

# Funder Listening Action Menu

## Tools & Resources to Shift Power to Communities

Foundations and nonprofits can do more good in the world, co-creating more positive outcomes and building community voice and power, when they regularly and deeply listen to the people and communities most affected by their decisions.

As listening through systematic feedback loops, participatory processes, and other methods has become more common in philanthropy, the question we most often hear from funders has shifted from:

**Why does  
listening  
matter?**

to



**We recognize the importance of listening, but how do we do it well in a way that improves outcomes and shifts power to the people most impacted by our work?**

## How do funders listen to shift power to communities?

We created this menu to help answer that question. It features a variety of ways funders are listening across the many dimensions of their work, and offers resources to help you start or progress along your own listening journey. It's designed to help you think broadly and systematically about how to listen in authentic, relational, and non-extractive ways.

The goal of the menu is to help you surface the most effective solutions; promote trust, accountability, and transparency; advance equity; and, ultimately, shift power to the people and communities most impacted by your work.

Viewpoint

**What Is Funder Listening to Shift Power?**

Melinda Tuan  
Fund for Shared Insight  
October 22, 2024





# **We believe funder listening to shift power to communities:**

## **Is not a one-time activity or exercise, but an ongoing process.**

Listening well reflects a commitment to the [five steps of a high-quality feedback loop](#), which includes closing the loop – circling back to those who shared their perspectives to let them know what you heard and how you are planning to respond.

## **Is grounded in relationships and partnership.**

Research from our learning partner, ORS Impact, suggests that listening processes that are most effective at advancing equity and shifting power involve being in relationship and partnership throughout the process – from framing the initial conversations to making meaning from what is heard to figuring out how to respond. These relationships are built on open channels of communication, mutual accountability, and authentic partnership, such as through shared decision making.

## **Engages an explicit power analysis.**

Funders have historically exercised outsized power, and that dynamic, if not taken into account and addressed, can result in funder listening that is extractive, transactional, or just reinforcing what funders want to hear. Funders should approach listening with a clear understanding of how power currently operates and with specific attention to people and communities most impacted, but not typically consulted, by philanthropy and nonprofits.

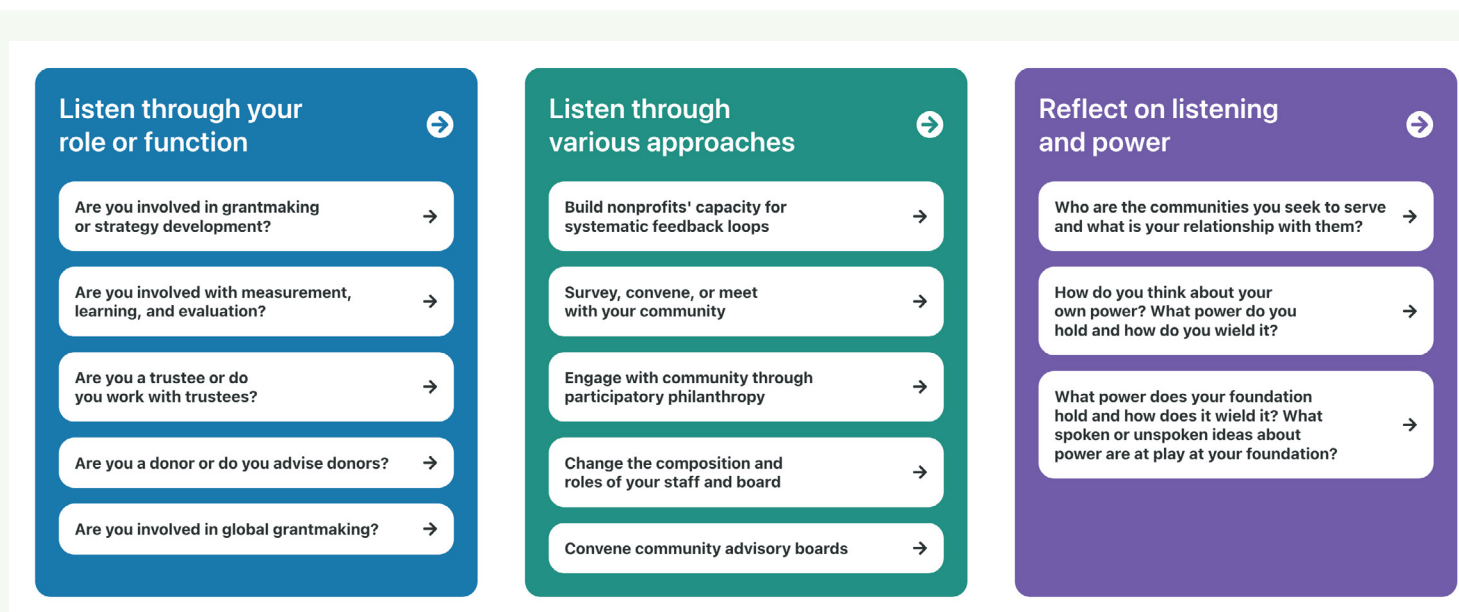
## **Advances equity.**

This kind of listening offers an opportunity for funders to hear from — and work shoulder-to-shoulder with — diverse communities and people who are experts in their own lives and have myriad assets and capabilities. It engages multiple forms of listening, such as systematic feedback loops, participatory processes, and community-driven practices, to make lasting systemic change.



## Explore this menu to spark the changes you want to see.

Mix and match to find the examples, resources, and reflections best suited to help you and your organization shift power to the people and communities at the heart of your work.



## How to use the menu

Funders are moving toward listening and participatory practices at different rates and from different starting points and perspectives. We also know that shifting power is not easy work and requires a strong internal commitment and continuous learning. It's best to be clear on your organization's motivations, capabilities, and goals. As you engage with this menu, consider your funding practices, operations, policies, and values — and then identify where change will best serve your foundation and the people and communities you seek to serve.

We recommend examining the menu's resources and examples with a willingness to turn kernels of ideas into something right for you. No matter where you start or the path you travel through this menu, we suggest spending time on the reflection questions, perhaps engaging colleagues to help you and your organization better understand and prepare for what it means to listen to shift power.

Our Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit, included as a resource in the menu, has a [Funder Readiness Assessment](#) that can be adapted to different listening practices and help prepare you to make changes in your priorities and practices.

## How we choose the items

We offer a range of examples and resources because there are no one-size-fits-all solutions; and we share them in a menu format so you can choose what's interesting or relevant to you and your foundation. We don't rank the practices or the organizations employing them or intend to signal that any featured funder has met its listening goals across the board. Each example represents only a moment in time — a practice one of your peers told us (or an intermediary) about, and that we hope might inspire you to enhance your own listening work.

