

Using Peer Learning to Improve Racial Equity

In 2005, the Annie E. Casey Foundation commissioned the group Marga Incorporated to assess a variety of foundation practices focused on race, inclusion, and equity among more than 25 foundations. The researchers then conducted a series of conversations based on the report's findings with the Rockefeller Foundation, The California Endowment, San Francisco Foundation, and the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund. The conversations focused on the question: How can foundations apply a racial equity lens to their grantmaking and internal operations and policies?

To explore the answers on an ongoing basis, participants formed The Racial Equity Philanthropy Group (REPG).

"REPG provides venues for peer learning exchange," says Marga CEO Cynthia Jones. "Member institutions engage authentically and ask one another hard questions: 'What can we do to improve how resources are allocated to communities of color?' 'How are we and our peer institutions tracking information on racial equity and inclusion and how can we do it better?'"

To get at that practical application, REPG has released a series on racial equity that profiles funder strategies, highlights promising practices, and presents recommendations to the broader philanthropy sector.

The series also lays out REPG's target outcomes, among them "use of a race-equity analysis in grantmaking," "changes in the culture of philanthropy as it relates to communities/organizations of color," and "development of systems for tracking grantmaking to communities of color/minority-led organizations." One persistent issue that came up in the group's discussions about the last outcome was the lack of access to "codifiable" information about staff diversity and quantitative data about foundation investments in institutions and communities of color. So REPG members developed strategies to make this information more transparent in their institutions, and several now have detailed information on the racial demographics of grantees on their websites.

As it adds more foundations to its membership, REPG continues to provide a venue for participants to discuss their perspectives on race, equity, and inclusion in foundations while also acting as a laboratory for ideas and strategies for making practical improvements to institutional policies and practices.