



ORSIMPACT

An Exploration of The Denver Foundation's Community Listening Efforts

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful to The Denver Foundation staff and community participants who took the time to share their insights and experiences. We hope that the information in this report will be useful to them and to other foundations exploring ways to leverage community listening practices as a mechanism of shifting power to those most impacted by structural racism and systemic inequities.



Overview of The Denver Foundation

Founded 100 years ago, The Denver Foundation is a donor-advised philanthropic organization that manages more than \$1.3 billion. The Foundation has distributed \$1.6 billion of these financial resources over the last 100 years to organizations throughout the Metro Denver area, the state of Colorado, and elsewhere. The Foundation's purpose is to *"create a Metro Denver that is racially equitable in its leadership, prosperity, and culture."* Relatedly, it is guided by principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion and a commitment to engaging critical issues, accelerating systems change, building trust-based partnerships with the communities it serves, and elevating community voices and perspectives.

In working to strengthen the communities, the Foundation focuses on four key areas—economic opportunity, housing, environment and climate, and youth wellbeing. These areas were identified by the community as priorities through a series of listening sessions in 2020 to 2021 and are grounded in a racial equity approach. This strategic framework supports the Foundation's efforts to reduce racial disparities. The Denver Foundation interprets racial equity as the outcome of diversity and inclusion practices, creating the conditions for a society in which race does not provide advantages or disadvantages and each person can reach their full potential. The Foundation distributes resources to organizations working within these issue areas and supports public policies that advance mission-aligned efforts to improve outcomes across these pillars.

As part of their approach, The Denver Foundation leverages a suite of community listening efforts to influence its work and shift power to community partners. This case study explores their Advisory Committee for Community Impact (ACCI), a group of 50 to 70 community leaders whose feedback helps shape the Foundation's strategic priorities and a subset of whom guides the Foundation's community grantmaking efforts. This case study describes these listening efforts, explores related outcomes, assesses the extent to which both community members and foundation staff believe the ACCI has shifted power, and describes the experiences of the community members engaged in the ACCI. This case study is an extension of a broader analysis of funder listening efforts across 11 foundations, which provides a more expansive view of how they approach listening practices, who they include in those initiatives, the extent to which they seek to shift power, and how these listening efforts have impacted their work, along with our observations about funder listening as a practice in the philanthropic sector.



Purpose and Methods

For more than a decade, Fund for Shared Insight (Shared Insight) has been working to support nonprofits and foundations in listening, responding, and shifting power to the people most directly impacted by their work. In the past, Shared Insight focused mostly on supporting nonprofits' ability to collect feedback from their clients while more recently focusing on influencing foundations to listen and shift power. Their theory of change identifies "more leaders and staff in foundations listening, responding and shifting power to those most impacted by structural racism and systemic intersectional inequities" as a core outcome to ensuring that listening becomes standard practice in the sector. ORS has partnered with Shared Insight to explore the extent to which funders are, in fact, listening, responding, and shifting power as well as how the communities being listened to experience the work.

We use the term "listening" to refer to the range of practices the Denver Foundation employs to engage with and respond to community needs. This report illustrates *one* way listening looks like in practice and focuses on how listening can serve as a tool for shifting power to communities least consulted by philanthropy.

We selected The Denver Foundation from among 25 other foundations based on its commitment to listening and responding to community needs. We conducted six 60-minute interviews with three Foundation staff members and three community members who participate in their listening efforts. We asked staff to provide an overview of the Foundation's listening methods, the goals of those practices, and the extent to which they seek to shift power away from the Foundation and to the communities most directly impacted but least consulted by philanthropy. Because we interviewed staff across many roles within the Foundation, we also inquired about how listening efforts specifically inform their work. For community member interviewees, we sought to understand how they perceived the purpose of the Foundation's listening practice and how they experienced the engagement. We asked community members to evaluate the power dynamics between community participants and foundation staff, as well as their perception of the extent to which the listening effort shifted power and impacted their community. We then analyzed the information to draw insights. At the end of the case study, we relate the Foundation's listening practice to Shared Insight's framework on listening to shift power and assess the degree to which it aligns with this definition.



How The Denver Foundation Listens to Community


The Denver Foundation uses a suite of community listening efforts to influence its work and shift power to community partners.

The Denver Foundation staff we interviewed named a variety of community listening practices. These efforts take place over different time spans and utilize a variety of methods to gain insights from interest holders. For instance, every ten years, the Foundation engages thousands of community members through surveys and interviews to gather data and insights that inform their strategic plan and frameworks. In between these ten-year cycles, the Foundation conducts continuous listening efforts with stakeholders throughout the year. This ongoing listening can take many forms, from one-on-one conversations with grantees, community leaders, nonprofits, and donors to attending community meetings. The insights gathered are used to guide the particular areas of work each staff member holds.