Similarly, we do not rank the resources, though we did select them based on a set of criteria, including:

- We and/or our partners have personally used the resource and find it is high-quality, promotes impact, and aligns with our power analysis
- The resource is widely and publicly available (not just to paid members) and, ideally, accessible to people with disabilities
- The resource is relevant to, and includes applicable lessons for, a variety of types of funders
- The resource is as evergreen as possible

New resources are always coming online. We hope that the ones we've included are helpful while also sparking your curiosity and helping you forge an ongoing relationship with the creators and other aligned efforts.

We are always looking to add more funder listening examples and more resources. Please reach out to our communications manager, Debra Blum, or take a few minutes to share your stories and ideas on our [Lift Up Listening online form](#).

### Have questions about the menu or ideas for resources or examples?

Please reach out to our communications manager, [Debra Blum](#).



### Let's lift up listening!

This menu is a living document and we will continue to add to it as we collect new resources and examples. Please share your stories about, or experiences with, funder listening to shift power. We can't wait to share more ideas and inspiration with the field.

### Together, we can lift up listening!

Share your ideas and experiences

# Funder Listening Action Menu

## Tools & Resources to Shift Power to Communities

START LISTENING TO SHIFT POWER TO COMMUNITIES

### Listen through your role or function

Roles change and overlap – and we certainly didn’t capture all of them – so plan to take a couple looks, and also let us know how we might better help you see yourself and your colleagues in this work.

No matter what your particular role (staff, trustee, donor), we encourage you to take some time with the [reflection questions](#), especially considering your individual power.

#### Listen through your role or function



1. Are you involved in grantmaking or strategy development? →
2. Are you involved with measurement, learning, and evaluation? →
3. Are you a trustee or do you work with trustees? →
4. Are you a donor or do you advise donors? →
5. Are you involved in global grantmaking? →

## LISTEN THROUGH YOUR ROLE OR FUNCTION

### 1. Are you involved in grantmaking or strategy development?

Power shifts when funders partner with community members from the outset of their work, listening well in an ongoing and systematic way as strategy and grantmaking evolve.

This critical from-the-start approach can be paired with the grantee feedback many of you already collect. Together, the input from, and partnerships with, grantees and the people and communities you seek to serve will lead to better informed and more equitable grantmaking and strategy-setting decisions.

Listening practices that inform grantmaking can be adapted and put to use in crisis response situations when time is short.

*Note: If you're involved with grants administration, check out resources at [PEAK Grantmaking](#) and at our partner initiative [Trust-Based Philanthropy Project](#) to explore ways to engage with grantees in service of shifting power to the people and communities at the heart of the grantees' and your foundation's work.*

#### Get going with these tools and resources

##### Community-Driven Philanthropy: Participation, Partnership and Power ↗

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)

This wide-ranging publication on community-driven philanthropy explores how grantmaking can include a broad and diverse set of voices and equips you to identify and implement accessible and transparent opportunities for nonprofits and communities to influence decision making.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### The Case for Funding Black-Led Social Change ↗

ABFE: A Philanthropic Partnership for Black Communities & Hill-Snowdon Foundation

This case for philanthropy to address anti-Black racism and support Black-led initiatives can guide your foundation in creating a grantmaking strategy that achieves racial and social equity for people in the community on their terms.



### Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens ↗

Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE)

This actionable guide can help align your foundation's practices with racial justice principles by addressing systemic inequities, centering communities of color in decision-making, and sharing power.



### On Our Terms: Supporting a Thriving Native Nonprofit Sector ↗

Native Ways Federation & Melvin Consulting

Use this report's recommendations and calls to action — culled from focus groups of Native nonprofit and philanthropic leaders — to help design the ways in which your grantmaking and strategic direction can be guided by voices from the communities you seek to serve.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



As a new health conversion foundation, **Natrona Collective Health Trust** wanted to create a philanthropic institution centered on the belief that the community owns and informs their work. They partnered with global social impact firm FSG on a strategic planning process that engaged over 50 community members and leaders, particularly members of historically marginalized communities. Hearing from community members brought local and national data on health disparities to life. For example, many were surprised to learn that it could take someone hours to pick up a prescription from the pharmacy using public transportation.

Based on the data and what they heard from the community, the foundation decided to focus its work on improving behavioral health in early childhood and adolescence. They also have created a program advisory committee composed of paid community members and work with youth and other community members on participatory grantmaking efforts.

[Read more about the strategic planning process →](#)

## GreenLight Fund

As with other GreenLight Funds across the country, **GreenLight Boston** relies on local GreenLight Selection Advisory Councils made up of for-profit and nonprofit leaders, philanthropists, social entrepreneurs, and academics, who act as expert partners and sounding boards to help decide which community-based organizations receive funding. In Boston, GreenLight's model also includes a separate council of family partners who engage in a parallel process to the Advisory Council, sharing their opinions on what kinds of services they would use and how nonprofit programs impact their communities. Ultimately, the family partners join the Advisory Council to vote on what organization to support.

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



The Colorado  
Health Foundation

**The Colorado Health Foundation's** annual survey of nearly 3,000 Coloradans helps shape strategy. In recent years, residents have identified the rising cost of living, the cost of housing, and homelessness as the most serious problems facing the state. In response to those results and other input from community, the foundation added a new priority area, Economic Opportunity. And it is relying on additional listening efforts, such as interviews and focus groups and its staff's continued community engagement, to inform its work in that area.

Says Tracey Stewart, a senior program officer: The survey data, "point us in a certain direction and then we start knocking on the doors of the people we need to meet to understand, plan, and act."



Participants at the 2023 Colorado Health Symposium engage in a creative activity around community power building. Photo Courtesy of The Colorado Health Foundation; Flor Blake Photography

[Read about how the survey sets the stage for deeper listening →](#)

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



**Community Foundation**  
for Greater Buffalo

**Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo** undergoes a strategic refresh every five years, conducting a listening tour in order to re-examine its community goals. In one such effort, the foundation worked with community-based partners to engage community leaders, nonprofits, and residents through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. One result: instead of continuing with plans to invest in transportation and childcare, the foundation pivoted to focusing on systems change within education and workforce training programs to address the root causes of the challenges residents from low-income households said they were facing.



Before launching a new grantmaking program, the **Freedom Fund** collaborates with frontline organizations and local advisors on a scoping study and strategy process that includes the voices of people with lived experience. To learn about how to address the risks to young women in textile mills in India, for example, the fund supported partners' field staff to collect 300 life stories, then brought together nearly three dozen people, half nonprofit staff and half community members, to together analyze the stories and identify themes to focus their efforts on. The findings were also used to create a film and an accompanying curriculum that the local organizations used for community-led discussions.

## LISTEN THROUGH YOUR ROLE OR FUNCTION

### 2. Are you involved with measurement, learning, and evaluation?

There are many ways of knowing. Participants' first-hand experiences and perspectives produce knowledge that is just as valid as data from other monitoring and evaluation activities, and should be a critical component of your approach to measurement, learning, and evaluation.

