CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICE

A BLUEPRINT FOR INCORPORATING LIVED EXPERIENCE INTO THE GRANTMAKING PROCESS

United Way for Southeastern Michigan and Detroit Future City

Spring 2021

DETROIT FUTURE CITY

National Fund for Workforce Solutions

United Way

United Way
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

United Way for Southeastern Michigan

The mission of United Way for Southeastern Michigan is to mobilize the caring power of Detroit and southeastern Michigan to improve communities and individuals' lives in measurable and lasting ways.

We Live United for universal success and prosperity in southeastern Michigan. To that end, we work with public, private, and nonprofit partners to help families become stable and ensure children have the support they need to thrive.

Learn more at UnitedWaySEM.org/

Detroit Future City Center for Equity, Engagement, and Research

Detroit Future City (DFC) is a nonprofit organization that plays a crucial role in Detroit as an independent think tank, policy advocate, and innovation engine focused on the future of the city and the implementation of strategies that advance the recommendations laid out in the Strategic Framework, a shared vision for Detroit's future that resulted from a robust citywide public engagement effort. DFC is committed to advancing the quality of life for all Detroiters.

With equity and engagement as two guiding principles, DFC's new division, the Center for Equity, Engagement, and Research, continues to build upon DFC's research portfolio of publications and special reports, which provides up-to-date information to residents and key stakeholders.

Learn more at DetroitFutureCity.com.

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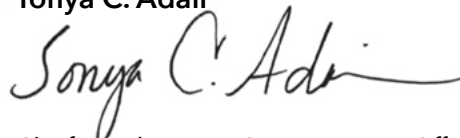
United Way for Southeastern Michigan is pleased to share Centering Community Voice: A Blueprint for Incorporating Lived Experience into the Grantmaking Process – a set of recommendations, tools, and action steps for funders and other community organizations who are committed to more equitable grantmaking. United Way received support from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions to create this blueprint, which provides tools for centering equity in both existing and future programming and systems-change work, with a particular focus on incorporating lived experience. It is the culmination of extensive research of best practices from around the country, conversations with United Way staff and partners, and focus groups with community-based organizations and community members with lived experience.

The intent of this blueprint is to bring awareness to the need for the voice of the community to be centered in our work; to provide tools for grantmakers to begin examining current processes and practices; and to describe key actions for organizations to move equity work forward. United Way strongly believes that equity should be the foundation of community investments. Our commitment to practices that disrupt unfair systems and provide access to opportunity for all is one of our guiding principles; it is central to our work and embedded in our investments. We recognize that a key component of this equity work is seeking out, valuing, and incorporating the voice of the community into grantmaking. It is one of the most effective ways to better understand and effectively respond to community needs, strengthen relationships, and achieve lasting impacts. Ultimately, we hope that this blueprint and the tools it provides will inspire and encourage grantmakers to continue the pursuit of more equitable grantmaking practices and, as a result, deeper and more meaningful impacts in the communities they serve.

Tonya C. Adair

Chief People, Equity & Engagement Officer
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INTRODUCTION

Inequities are part of a complex, deeply rooted legacy of oppression and discrimination that continues to permeate all facets of society. Funders across the country work diligently to address these inequities through their grantmaking, yet economic prosperity consistently continues to be merely a dream for millions of Americans. It is time to advance the way grantmaking is done to better meet the needs of the communities that funders seek to serve through their philanthropy and financial contributions.

Incorporating lived experience through an equity lens within your organization, and at all levels of the grantmaking process, is an important and effective way to support system changes, shift power dynamics, and ultimately move individuals in underserved communities closer to having their basic needs met long term and to reducing the inequities that exist.

Developing this blueprint involved conducting a national study of literature and toolkits centered on equity, justice, and inclusion, along with conversations among practitioners, community-based organizations, and southeastern Michigan residents with lived experience.

This blueprint begins by introducing a basic framework, which includes context from research and people with lived experiences. The framework describes the need for centering community voice and highlights opportunities throughout the grant cycle for incorporating lived experience. Following the framework is a user-friendly toolkit that includes four short organizational assessments and a list of tools. The four short assessments will help your organization evaluate where you are on your journey and includes space to create an action plan towards advancing inclusive practices within your organization by incorporating lived experience. The library of tools follows the assessment and action plan section to support you with navigating the road ahead.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Lived experience describes the expertise that comes from a person's past or present experiences; this level of expertise provides context to a given issue. People with lived experience are also called context experts. Lived experience makes individuals distinctively equipped to understand the unique challenges of their communities and therefore what is needed to make resources and processes more equitable.

WHY LIVED EXPERIENCE?