In 2021, The Denver Foundation launched its Advisory Committee for Community Impact (ACCI), a group of 50 to 70 community leaders that inform the Foundation's strategic priorities and a subset of whom guides the Foundation's community grantmaking efforts by recommending which groups to fund. Because the ACCI is structured to provide deep, ongoing touchpoints between the Foundation and the community, we consider it the listening effort most aligned with Shared Insight's strategic questions around community listening and shifts in power; as such, this program is the focus of the case study.

The ACCI is a specific listening effort created to improve the Foundation's work by engaging with and learning from the community it serves and offering the Foundation strategic feedback.

The Denver Foundation created the ACCI in 2021 when it launched its strategic framework. The ACCI helps the Foundation engage with and learn from the community and the Foundation aims to use the feedback collected from ACCI members to shape and improve its programs and strategies. To ensure the participants are well-suited to represent their communities' interests and offer strategic insights, prospective ACCI members are asked to fill out a written application and participate in an interview to explore their connection to community and commitment to racial equity. To form each cohort, 50 to 70 applicants out of a pool of 100 to 150 are selected to serve two-year



terms. The Foundation seeks to recruit a diverse set of participants across race, age, gender, and stakeholder groups, believing that this will ensure the feedback and insights they receive represent a variety of community perspectives. As such, ACCI participants include community navigators, donors, nonprofit leaders, civic leaders, elected officials, and community members who are most directly impacted by the issues the Foundation seeks to address. Importantly, by including a range of stakeholders in the ACCI, the Foundation aims to process and synthesize a diversity of perspectives, leading to better feedback, conversations, and ultimately, better outcomes. As one staff member shared,

*“We really think that **bringing these diverse voices together is going to give us better conversation**, and it's going to give us better feedback . . . having those kinds of conversations and getting advice from them in that really direct way will allow us to better serve our community.”*

The group meets three times a year for three hours. The first hour is a topical learning exploration, where the group learns about a particular policy and updates in the philanthropic field or an academic area of interest. During the second part of the meeting, the group is asked to provide insights on a strategic question or challenge The Denver Foundation is navigating. In the past, the ACCI has been asked to provide feedback on how the Foundation approaches impact investing, its scholarships, approach to public policy, and use of volunteers, among other topics. Typically, these discussions are facilitated in small groups and may include foundation staff.

ACCI members are also invited to participate in the Foundation's community-informed grantmaking program, which awards ~\$4M to selected grantees each year. In line with the Foundation's commitment to racial equity, 60% to 70% of the awards are for organizations run by BIPOC leaders. ACCI members who are interested in participating meet twice a year to review a set of grant applications. Before joining this community grantmaking initiative, foundation staff train ACCI members about the grantmaking program and the Foundation's strategic priorities to help ensure that members feel equipped to participate and understand the types of work the Foundation funds. After an initial review of grants, each ACCI member meets with a staff member to review the applications in more detail and come to alignment on recommendations for awards. Once each member-staff pair has aligned their recommendations, all 25 reviewers meet for a day-long deliberation and decision-making session and ultimately recommend 50 organizations for funding, with decisions made using a consensus model. These recommendations require board approval, and to date, the board has



approved all of the ACCI's funding recommendations, signaling a shift in how the Foundation is deciding who to fund.

The ACCI intentionally targets a broad range of community stakeholders as community representatives that includes but expands beyond those who are most directly impacted but least consulted by philanthropy.

The Denver Foundation staff seek a diversity of perspectives through their listening efforts, including perspectives from donors, grantees, nonprofit leaders, and the most impacted community members. Intentionally, no single stakeholder group is the focus of their listening practices. As one staff member assessed,

*"The Foundation's direct impact isn't in community, right? It's about how we support nonprofits to do work that does have that impact. And so, we can't claim that impact in community. We can claim that a nonprofit says it's better able to do its work because of the Foundation's investment. But that's about the extent of it. We can't claim that we house people. We can't claim that we give people jobs . . . and so there's a little bit of, I think, a disingenuousness when foundations are saying they're in community, they're with the people, but their actual work is really with all of these other stakeholders. And so, **we make sure that directly impacted grassroots communities are a part of the conversation, but we don't overweight that part of the community because our work is not actually in direct relationship with that community.**"*

Because The Denver Foundation is an intermediary organization with an indirect relationship to community, they choose not to overweight any single perspective and believe that the diverse composition of the ACCI group provides the Foundation with a broad representation of community interests. In this way, the Foundation sees itself as accountable to engaging with a wider range of stakeholders in their ecosystem because the work it does involves and impacts each of these groups. Due to this diversity of perspectives, it is unclear the extent to which the voices and perspectives of community members most directly impacted by the Foundation's decisions are incorporated into ACCI recommendations and the Foundation's responses to those recommendations.