#### Movement-Defined Learning Project ↗

Borealis Philanthropy, Social Insights

This reimagined approach to learning and evaluation makes the case for centering your grantee partners' definitions of progress and making philanthropy more accountable to movement organizers. It features recommendations and resources for funders, including a one-page tool meant to replace traditional annual reporting requirements, help nonprofits tell their stories, and encourage funders to learn alongside community members.



#### Why Am I Always Being Researched? ↗

Chicago Beyond

This guide will help you and your foundation colleagues reimagine power dynamics and level the playing field on which you design research, generate knowledge, and make decisions. It provides an equity-based approach to research that offers a path to restoring communities as authors and owners.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### Equitable Evaluation Framework ↗

Equitable Evaluation Initiative

This framework invites evaluation practitioners to recognize culture, context, and power in their evaluative work and to make explicit the ways they are tending to each. It can be used to design a measurement, learning, and evaluation strategy that invites alignment of purpose, process, and policies to shift power to community.



### Indigenous Data Sovereignty & Governance ↗

Native Nations Insitute at the U. of Arizona

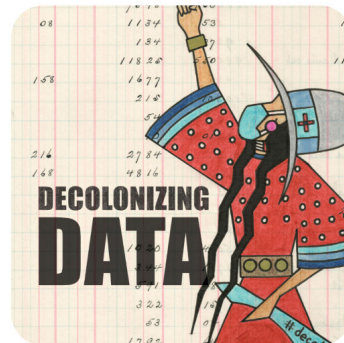
See publications and projects here to help orient your work in any type of community around the idea of Indigenous data sovereignty, the right of a nation to govern the collection, ownership, and application of its own data.



### Decolonize Data ↗

Urban Indian Health Institute

This set of tools will help you understand how and why to "decolonize data," using Native scientific methodologies to collect and present data with the necessary context to tell the complete stories. Decolonizing your data is essential to truly understanding and hearing the people and communities at the heart of your work.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### We All Count Tools ↗

We All Count

Use these tools, including one that matches research questions to methodologies, to bring more equity and fairness to how you look at and use data to tell the stories of the people and communities you seek to transform.



### Fostering Participatory Learning Approaches in Philanthropy: A Guide for the Curious ↗

Engage R+D

This guide offers practical tools, tips, and examples for integrating participatory learning into practice, such as integrating grantee and community input, and addressing limitations in traditional feedback loops.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



**The James Irvine Foundation's** participatory learning journey has focused on listening and learning from its grantees. While some participatory approaches involve direct engagement with community residents, others can center on grantees — organizations that have deep roots in their communities and actively engage with residents and the issues they face. Irvine has prioritized working closely with grantees to inform its learning and decision-making, recognizing their role as trusted partners with direct community connections.



Image: Engage R+D

[See how Irvine's efforts map with Engage R+D's participatory learning guide →](#)



The **Katz Amsterdam Foundation** collaborated with global social impact firm FSG and representatives from seven mountain resort communities to create a shared measurement framework with joint indicators for mental health and well-being. Previously, grantees had shared that key data on mental health and community well-being were unavailable for many mountain resort communities, making it difficult to measure their impact or develop programs that truly addressed community needs. Informed by community surveys conducted every other year, the data is now available through a public-facing dashboard in English and Spanish. Grantees have leveraged this data for strategic decision-making, targeting programs for specific sub-populations, securing additional funding, and collaborating effectively across regions.

[Read more about learning through shared measurement →](#)

## LISTEN THROUGH YOUR ROLE OR FUNCTION

### 3. Are you a trustee or do you work with trustees?

Trustees have unique opportunities and power to drive change — promoting listening that shifts power. They also have the potential to be transformed themselves — adopting new approaches and mindsets around stewardship, power dynamics, and philanthropy writ large.

We'll have more resources and examples coming soon. In the meantime, you may find content provided in this menu for donors applicable to your work.

#### Get going with these tools and resources

##### Purpose-Driven Board Leadership ↗

BoardSource

Get in on the growing conversation about purpose-driven board leadership to orient your governance to positive social impact and more connectedness with the communities you seek to serve, particularly around “authorized voice and power,” the recognition that organizations must be informed and authorized by those impacted by the organization’s work.

Purpose-Driven  
Board Leadership

## LISTEN THROUGH YOUR ROLE OR FUNCTION

### 4. Are you a donor or do you advise donors?

If you are a foundation donor — or work closely with donors — you have unique opportunities to shift your mindset from one of ownership over the organization's wealth to one of stewarding resources into the hands and control of impacted communities. With this kind of reframing, defined by, and advanced through, listening to the people and communities your foundation seeks to serve, you'll be creating a legacy of partnership that delivers resources where they are needed most.

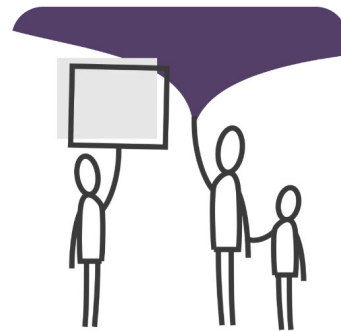
*Note: If you're a fundraiser, take a look at what [community-centric fundraising](#) is all about.*

#### Get going with these tools and resources

##### Solidaire Network ↗

Solidaire

Join a network of funders and donor organizers committed to building relationships with social movement leaders to provide support for transformational change toward a more just and collective future.



##### Resource Generation ↗

Resource Generation

Resource Generation offers resources and programming to young people with wealth or class privilege, or who are involved in family foundations to learn more about philanthropy around social, racial, economic, or environmental justice. Use this guidance to help you make sense of all the opportunities to give and move your money in the direction of social change efforts led by people most impacted by injustice.



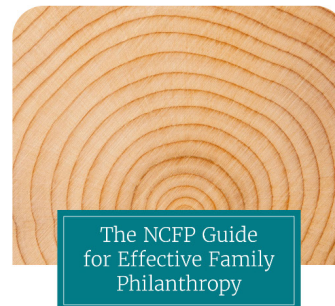
## Get going with these tools and resources

### The NCFP Guide for Effective Family Philanthropy ↗

National Center for Family Philanthropy

This guide invites you to reflect on four principles — accountability, equity, learning, and relationships — considering the meaning of each, how they manifest in your foundation’s philanthropic purpose, and how they show up in governance, grantmaking, and operations.

**Pro tip:** [National Center for Family Philanthropy’s](#) website offers additional resources to help families realize the purpose and potential of philanthropy for meaningful impact.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



Through a community-based research process that tapped the wisdom of local movement leaders and grantee partners, the **Tzedek Social Justice Fund** recognized that it needed board members with direct experience doing the kind of work that Tzedek funds. Founder and donor Amy Mandel stepped down from the board, and Tzedek is now governed by a board of community leaders with diverse backgrounds and lived experience.



