact on the table*. Echoing Green and The Bridgespan Group. <https://www.bridgespan.org/bridgespan/Images/articles/racial-equity-and-philanthropy/racial-equity-and-philanthropy.pdf>



REFLECTION QUESTIONS: FOUNDATION OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

- What support do we need to understand and promote racial equity?
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- Does our organization and board composition reflect the communities we seek to partner with?
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- Do we collect, disaggregate, and report data by demographic characteristics, such as gender, race or ethnicity?
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- What barriers of entry might be preventing prospective staff or partner organizations from wanting to join our organization?
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- How are we continuously connecting racial equity to the foundation's mission?
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- What racial equity operational and behavioral practices and policies have we implemented to explicitly focus on racial equity to further our impact and to be more inclusive?
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- Are we exacerbating inequities with our funding? If so, how?
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS: BOARD AND STAFF DEMOGRAPHICS

- What proportion of our board identifies as a member of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community?

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- What proportion of our staff identifies as BIPOC?

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- Do these demographics reflect the communities we fund?

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- How can we better incorporate voices from the communities we fund into our work?

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- How can we broaden our potential pool of applicants when looking for new board and staff?

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MORE REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR FAMILY FOUNDATIONS WITH ALL FAMILY BOARDS:

- Is there an opportunity to expand our board beyond all-family members? Are there bylaw limitations to consider?

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- Do we have authentic relationships within our communities? How can we better involve them in making decisions about funding?

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- How can we recruit those who identify as BIPOC to the board without tokenizing them?

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS: GRANTMAKING FOR RACIAL EQUITY

- What proportion of the organizations that we fund are led by those who identify as BIPOC or by women or members of the LGBTQIA+ community?

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- Do we have authentic and trusting relationships with members of the communities we seek to serve?

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- What work are our grantees already doing to support racial equity? How can we join or support their efforts?

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- Does our application process create barriers to funding for leaders of color?

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- Have we considered accepting proposals written for other foundations or funders?

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- Do we offer general operating support grants? If so, how many? Could we do more?

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- Do we offer capacity-building grants? If so, how many? Could we do more?

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- Do we offer multiyear grants? If so, how many? Could we do more?

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- Does our reporting process create unnecessary burdens on grantees?

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IMPLEMENTATION



MINDING THE GAP BETWEEN REFLECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Lean funders are well suited to engage grantees and members of the community in decision-making. Supporting racial equity involves being able to listen, show humility, curiosity, and a commitment to continual learning—characteristics lean funders possess in droves.

To be powerful allies in this movement toward racial equity, leanly staffed foundations must do more than reflect—they must implement change.

Implementation ideas: operational practices

What racial equity operational practices have we implemented? For the statements that follow, check those that apply to your foundation. For those statements not selected, write in the space provided what it would take to implement the operational practice at your foundation.

- We have an institutional commitment to addressing or eliminating inequities.
- Employees completed training or self-assessment, or both, on racial equity-related topics, such as cultural complacency or implicit bias.
- Vision or mission statements, or both, include an expressed commitment to racial equity.
- We are implementing the same racial equity practices and policies required of our partners or our grantees.
- We provide intentional support to staff to address racial and ethnic inequities.
- Our board has organizational policies dedicated to creating a more equitable environment.
- We have an organizational policy or practice or rule for board diversity.
- We provide intentional support for the board to address racial and ethnic inequities.
- We have an organizational policy or practice or rule for employee diversity.
- The board completed training or self-assessment, or both, on racial equity-related topics, such as cultural complacency or implicit bias.

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Implementation ideas: behavioral practices

What racial equity behavioral practices have we implemented? For the statements that follow, check those that apply to your foundation. For those statements not selected, write in the space provided what it would take to implement the behavioral practice at your foundation.

- Foundation board and staff have authentic relationships with members of the communities the foundation seeks to serve.
- Foundation board and staff have a strong understanding of the social, environmental, and structural determinants of racial and ethnic inequities.
- The foundation's data and planning practices are accessible to community stakeholders.
- We accept proposals written for other foundations or funders.
- The foundation's data and planning practices are driven by community stakeholders; for example, they incorporate community narratives and experience.
- The foundation asks grantees to disaggregate their data by demographic characteristics, such as gender, race or ethnicity.
- The foundation disaggregates its own data by demographic characteristics, such as gender, race or ethnicity.
- The foundation has moved part of its endowment into a Community Development Financial Institution.
- A majority of our grants go to organizations run by People of Color.
- The foundation purchases products from a majority of women, BIPOC or both-owned businesses.

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CONCLUSION



Lean funders are increasingly focusing on racial equity, an essential part of philanthropy. To be influential supporters of the racial equity movement, though, leanly staffed foundations must evaluate their own demographics and operations first. We hope this guide was an opportunity to commit to taking an intentional approach to grantmaking that leads to better decision making, more equitable outcomes and an outsized impact. As always, the Exponent Philanthropy community can help you on your racial equity journey. We encourage you to connect with and get inspired by your peers:

- Reach out to other funders and nonprofits in your community or explore focus areas that concentrate on racial equity. What work are they already doing? How can you join or support their efforts?
- Attend an Exponent Philanthropy program (virtually or in person) that is focused on racial equity.
- Invite peer funders to board and staff meetings to share insights and lessons from their own racial equity journey.
- Use the [Member Directory](#), visit the [Member Discussion Community](#), or call us at 202-580-6560 to connect with members who are actively funding racial equity.
- Consider coaching and training opportunities to learn more about how you can integrate racial equity into your organization's internal and external practices.



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