The ACCI has influenced The Denver Foundations' programs and grantmaking strategy.

Although foundation staff did not describe the ACCI as a power-shifting mechanism at first, when we asked them to reflect on the extent to which their listening efforts sought to shift power relative to this definition, staff agreed that the Foundation's work aligns with this interpretation of shifting power. They emphasized their work to decenter the Foundation's role in decision-making and create avenues for the community members to drive where the Foundation allocates its resources and advances its policy agenda.

As previously outlined, a core goal of the ACCI is to help improve outcomes of The Denver Foundation programs and strategies by sharing key insights about community needs that inform their work. After each ACCI meeting, staff will synthesize the information they receive and harvest the recommendations participants have offered, some of which are incorporated immediately, while others take more time to develop and implement. In this way, the ACCI is able to influence the Foundation's decisions. Respondents highlighted the Foundation's transparency in closing the loop with ACCI members, as participants are updated in each meeting about how the information they provided has been utilized by the Foundation. The Denver Foundation has made various changes to its programs and strategy based on its learnings from the ACCI, including the following:

- **Programmatic approaches:** Several respondents cited that the ACCI informed the design of The Denver Foundation's public policy program. ACCI members helped the Foundation narrow the geographic focus of its policy work and determine how it should show up in the policy arena (e.g., writing about policy ideas, engaging in advocacy, etc.). One staff member described the resulting policy program as being "exactly how [the ACCI] envisioned it. There were really no changes from what they envisioned." The ACCI continues to influence the policies that the Foundation engages in, specifically related to issues around housing, economic opportunity, and the environment. Similarly, interviewees cited the ACCI as the genesis of the Foundation's investments in youth mental health. After informing the Foundation about the community's need for more resources in this area, the Foundation added it to the list of issues it funds. The ACCI also helped ensure that the Foundation's approach to impact investing embedded principles of racial equity.
- **Resource allocation:** The ACCI was also responsible for The Denver Foundation's allocation of resources to nonprofit capacity building. Though the Foundation had been giving low-interest loans to local organizations for almost a decade, the ACCI alerted foundation staff about local organizations' need for grants to help them



prepare to receive those loans. The Denver Foundation acted upon this feedback and created a grants program to meet this need.


The community-informed grantmaking program gives ACCI participants direct influence over how The Denver Foundation allocates ~\$4M annually.

The subgroup of ACCI members who volunteer for this community-informed grantmaking program partner with the Foundation to select awardees for \$4M in grants annually. Although \$4M represents only 0.3% of the Foundation's annual grantmaking budget, it accounts for almost all of the Foundation's discretionary grantmaking, as the majority of their giving comes from donor-advised funds. Community volunteers collaborate with foundation staff to evaluate grant applications and determine if applicants meet the Foundation's criteria. During these meetings, they submit a slate of approximately 50 recommended applicants to the Impact Committee, which is composed of Denver Foundation board members and community leaders. Demonstrating the Foundation's deference to the community grantmaking program, one staff member noted that they had never seen the Impact Committee reject the volunteers' recommendations.

Though this model enables community members to influence resource allocation, embedded within the model are some limitations to how much power participants have over grantmaking decisions. For instance, foundation staff ultimately determine how much grantees are awarded (typically between \$25,000 to \$50,000) based on a racial equity-weighted formula. Similarly, volunteers' decisions are constrained by the Foundation's existing strategic framework. As one staff member put it,

*"True community power would be like . . . here's all the grants. You guys totally decide what you want to do. . . but **there has to be a balance of letting community lead while also giving them tools and support** from our staff."*

The community participants we interviewed, however, took no issue with this staff-volunteer partnership model, and one explicitly named that the support, guidance, and parameters helped them feel more equipped to participate effectively. Two community participants expressed appreciation for the onboarding process, during which foundation staff offered an overview of the Foundation's mission and work, as well as the purpose of the grantmaking program, its priorities, and how community participation might influence who received funding.