The Tzedek Social Justice Fund convened a series of meetings of people identified as trusted advisors as part of a community research process that Tzedek’s executive director Marsha Davis says led to a “paradigm shift in how we fund, whom we fund, and who decides.”

[Read more about the changes at Tzedek →](#)

## LISTEN THROUGH YOUR ROLE OR FUNCTION

### 5. Are you involved in global grantmaking?

If you are a funder making grants outside the U.S., you can still listen and shift power directly to impacted communities or indirectly through intermediaries that are trusted by and accountable to impacted communities.

#### Get going with these tools and resources

##### Human Rights Grantmaking Principles ↗

Human Rights Funders Network

Six principles to help your foundation develop strategies that increase accountability, shift power, and center communities in service of advancing justice and equity.



##### Community Driven Systems Change ↗

Firelight Foundation

This approach can guide your foundation to partner with and fund community-led efforts that create systemic change by empowering communities as drivers of their own agendas.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### Step Up, Step Back: Reimagining Non-Competitive Grantmaking in Community ↗

Equality Fund

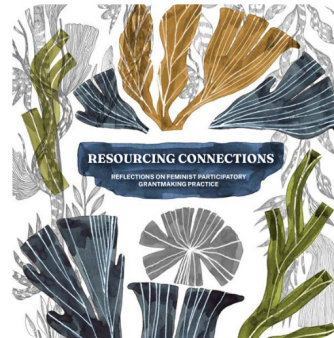
This case study shares Equality Fund's efforts to fund an ecosystem by asking the community to make decisions about how to prioritize limited resources in a non-competitive way. Apply the key learnings to design a funding process that better meets the needs of your grantee partners and the broader community.



### Resourcing Connections: Reflections on feminist Participatory Grantmaking practice ↗

FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund

FRIDA Fund documents a unique model of participatory grantmaking that you can use to consider ways that a participatory approach can transform power dynamics, create solidarity, and increase your connection to the people and communities at the heart of your work.



### 10 Things We've Learned About Community-Led Philanthropy ↗

Global Giving

Through a participatory research project, GlobalGiving shares what community members define as "community led." Apply this definition and the learnings to help you identify, support, and strengthen your own community-led approaches.

**What Does It Mean To Be Community-Led?**  
Community Leaders' Perspectives On Principles, Practices, And Impacts  
**Part 1**



## Get going with these tools and resources

### Global Fund for Community Foundations ↗

Global Fund for Community Foundations

A longstanding grantee partner, GFCF offers information and guidance to funders interested in building community philanthropy, where the emphasis is on local resources and capabilities, as an essential element of people-led development around the world.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



With a strong commitment to raising youth voices and ensuring that young people inform its work, **Global Fund for Children (GFC)** works closely with an active Youth Leadership Council (YLC). Representing different countries and holding unique experiences of activism across sectors, the YLC's 11 members play an important role in GFC's strategic planning, program development, and grantmaking processes. The YLC's chair also sits on GFC's governing board. A position on the YLC is a volunteer role but members are paid an annual fee and are also compensated for other time commitments. Additionally, they gain access to networking, capacity development, and other career-enhancing opportunities.

[Read about Global Fund for Children's Youth Leadership Council →](#)

# Funder Listening Action Menu

## Tools & Resources to Shift Power to Communities

START LISTENING TO SHIFT POWER TO COMMUNITIES

### Practice listening through various approaches

Funders can listen to people and communities in many different authentic, equitable, and non-extractive ways. The practices highlighted here are meant to demonstrate how listening can show up throughout your organization, not only in grantmaking, but also in other areas, including staffing and governance. In some cases, listening to shift power can be achieved not only through specific practices but also through more structural or systemic changes, such as those that reformulate who the decision makers are.

#### Listen through various approaches



1. Build nonprofits' capacity for systemic feedback loops →
2. Survey, convene, or meet with your community →
3. Engage with community through participatory philanthropy →
4. Change the composition and roles of your staff and board →
5. Convene community advisory boards →



#### Pro Tips

Many of the different listening practices we explore would benefit from you working in partnership with your grantees and other nonprofits working in the communities you seek to serve. And all of them are expected to enhance your continuing efforts to listen to and be in direct feedback loops with your grantees, such as through [trust-based approaches](#) and the Center for Effective Philanthropy's [Grantee Perception Report](#).

It's important to keep in mind that funders shouldn't think they must always create new or unique spaces for listening, such as by conducting listening tours or focus groups or hosting their own participatory processes. People, neighborhoods, and communities are already talking, connecting, communicating, and convening in their own forums, such as town halls, and in myriad more informal ways all of the time. As funders build relationships with communities, they should be finding ways to meet people where they are, working with them in the common spaces of partnerships and listening opportunities that already exist.

## LISTEN THROUGH VARIOUS APPROACHES

# 1. Build nonprofits' capacity for systematic feedback loops

Funders can listen by building the capacity of their nonprofit partners to implement high-quality, systematic feedback loops with the people they serve. More than 130 funders have sponsored their grantees to participate in Listen4Good, a program we spun out in 2023 that helps nonprofits gather data on client experience to improve outcomes and advance equity. Listen4Good also helps funders tap into community voice by coordinating learning cohorts and creating customized client feedback reports to promote funders and grantees cooperatively reviewing the data.

These kinds of listening opportunities can enhance partnerships with nonprofits and allow funders to hear more directly from the communities they seek to serve.

### Get going with these tools and resources

#### Feedback Labs ↗

Feedback Labs

Feedback Labs incentivizes organizations to build strong feedback loops, provides tools and training to make gathering feedback common social-sector practice, and supports a growing community of feedback practitioners, funders, and researchers.



#### Listen4Good ↗

Listen4Good

Through Listen4Good, your foundation can support nonprofit partners to gather data on community experience to improve outcomes and inform your grantmaking.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



**Charles Schwab Bank** sponsors grantees to participate in the client-feedback survey program Listen4Good and pays additional grant money to cover the staff time associated with participation. It also supports the nonprofits to collaborate in their feedback work and share key learnings with each other and with Schwab Bank.

For example, the bank has partnered with Communities Foundation of Texas and United Way of Tarrant County to sponsor a cohort of five human services nonprofits in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area to participate in Listen4Good's capacity building program and learning community. The DFW community convened five times throughout the 18-month program, covering topics including survey design, strategic planning data, and feedback system sustainability.

Elaina Mulé, community development at Schwab Bank, writes that the learning community allowed the bank "to gain new insights on community needs while developing deeper relationships with our grantees."

[Read more about Elaina Mulé's story →](#)

### ARROW IMPACT

When **Arrow Impact** paid for a grantee to participate in the feedback capacity-building program Listen4Good, it also provided a direct grant to the nonprofit to cover the staff time associated with participation, which includes developing, administering, and analyzing client-feedback surveys.