One community member highlighted that the parameters set by the Foundation enabled them to have the power to make appropriate choices, explaining,

*“When I collaborated with my foundation partner, I was able to make better decisions because they reminded me of those parameters. So, I would strongly urge that as foundations think about what this power shift dynamic looks like, that they take that model that The Denver Foundation has created, that **they set people up for success by making sure they have the knowledge to make good decisions.**”*

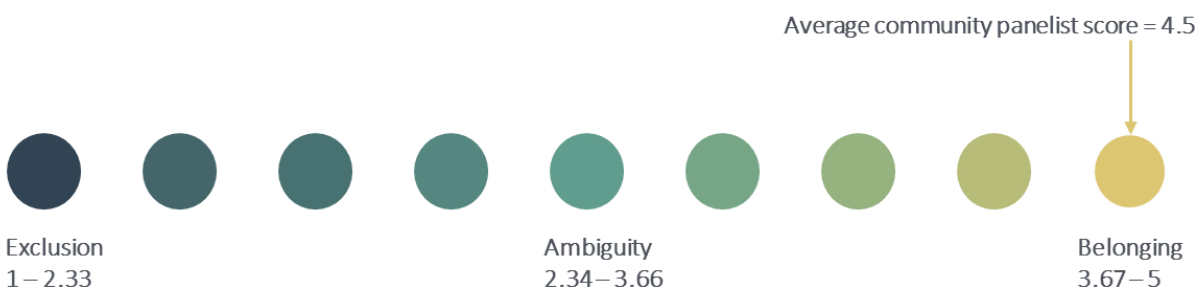
Community member ACCI participants expressed positive sentiments about their experience in the ACCI and believe the program contributed to the Foundation’s efforts to shift power in meaningful ways.

In addition to exploring foundation staff's perspective about the ACCI, it was important to consider how community members experienced the initiative when evaluating the extent to which the ACCI shifted power and achieved its outcomes. Assessing participants' experiences helped elucidate whether the ACCI was truly accessible to participants, if members believed the initiative benefited them and their communities, and if they experienced shifts in power. For instance, community members' comfort level with participating in ACCI activities will influence the quality and depth of the feedback they share with the Foundation and, as a result, the extent to which the Foundation can meaningfully leverage community voices to shape its programming. In this way, community member sentiments about the experience participating in the ACCI and their interpretation of its outcomes shed light on the true effectiveness of the program.

To assess community members' experiences on the ACCI, we spoke with three ACCI community members. All three have experience working in or leading public sector and nonprofit organizations and thus, relative to other community members, may have a deeper understanding of how social sector institutions function. Because of their positionality in the sector, none of the community member participants we interviewed are currently the most impacted but least consulted by philanthropy.

We first assessed their level of belonging within the ACCI, using the [Belonging Barometer](#) (Figure 1), which confirmed that all three members experience a strong level of belonging within the group according to their agreement ratings of ten statements. The average rating for each ACCI community participant was at least 4.3, and the average of all three community participants was 4.5 out of 5. The full methodology can be found in the Appendix.

FIGURE 1 Belonging Barometer Spectrum of Belonging¹



In reflecting on their experience as ACCI members, all three community participants expressed positive sentiments about their work and experienced the program as a meaningful opportunity to shift power from the Foundation to the community. These members offered the following reflections:


- **Positive sentiment and belonging:** All three interviewed participants felt a strong sense of belonging and appreciated the diversity and inclusivity of the group. They felt comfortable sharing feedback and believed their voices were valued. However, most of the participants expressed neutral sentiments when asked if they felt like an “insider” who understands how the Foundation works; and one participant recommended a smaller ACCI group size to facilitate relationship-building within the cohort.
- **Accessibility and understanding:** Community respondents described having a strong grasp on the purpose and role of the ACCI and outlined the core intentions of the program similarly to foundation staff. They felt well prepared to participate in the ACCI due to a strong onboarding process. However, one respondent noted that the program might be less accessible to those unfamiliar with philanthropy or with limited capacity and suggested the Foundation create more opportunities for these community members to participate in the work.

¹ Over Zero and The American Immigration Council. (2024). The Belonging Barometer: The State of Belonging in America. Revised ed. <https://www.projectoverzero.org/media-and-publications/belongingbarometer>

- **Impact and communication:** While participants understood their role, some were unclear about the tangible impact of their contributions. They suggested more communication about how their input influences foundation decisions and clarity on the Foundation's goals for community engagement, how it is evaluating outcomes, and opportunities for improvement.
- **Power shifts:** Participants noted that structural elements like hosting some meetings in Spanish instead of English and meeting in community-based locations rather than at the Foundation's office helped shift traditional power dynamics. They also reported feeling as though they had a real influence on the Foundation, especially through the community grants program and shaping strategic priorities like education and youth mental health. As one participant explained,

*"I think one of the very tangible ways that we had power is The Denver Foundation hosts a community grants program, where they have a set number of dollars that they can give out to organizations that are working in their kind of outcome areas. And the community grants program reviewed, selected, and made recommendations. But really, **it was ultimately like the group's decision about who was going to get funded and who was not.** So, when I think about power and shifting that dynamic, I think **really listening to community and the ways that community believed people, groups, [and] organizations should be funded** was helpful for them because I think through that process The Denver Foundation then had the opportunity to turn around and say, 'Oh we have a really high influx of grant applications for this specific type of organization. We're going to lean on that a little more and alter our outcome area focus to those specific things.'"*

- **Community benefits:** Participants reported feeling more civically engaged, aware of their involvement in their communities due to their participation in the ACCI. When thinking about the impact of this listening effort on the community, participants expressed that the ACCI was able to help the Foundation improve its relationships with local organizations and individuals, that funding is now more accessible for smaller organizations, and that the community is less apprehensive about working with philanthropy because of how The Denver Foundation responded to community feedback.



The Denver Foundation engages ACCI members in different ways, with varying degrees of shifting power to specific groups of ACCI members.

Community engagement literature, like *Facilitating Power's Spectrum of Community Engagement*² and Sherry Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation"³ explain the different ways in which community members engage with actors who traditionally make decisions that impact their communities, whether it is philanthropy, business, or government (Figure 2). Based on respondents' descriptions of the ACCI, this listening mechanism engages community members in different ways across the spectrum of engagement. For instance, the Foundation *involves* ACCI members in its decisions when it incorporates their feedback into its programs and strategies. On the other hand, the community-informed grantmaking process that some ACCI members participate in could be considered an example of collaboration with or deference to community participants. As such, rather than fitting neatly into a singular type of community engagement, the ACCI blends approaches based on a given function. Because of this, the extent to which power is shifted to the ACCI also varies depending on the body of work the group is engaging in.

² González, R. (2019). Spectrum of community engagement to ownership. [Facilitating Power](#).

³ Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35(4), 216–224.

FIGURE 2 Spectrum of Community Engagement⁴



However, there are some limitations to how the Foundation is deferring to the ACCI. Process-wise, while the Foundation collaborates with community members on who should receive its community grants, The Denver Foundation staff ultimately decide how much each grantee is awarded, according to an internal formula. In addition, although there have been extensive language justice efforts, challenges remain in ensuring the inclusion of non-English speakers. For example, monolingual Spanish-speaking ACCI members are currently unable to participate on the community grants committee because the Foundation has not determined a way to make that process accessible to those who are not fluent in English. As a result, their perspectives are excluded from the Foundation's listening practice that most directly shifts power to community members.

Moreover, all three of the community participants we spoke with have experience working in or leading public sector and nonprofit organizations and, thus, relative to other community members, may have a deeper understanding of how social sector institutions function. This knowledge base and expertise could enable them to have more power in ACCI conversations than community members without those particular professional experiences. For example, one community participant offered that they are a “very aware community member” and that an area of improvement for the ACCI

⁴ González, R. (2019). Spectrum of community engagement to ownership. [Facilitating Power](#).



would be facilitating more opportunities to shift power to community members who are not “in the know.” This suggests that though The Denver Foundation appreciates the diversity of stakeholder perspectives represented in the ACCI, not all voices are necessarily able to participate equally, raising a question about how power is shifting across stakeholder groups.



Assessing Efforts to Shift Power Through Community Listening

Overall, The Denver Foundation is successfully listening to community, but there are opportunities to strengthen practices to enable listening that shifts power.

In its efforts to make listening to shift power an expected practice throughout the philanthropic sector, Shared Insight has developed a detailed understanding of what it means to listen to shift power. By offering this definition and supporting tools to the sector, Shared Insight hopes to support funders in strengthening their practices to work in increasing solidarity and proximity with the communities they support. In this section, we apply Shared Insight's definition to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improving The Denver Foundation's listening practices through the ACCI.

Fund for Shared Insight defines *power shifting* as “movement toward self-determination and ownership for communities most impacted by structural racism and systemic intersectional inequities.”⁵ In relation to this work, that means decentering the outsized power of funders by enabling community members to directly influence the decisions foundations make about their resources, strategies, and practices. As Shared Insight explains,

*“Listening to shift power embraces the concept of power with, where philanthropy engages in reciprocal relationships with the communities it exists to benefit. This **requires funders to decenter themselves as the primary source of solutions and to acknowledge the knowledge and power that also reside in people and communities.** As a result, funders engage in partnership with and provide resources to support people and communities to achieve their self-defined interests and aspirations.”*

⁵ Tuan, M. (2024). What is funder listening to shift power? [Fund for Shared Insight](#).