The **Barr Foundation** and **The Boston Foundation** hosted a one-day New England Listen4Good Gathering in partnership with Philanthropy Massachusetts to connect, learn, and build momentum for funders and nonprofits in the area implementing high-quality feedback loops. Similarly, the **Mary Black Foundation**, **Episcopal Health Foundation**, **The James Irvine Foundation**, and **Virginia Piper Charitable Trust** are among other funders that have hosted one-time convenings of their foundation staff and funded nonprofits working on client feedback efforts.

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



The **Northeast Pennsylvania Funders Collaborative**, a consortium of regional grantmakers, sponsored a number of nonprofits to participate in Listen4Good's feedback program. The consortium — spearheaded by the **Moses Taylor Foundation** — held quarterly convenings for funders and nonprofits to share their progress and learnings around their efforts to collect and use community feedback. The funder collaborative also distributed mini-grants to help pay for the improvements that grantees implemented in response to community feedback.



Kelly Ranieli, is executive director of Volunteers in Medicine, a Pennsylvania nonprofit that learned through feedback surveys it was important to offer clients translation services. Photo credit: Volunteers in Medicine

[Read about NEPA Funders Collaborative efforts in listening →](#)

## LISTEN THROUGH VARIOUS APPROACHES

### 2. Survey, convene, or meet with your community

Working with nonprofits through client-feedback programs, like [Listen4Good](#), or through [trust-based philanthropy](#) approaches provide funders opportunities for indirect listening and learning. In direct listening, foundation staff or board members are the primary listeners or recipients of the insights, through activities such as hosting listening sessions, convening focus groups, and conducting surveys. Funders might also commission a third party, such as research firms or consultants, to gather input for them.

The key is that your listening activities are not one offs; that they are systematic, ongoing, and part of authentic partnerships and communications.



#### Pro Tip

Make sure to take participant accessibility into account in all your listening activities, such as incorporating disability inclusion practices when convening meetings and oversampling underrepresented groups when conducting surveys. Current Global created [a website](#) to help you ensure that all your communications are accessible to people with disabilities.

#### Get going with these tools and resources

##### Community Listening Sessions: A Guide for Funders ↗

Fund for Shared Insight

Learn how to host listening sessions that encourage meaningful community engagement and empower those most affected — yet often least consulted — to influence your foundation's work.



##### Planning Accessible Meetings and Events ↗

Disability & Philanthropy Forum (DFR)

Find practical resources on how to make your virtual and in-person meetings and events more inclusive, such as an accessibility checklist and much more.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### Why Am I Always Being Researched? ↗

Chicago Beyond

This guide will help you and your foundation colleagues reimagine power dynamics and level the playing field on which you design research, generate knowledge, and make decisions. It provides an equity-based approach to research that offers a path to restoring communities as authors and owners.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



The **William and Flora Hewlett Foundation** considers itself an experienced donor in the field of family planning, yet when its Gender Equity and Governance Program was refreshing its strategic plan, the foundation turned to design thinking, a way of problem solving by deciphering what people really want through watching and listening. Hewlett brokered a partnership between IDEO.org and Marie Stopes International to engage adolescent girls in Zambia in project design. The result was a new approach that better connected with teenagers around issues of reproductive health.



[Read about Hewlett's experience →](#)

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



To follow up on themes heard in its community listening sessions with low-income workers in California, **The James Irvine Foundation** commissioned a survey of more than 3,300 residents to gain insights into the unique experiences of different demographic groups (e.g., by region, age, race/ethnicity). Learnings from the listening sessions and survey were useful, but Irvine realized that the survey's sample of Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders had painted dozens of nationalities and ethnicities as a monolithic group. To be able to see the unique challenges that exist among different groups, Irvine followed up with another survey, this time including 2,600 Californians from nine distinct AAPI ethnic groups.



[Read more about The James Irvine Foundation's survey →](#)



Through its program, Listening to Mothers in California, the **California Health Care Foundation** gathered perspectives from roughly 2,500 people who responded to a survey focusing on the experiences, outcomes, and views of childbearing women. The foundation aimed to hear especially from under-represented groups, such as by offering the survey in both English and Spanish and by oversampling Black women.

## LISTEN THROUGH VARIOUS APPROACHES

### 3. Engage with community through participatory philanthropy

Participatory approaches center the leadership, wisdom, and voices of communities, shifting power from philanthropy's traditional power centers (i.e., the donors and institutions that control the money) to the people and communities directly affected by the issues being addressed. Such approaches can be implemented in your grantmaking and across the entirety of a foundation's functions, including governance, grants administration, and evaluation.

Remember that participatory approaches require trust among all parties to be authentic and effective. Make sure to invest in relationship-building to set the stage for the deeper partnership work that will be involved.

#### Get going with these tools and resources

##### Community-Driven Philanthropy: Participation, Partnership and Power ↗

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)

This wide-ranging publication on community-driven philanthropy, which includes discussions, reflection questions, frameworks, and resources, can help you embrace diverse forms of participation — along a spectrum of practices with varying levels of nonprofit and community involvement in decision making — that are aligned with your organization's values and the contexts you work in.



##### Sharing Power with Communities: A Field Guide ↗

Community Wealth Partners

This guide offers examples of different participatory practices and advice on the groundwork you'll need to do — such as building trust and setting expectations — before engaging community members in participatory work.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### Participatory Philanthropy Toolkit ↗

Fund for Shared Insight

Find recommendations, checklists, templates and discussion guides on launching a participatory philanthropy process; a detailed case study with lessons learned; and reflections on how power shifts can happen in your philanthropy.



### Advancing Participation in Philanthropy Tool ↗

Katy Love & Diana Samarasan

This self-assessment helps gauge how effectively your foundation is incorporating participatory practices across all areas of operations, and to serve as a planning tool to increase your participatory work.



### A Funders' Toolkit for Child and Youth Participation ↗

Elevate Children Funders' Group

This tool builds your foundational understanding of child and youth participation in philanthropy and provides resources, practical considerations, and reflection questions to help you implement meaningful participatory practices.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources through Participatory Grantmaking ↗

Cynthia Gibson and Jen Bokoff via Grantcraft

This seminal guide looks at why and how funders are engaging in participatory grantmaking, sharing challenges, lessons learned, and best practices, and offers a number of case studies.



### Participatory Strategy ↗

Transparency and Accountability Initiative

This project shares case studies and a library of resources to illuminate what is (and isn't) a participatory strategy and describe how funders and nonprofits have designed and executed participatory strategic processes.



### Fostering Participatory Learning Approaches in Philanthropy: A Guide for the Curious ↗

Engage R+D

This guide offers practical tools, tips, and examples for integrating participatory learning into practice, such as integrating grantee and community input, and addressing limitations in traditional feedback loops.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



**Omaha Community Foundation** (OCF) supports five Community Interest Funds run by committees made up of residents who are directly connected to or identify with the populations the funds aim to support. The committees are responsible for setting and guiding direction, determining the process for grant selection, making funding decisions, and selecting additional committee members. Prospective committee members apply to serve through an open application process and are selected by the existing committee members.

The foundation provides administrative support to the funds and capacity-building and other support to the committees and to grant applicants. It also helps committee members embrace their role as more than advisors or managers of the funds, but, what staff describe as “true owners of it.”

[Read more about participatory philanthropy at OCF →](#)



Before transitioning to a participatory model, **Borealis Philanthropy's** Communities Transforming Policing Fund (CTPF) had a traditional grantmaking process in which grantees were selected solely by fund staff, mostly through an invite-only process. Now, deliberations and decisions are made by a participatory grantmaking committee, composed of community members identified by Borealis's grantee partners. And an open application process has meant more small and emerging nonprofits have had the opportunity to receive support.

“Ultimately, our transition to a participatory grantmaking model not only created space for a diversity of voices with direct personal and professional experience to make decisions on the distribution of resources,” writes program director Jeree Thomas. “It also birthed new practices and ways of being in relationship that our team at Borealis did not have before.”

[Read more from Thomas about transforming the CTPF →](#)

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



When **ACT for Alexandria** set out to establish a fund with a participatory-grantmaking approach, its first focus group with community leaders provided feedback that signaled the foundation did not yet have the track record or trust necessary for such an effort. In response, ACT slowed the fund's timeline, prioritizing relationship building in its day-to-day work, creating more space for community voice, partnering more deeply with community-based organizations, and executing a community-centered strategic planning process for the whole foundation.

That process led ACT back to its plans for a participatory-grantmaking fund when members of the strategy planning team, composed primarily of Alexandrians with lived experience at the intersection of race, immigration, and poverty, agreed to work on the fund's inaugural community advisory board.



A strategy planning meeting at ACT for Alexandria. Photo credit: Heather Peeler

[Read more about ACT's journey →](#)



The **Indigenous Women's Flow Fund (IWFF)** convenes five Indigenous women — described as artists, seed savers, poets, organizers, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers — to shape the themes of grantmaking programs, identify groups to support, and make final decisions on grants. An IWFF report says, "By making space for Indigenous women to create their own practices, rituals, and relationships to giving, IWFF becomes an example of what is possible when communities are given the autonomy to design processes that work best from within their own cultures and wisdom."

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing

### BROOKLYN ORG

**Brooklyn Org** has transitioned all its strategic grantmaking (more than \$4 million a year) to be conducted in partnership with community members. It employs a participatory model, including through its youth fellowship program where young people run their own grant program, reviewing proposals, conducting site visits, and making recommendations. Through its Brooklyn Elders Fund, the foundation distributes money by incorporating the advice of a rotating group of older residents who work alongside program staff to inform grantmaking and advocacy efforts. And foundation staff work with an advisory council of residents personally impacted by substance misuse or who have worked with impacted communities to determine how money from a Wellness and Recovery Fund should be distributed.

During ongoing listening tours in Brooklyn neighborhoods, the foundation actively recruits participants for its advisory councils (members are compensated) so that, as the president Jocelynn Rainey writes: “[W]e have a continuous and powerful pipeline of community informants who can become community decision makers at their community foundation.”



Dr. Jocelynn Rainey (lower left), president and CEO of Brooklyn Org, participates in a Listening Tour session in Fort Greene, Brooklyn. Photo Credit: Inspired Storytellers

[Read "Representing Brooklyn from the Ground Up" →](#)

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing

### SCATTERGOOD THINK|DO|SUPPORT

During a partnership between the City of Philadelphia and the **Scattergood Foundation**, the Overdose Prevention and Community Healing Fund used national opioid settlement money to address the harms of the opioid epidemic. As one of the foundation's three "Participatory Funds" at the time, the Prevention Fund involved impacted residents in decision making, such as through a Community Advisory Committee that helped set grantmaking strategy. A committee member's experience of having lost a loved one to overdose had led the group to reframe the fund's grant focus areas to elevate needs around community and family healing.

In addition to the advisory committee, Community Granting Groups (CGG) in each of the fund's neighborhoods of focus had reviewed applications and made selections for awards through a facilitated participatory process. CGG members, most of whom had been in recovery and/or had cared for a loved one in addiction, were careful not to evaluate grant applications based on grammar, spelling, or writing style, but rather on the organization's impact. Members also shared their personal experiences with organizations, as well as the reputation that organizations had in the community. Caitlin O'Brien, Scattergood's director of learning and community impact, says this process helped identify organizations that were deeply rooted in their communities, and lifted up grassroots groups that do not have access to professional grant writers and other resources, which often causes them to be overlooked by traditional philanthropy.

## LISTEN THROUGH VARIOUS APPROACHES

### 4. Change the composition and roles of your staff and board

One way to improve community-centered listening is to change who does the listening — that is, how your foundation is governed and staffed. For example, you might hire staff or recruit board members who have lived expertise in the issue areas you are addressing.

Remember that when working with community members in these new ways, it's critical to build a culture that makes everyone feel welcome, supported, and able to contribute.

#### Get inspired by what other funders are doing



**Inatai Foundation** hires employees who, explains president & CEO Nichole June Maher, “reflect the people we are accountable to and have expertise in delivering change with communities.” Inatai does not require prospective staff to have philanthropy experience, and they prioritize candidates who are connected to and live in certain counties in Washington that may be underrepresented on their team. They rarely recruit out of state.

After learning from community leaders how much they valued local connections, Inatai, based in Seattle, opened a second office in another part of the state, and has team members working remotely in more than a third of the state's counties. Says Maher: “This approach extends to how we recruit board members, where we host meetings and convenings, where and with whom we spend our dollars, and of course, where we make grants.”

[More about how Inatai has forged relationships with — and learned from — community members →](#)

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



The **Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge (CFCBR)** and **Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH)** each employ full-time community liaisons. Unlike program officers who deal with grants and grantees, these staff members have a mission to hear directly from and build relationships with the people their foundations seek to serve, reporting back in both formal and informal ways to inform and shape decision making at the organization.

The CFCBR's director of community engagement, who has lunch every week at a local homeless shelter, says his strategy is to make himself a "part of the fabric of the community." At MFH, the director of community relationships says for herself and the other field-based staff, the "whole job is just talking and listening to everyone" they can.



Chris Lassiter, director of community engagement at the Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge, and Rick Bady, case manager at Valley Mission, in Staunton, VA, which provides services to people experiencing homelessness. Photo credit: Kate Simon

[Hear more from the community liaisons →](#)

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



As part of a 2022 strategic plan that included a commitment to sharing power with grantees and the community, **Silicon Valley Social Venture Fund (SV2)** appointed three nonprofit leaders to its governing board that had always been comprised only of donors who fund the organization. SV2 is also including for the first time community leaders on the panels making the grants recommendations that go to the board for final determination. And a committee with an equal number of fully voting members representing donors, staff, and the community will have the authority to shape and approve of final plans on the focus of a new initiative that will represent SV2's largest-ever funding commitment.