Shared Insight [offers four guiding principles⁶](#) that can help foundations assess their listening efforts and identify opportunities to improve how they shift power to community. Table 1 defines these principles and summarizes The Denver Foundation's practices through the ACCI, identifying areas of strength and opportunities for improvement for the initiative.

TABLE 1 Mapping the ACCI to Shared Insight's Definition of Listening to Shift Power

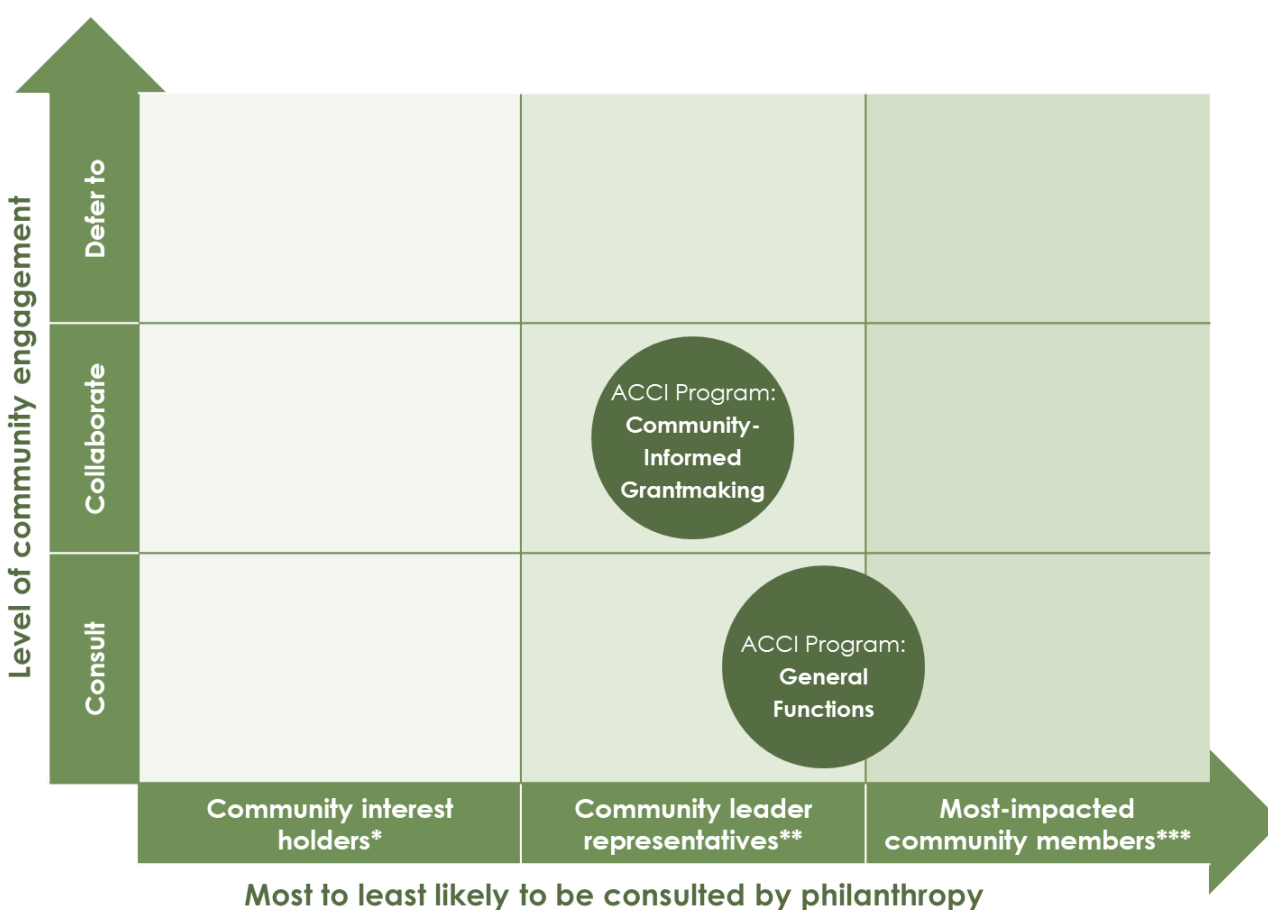
Listening to Shift Power Principles	Summary of The Denver Foundation's ACCI Practices
1. Ongoing practice: Listening should not be a one-time activity or exercise but an ongoing process reflecting a commitment to the five steps of a high-quality feedback loop, which includes closing the loop—circling back to those who shared their perspectives to let them know what you heard and how you are planning to respond.	The ACCI program is a long-term listening effort that engages its members several times throughout a given year, thus operating as an “ongoing practice.” However, participants expressed that the Foundation could do a better job of closing the loop with them so they are clear on how their insights are being used by the Foundation.
2. Relationship-based: 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.	The range of ACCI strategies enable different levels of partnership and relationship. For instance, ACCI members and foundation staff reflected that during the process of determining recipients of the community grants program, they work in deep partnership with one another and collectively decide which groups should receive funding. Similarly, the ACCI was a design partner when helping the Foundation develop its policy program. In contrast, the ACCI is positioned as an informant rather than a decision-maker, when the Foundation consults them for feedback on its topical or strategic areas of interest. In these engagements, the Foundation is seeking input from the ACCI but is not co-creating decisions with them.