The **Samuel S. Fels Fund** committed to recruiting board members more representative of its Philadelphia community, evolving its board over a three-year period to be 75 percent BIPOC, with more than a third of members born outside the United States. Fels also adopted a set of values that include: Trust that those most directly harmed by injustice are in the best position to know what is needed to address harms and to build well-being.

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing

### Elmina B. Sewall FOUNDATION

As part of an emergent approach that includes leaning into values around supporting individuals and community empowerment, in 2021, the **Elmina B. Sewall Foundation** held its first open call for board members. Six new people joined the board in this bid to attract more diversity and broader community representation.



Gabriela Alcalde is executive director of the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation, a Maine funder committed to "elevating voices" from the communities it serves.

[Read a Q & A with Sewall's executive director →](#)



#### Pro Tip

You don't have to wait for openings on your staff or board. Hosting interns and fellows can cultivate a pipeline that builds mutual relationships and delivers reciprocal value.

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



The **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation** has piloted an internship program for young people who have experience in the foster care system, and it is developing a fellowship program to provide leadership and professional development opportunities for people with lived expertise in other issues areas where the foundation works.



The **Annie E. Casey Foundation** has run a fellowship program for young people who are paid to design programs and advise on grants for the foundation's youth-engagement work. Casey has also included young adults in internal RFP processes.

## LISTEN THROUGH VARIOUS APPROACHES

### 5. Convene community advisory boards

In addition to changing the composition of governing boards, foundations also can take steps to listen to shift power by creating advisory boards composed of individuals impacted by their philanthropy. Advisory boards should maximize opportunities to lift up the diversity of community voice, have a true share in decision making, and be shaped by, or operate through, participatory processes.

Remember that when working with community members in these new ways, it's critical to build a culture that makes everyone feel welcome, supported, and able to contribute.

#### Get going with these tools and resources

##### Guidance for Foundations on Creating Disability Advisory Groups ↗

Disability & Philanthropy Forum

The key steps, things to know, and things to avoid laid out for you here apply to creating a disability advisory group, and are also relevant to building any kind of inclusive panel engaged in participatory work.



##### Tools and Resources for Project-Based Community Advisory Boards: Community Voice and Power Sharing Guidebook ↗

Urban Institute

This toolkit offers practical guidance, questions, and approaches for creating a community advisory board that can strengthen community empowerment, buy-in, and participation.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing

### GreenLight Fund

As with other GreenLight Funds across the country, **GreenLight Boston** relies on local GreenLight Selection Advisory Councils made up of for-profit and nonprofit leaders, philanthropists, social entrepreneurs, and academics, who act as expert partners and sounding boards to help decide which community-based organizations receive funding. In Boston, GreenLight's model also includes a separate council of family partners who engage in a parallel process to the Advisory Council, sharing their opinions on what kinds of services they would use and how nonprofit programs impact their communities. Ultimately, the family partners join the Advisory Council to vote on what organization to support.



**The California Endowment** engages young people living in California to serve on its President's Youth Council, intended to center youth voices and help shape the foundation's investments and culture. During three-year terms, council members provide community perspective and also get leadership, professional-development, and networking opportunities.

## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



When **ACT for Alexandria** set out to establish a fund with a participatory-grantmaking approach, its first focus group with community leaders provided feedback that signaled the foundation did not yet have the track record or trust necessary for such an effort. In response, ACT slowed the fund's timeline, prioritizing relationship building in its day-to-day work, creating more space for community voice, partnering more deeply with community-based organizations, and executing a community-centered strategic planning process for the whole foundation.

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A strategy planning meeting at ACT for Alexandria. Photo credit: Heather Peeler

[Read more about ACT's journey →](#)

# Funder Listening Action Menu

## Tools & Resources to Shift Power to Communities

START LISTENING TO SHIFT POWER TO COMMUNITIES

### Reflect on listening and power

We recommend you and your foundation consider the following reflection questions to help assess your readiness to listen in ways that can shift power to impacted communities.

#### Reflect on listening and power



1. Who are the communities you seek to serve and what is your relationship with them? →
2. How do you think about your own power? What power do you hold and how do you wield it? →
3. What power does your foundation hold and how does it wield it?  
What spoken or unspoken ideas about power are at play at your foundation? →



#### Pro Tip

Reading these discussions on power might help deepen and contextualize your reflections:

#### Decolonizing Wealth ↗

Edgar Villanueva





### Pro Tip

Reading these discussions on power might help deepen and contextualize your reflections:

## The Power Manual: How to Master Complex Power Dynamics ↗

Cyndi Suarez



## 2024 Reciprocity Report ↗

Right Relations Collaborative



## Limitless Possibilities: A Guide to Power Shifting Approaches in Philanthropy ↗

(formally) Center for Culturally Responsive Engagement, at MPH



## REFLECT ON LISTENING TO POWER

# 1. Who are the communities you seek to serve and what is your relationship to them?

When you engage in any listening practice, it's important to define who the communities are that you seek serve, to listen to, and shift power to, and understand your relationship to them.

**Q:** How does your foundation define the communities it seeks to serve/benefit?

**Q:** Who has lived expertise on the issues you focus on?

**Q:** Are there demographic priorities (e.g., people of color in general or specific racial/ethnic groups, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, women/girl-identified, etc.) defining communities?

**Q:** Are there shared circumstances of focus (e.g., returning citizens, youth transitioning out of foster care, un/under-insured, undocumented) defining communities?

**Q:** Does your work have geographic boundaries (e.g., neighborhoods, zip codes, regions, etc.) when defining communities?

**Q:** In whatever ways you define community, who is on the margins needing to be brought to the center of your attention in order to fully and most effectively serve the community?

## Get going with these tools and resources

### Community-Driven Philanthropy: Participation, Partnership and Power ↗

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO)

This wide-ranging publication on community-driven philanthropy includes discussion of, and reflection questions around, how you can embrace a more comprehensive view of community and relationship-building, particularly with groups traditionally under resourced by philanthropy.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### Five Domains of Wellbeing: Definitions & Key Aspects ↗

Full Frame Initiative

Put people and communities at the center and help them make meaningful change within a framework that values the five domains of wellbeing, social connectedness, stability, safety, mastery, and access to resources.



### The Community Bill of Rights ↗

Full Frame Initiative

A starting point for centering community, shifting power, and healing systemic harms, this document states eight fundamental rights communities have when engaging with systems and philanthropies.



### Thriving Leaders & Communities (TLC): Recommendations from Nonprofit Leaders of Color ↗

ProInspire

Strong and supported community-based leaders are an essential component to engaging in listening to shift power. This report provides a detailed exploration of the conditions necessary for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders to thrive within their communities and organizations.



## Get going with these tools and resources

### 14DM Definitional Matrix ↗

The Circle

This tool can help you distinguish between Indigenous-led, Indigenous-informed, and Indigenous-benefiting charities as your foundation makes funding and partnership decisions.



### The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Owners ↗

Movement Strategy Center

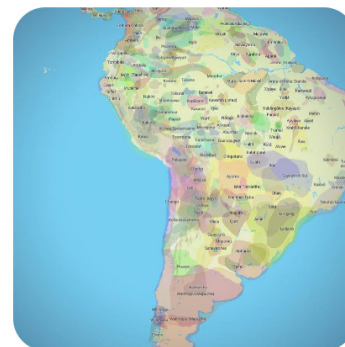
Use this spectrum to assess your current community engagement and set goals for how your foundation's efforts can advance toward greater community ownership.



### Native Land Digital ↗

Native Land Digital

Understanding who your community is begins with acknowledging the Native land on which it resides. This interactive website features a mapping project exploring the boundaries of Indigenous people and history through territory, language, and treaties.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



The Colorado  
Health Foundation™

**The Colorado Health Foundation's** annual survey of nearly 3,000 Coloradans helps shape strategy. In recent years, residents have identified the rising cost of living, the cost of housing, and homelessness as the most serious problems facing the state. In response to those results and other input from community, the foundation added a new priority area, Economic Opportunity. And it is relying on additional listening efforts, such as interviews and focus groups and its staff's continued community engagement, to inform its work in that area.

Says Tracey Stewart, a senior program officer: The survey data, "point us in a certain direction and then we start knocking on the doors of the people we need to meet to understand, plan, and act."



Participants at the 2023 Colorado Health Symposium engage in a creative activity around community power building. Photo Courtesy of The Colorado Health Foundation; Flor Blake Photography

[Read about how the survey sets the stage for deeper listening →](#)

**2. How do you think about your own power?  
What power do you hold and how do you wield it?**

**Q:** What are the sources of your power?  
Reflect on your identity, role/position,  
expertise, etc.

**Q:** What are the formal and informal mechanisms available to you to help your organization shift its relationship with communities at the heart of its work?

## Get going with these tools and resources

## Just 1 Voice

[illegible]

## Get going with these tools and resources

### HERE to Listen: Listening for Racial Equity Impact in Philanthropy ↗

ProInspire

This workshop is for foundations looking to strengthen their equity-centered practices. It includes activities to explore how power shows up within your organization and externally with community partners and grantees.



### Managing People and Power: Empowering Self for Social Impact ↗

ProInspire

A cohort-based training for you to explore and deepen a racial equity analysis around the power you hold when in management. By engaging in self-reflection and interactive activities with other participants, you will learn tools, practice strategies, and vision around liberatory ways to lead projects and teams.



## REFLECT ON LISTENING TO POWER

### 3. What power does your foundation hold and how does it wield it? What spoken or unspoken ideas about power are at play at your foundation?

In order to listen to communities in authentic and non-extractive ways, it's critical that your foundation engage in its own reflection on the institutional sources of power and how it uses that power.

**Q:** What are the sources of your institution's financial wealth?

**Q:** What are the ideas about what power is and how it operates? For example, is power thought of as primarily about control over others, or something that is generated in relationship with others? Is it considered inherently good or bad, neither or both? Dig deep, below the official ways your foundation might document its definition of power, to the underlying mental models that can be revealed through shared assumptions.

**Q:** What are the formal and informal ways your foundation uses its institutional power?

**Q:** How does your foundation collaborate or coordinate with other funders on your efforts to listen to shift power?

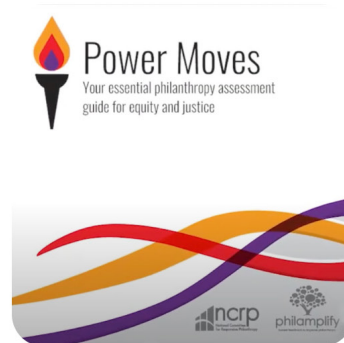
**Q:** How is your foundation's power analysis evolving over time?

## Get going with these tools and resources

### Power Moves ↗

NCRP

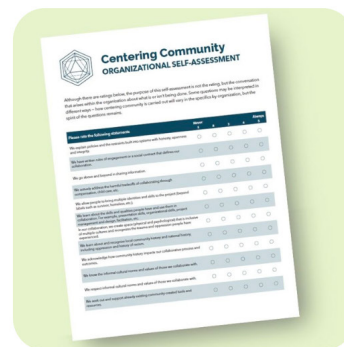
Use this self-assessment toolkit to determine how well your foundation is building, sharing, and wielding power and to identify ways to transform your programs and operations for lasting, equitable impact.



### Centering Community Self-Assessment Tool ↗

Full Frame Initiative

This tool guides conversations around what is or isn't being done to center community in your organization.



### Just Transition: A Framework for Change ↗

Climate Justice Alliance

Consider this set of principles, processes, and practices that are designed to transition whole communities, building thriving economies that provide dignified, productive, and ecologically sustainable livelihoods; democratic governance, and ecological resilience.



## Get inspired by what other funders are doing



In 2016, board members at **Weissberg Foundation** participated in “Putting Racism on the Table,” a learning series led by the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers under the leadership of Tamara Copeland, who now serves as one of the foundation’s trustees. They also hired the foundation’s first professional executive director. Since then, the board named racial equity as its North Star, and completed the National Center for Responsive Philanthropy’s Power Moves curriculum.

Through the work, Weissberg has built clarity around the need to shift power and to prioritize organizations led by and accountable to those most negatively impacted by racism. And it has adopted a four-part strategic plan focused on innovative grantmaking, investing for impact, internalizing racial equity, and influencing philanthropy.

The foundation has also explored its wealth origin story and identified harm that may have been caused in the creation of the foundation’s wealth. It has acknowledged that the commercial real estate investments that provided the basis for the foundation’s corpus, and helped transform Northern Virginia into the region it is today, may have contributed to the displacement of Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and low-income communities. And while the effort to explore its wealth origin story is ongoing, the foundation’s support of economic power building is a nod to the ties between land, land ownership, and wealth building from pre-history through today, and an acknowledgement of Virginia’s history of Native land theft and public and private destruction of Black wealth related to home and land ownership. The foundation works with consultants to continue developing skills for talking about power and racial inequity, and for interacting productively across lines of difference.



Members of New Virginia Majority gather to fight for housing rights. Weissberg Foundation supports the group as part of its Organizing Power portfolio. Photo courtesy of NVM.

[Read more about Weissberg's focus on power →](#)