⁶ Ibid.

Listening to Shift Power Principles	Summary of The Denver Foundation's ACCI Practices
<p>3. 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 engaging people and communities most impacted but not typically consulted by philanthropy and nonprofits.</p>	<p>Though the Foundation seeks to shift power to community members through the ACCI, the Foundation intentionally defines community broadly and does not explicitly target or center the most directly impacted community members who are traditionally the least consulted by philanthropy. For example, all three of the ACCI participants we spoke with were nonprofit or social sector leaders who had more access to decision-makers when compared to the average community member. Similarly, the community grants program review process, which a subset of ACCI members participate in, does not currently include monolingual Spanish speakers.</p>
<p>4. 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.</p>	<p>The Denver Foundation engages the ACCI in multiple ways, with the explicit goal of using ACCI member insights to improve its programs and strategies and advance racial equity. During ACCI meetings, the Foundation intentionally seeks input from the ACCI on strategic questions it is navigating. Importantly, foundation staff and ACCI members provided several examples of ACCI feedback that has directly shaped its work, including the following: helping the Foundation narrow the geographic focus, scope, and issue-areas for its policy work; introducing youth mental health as a new funding area; and designing the Foundation's approach to impact investing to ensure that it centers principles of racial equity. Lastly, as referenced, a subset of ACCI members work alongside foundation staff to make recommendations about which community organizations receive funds from the community grants program. To date, the Foundation has approved all of the ACCI and staff-recommended grantees.</p>

Overall, we found that the ACCI meets most of these principles to varying degrees given the different ways in which members can engage. However, there are opportunities to strengthen the practice when considering Principle 3, which specifies that funders should approach listening with a clear understanding of how power currently operates and with specific attention to engaging the most impacted people and community members. This principle allowed us to create a spectrum of community engagement that differentiates listening to shift power as a high standard of practice, from community listening and stakeholder engagement, all of which are ways in which foundations can interact with community members. Figure 3 shows where the ACCI sits in this spectrum currently, based on this analysis.

FIGURE 3 Mapping the ACCI to Shared Insight's Definition of Listening to Shift Power



*Includes members of the private sector, government officials, donors/peer funders

**Includes foundation staff with lived experience, community consultants, grantees, nonprofit/local leaders, and general members of the community

***Includes community members specifically identified as most impacted by systemic racism and other structural inequities, but least consulted by philanthropy



Conclusion

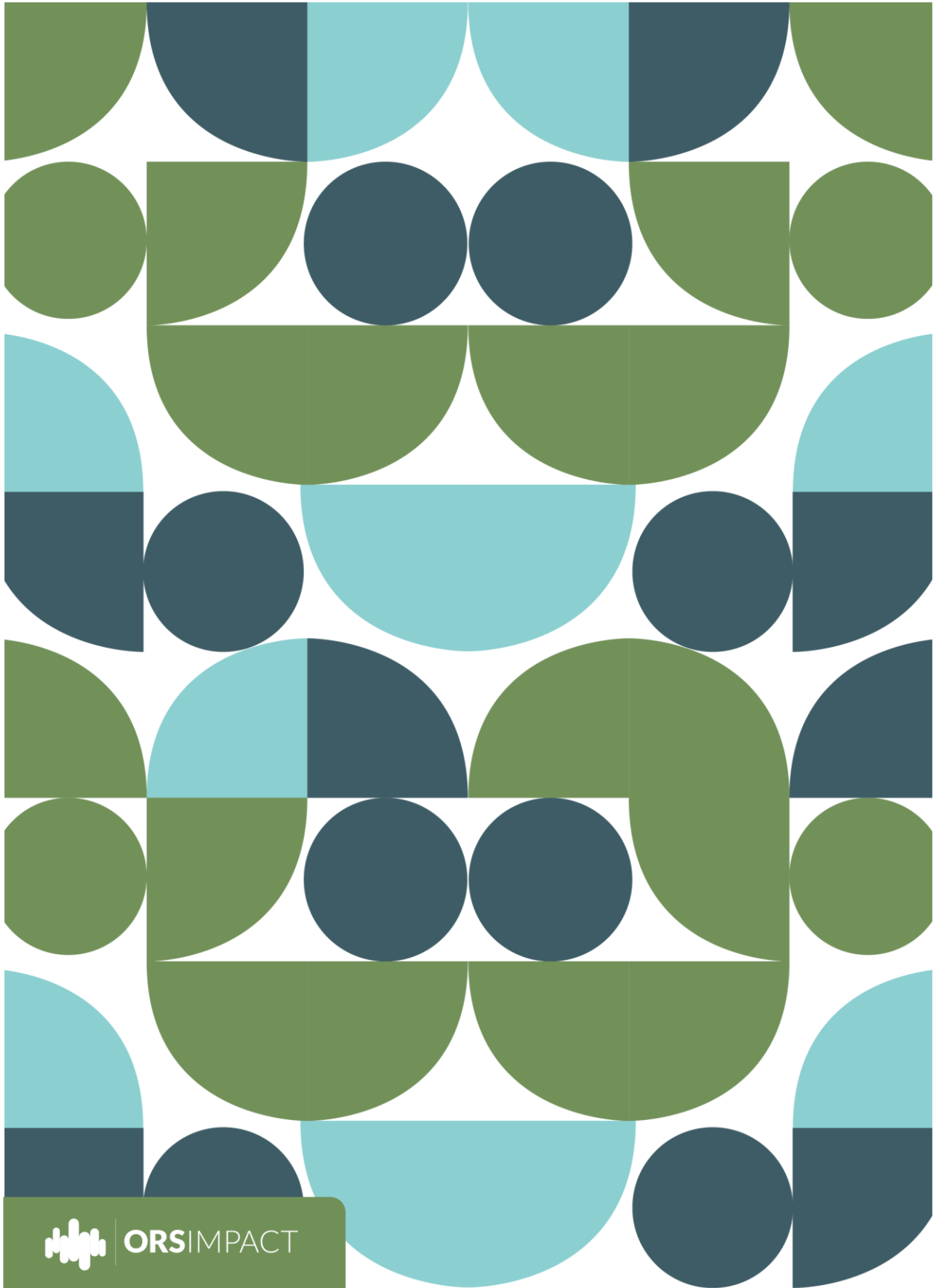
Taken together, both the staff and community member participants we interviewed believe The Denver Foundation's community listening efforts have had positive impacts on the Foundation, the community members engaged in their work, and the communities they represent. Through its listening practices, including the ACCI, The Denver Foundation has created avenues for receiving feedback from community members and strategically implementing and responding to those learnings. The Denver Foundation's experience with community listening offers examples, lessons, and questions for funders as they consider and develop approaches to community listening and shifts in power. Who should be the target of these efforts? What kind of impact can they have on participants and the wider community? What does it take to shift power effectively? There is no one answer to these questions or solution to the challenges that emerge when seeking to shift power. However, we encourage funders to embrace this complexity, analyze these questions in their own context, and design community listening efforts that enable progress toward community self-determination.

Appendix: Methodology

The Belonging Score was calculated by taking the average of scores for each belonging indicator statement for each ACCI community member participant. For negative statements, we calculated a reverse score to create a uniform scale (e.g., a “1” on a negative statement would translate to a “5”). We then took the average of those scores to arrive at the **composite score of 4.5** as shown in Table A1.

TABLE A1 Overview of Belonging Scores

	Panelist 1	Panelist 2	Panelist 3	Average
I feel emotionally connected to the Foundation and its work.	4	4	5	
Foundation staff welcome and include me in relevant activities.	5	5	4	
I feel unable to influence collective decisions at the Foundation.	5	4	3	
I feel unable to be my whole and authentic self with foundation staff.	5	5	5	
the Foundation values me and my contributions.	5	5	5	
My relationship with the Foundation is as satisfying as I want it to be.	4	4	5	
I feel like an “insider” who understands how the Foundation works.	3	3	4	
I am comfortable expressing my opinions to the Foundation.	5	5	4	
I feel like I am treated as “less than” other community members participating in this engagement.	5	5	5	
When I’m with my fellow community advisory members, I feel like I truly belong.	5	5	3	
Composite BB score	4.6	4.5	4.3	4.5



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