To affect long-term and sustainable movement toward equity in grantmaking, systemic issues must be acknowledged and solutions must address underlying biases and power dynamics. For example, place-based health outcomes and job opportunities can still largely be determined by race and ethnicity, as people of color have had less choice in where they live and which jobs they can pursue.[15] Centering lived experiences in the grantmaking process strengthens community agency and power to disrupt the systems of oppression that hinder people's capacity for reaching economic prosperity.

In 2018, of the 121 million households in the U.S., 51 million could not afford basic necessities of housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, a smart phone plan, and taxes. This includes 16 million who were living in poverty, meaning they earned below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and 35 million that were Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE).[17] In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these disparities, reducing opportunity for economic advancement for many.

Households in the ALICE population are our friends, our neighbors, our children's teachers, and frontline workers who risk their lives to keep us safe and healthy[15]. Their experiences matter and should be incorporated into the very programs and grants intended to serve them.

42%
OF U.S. HOUSEHOLDS ARE NOT ABLE TO AFFORD THEIR BASIC NEEDS.
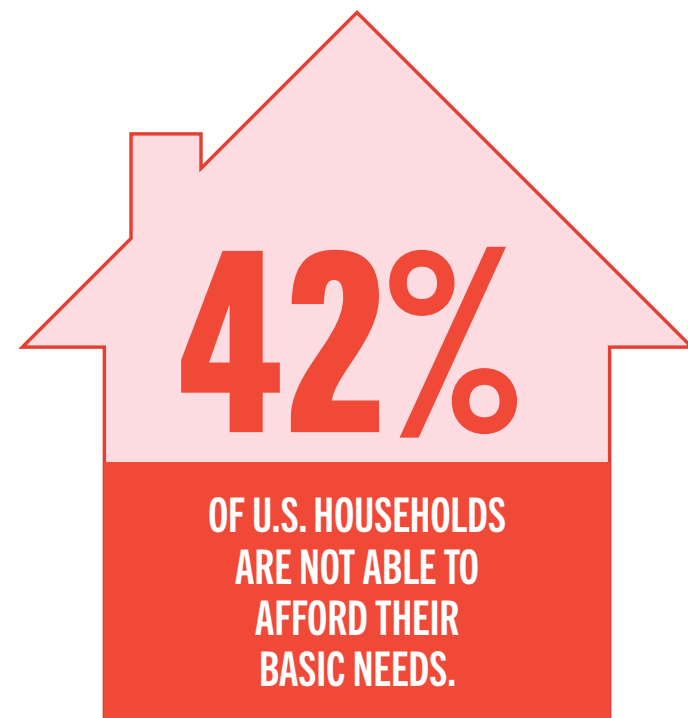
In Metro Detroit, there are approximately 1.8 million jobs, with the number of jobs in the region growing steadily since 2010. However, there are still fewer jobs than in 2001[20], and 61 percent of jobs in Michigan pay less than $20 per hour[15]. There is a substantial premium for those with a four-year degree. The median four-year degree holder in Metro Detroit makes $32.68 per hour compared to $17.58 for those without one[12]. With new jobs being largely low-wage, wealth and health gaps continue to increase. In 2019, there were more than 1.5 million Michigan households – nearly 40% of households in the state – living below the ALICE threshold which is the the average income that a household needs to afford the household basics defined by the Household Survival Budget for each county." [17] A disproportionate percentage of these households are Hispanic (48%), Black (60%) and single-headed households with children (73%)[15].

The Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO) points to several economic challenges that hinder people's ability to reach self-sufficiency. They are:

- **Economic mobility has stalled:** Although the economy is strong, prosperity is not widely shared across various demographic groups.

- **Skill and credential gaps persist despite available jobs:** Good jobs require learning after high school.

- **Too many people face non-skill barriers to opportunity:** Poverty and systemic barriers prevent many from being able to move up the career ladder.

- **The talent pool isn't growing fast enough:** Michigan faces more potential decline in population by 2030.

- **Future economic shifts pose threats to families:** Michigan is highly exposed to automation and recession, with 42%of Michigan jobs projected to be at least partially automatable by 2040.

- **The ecosystem is not generating enough economic growth:** Failure to translate R&D investment into growth and employment.[27]

WHY LIVED EXPERIENCE?

The fundamental goal of grantmaking is to support the ability of nonprofits to make progress on complex issues within communities. Grantmakers work hard through their philanthropy to combat the inequities that stifle opportunity and justice. Yet, at the same time, funders are frequently contributing to those inequities through grantmaking practices that control the accumulation of wealth and its distribution in communities, in many cases hindering a nonprofit's ability to produce social goods that truly meet the needs of the community and support systems change. Fully, deeply, and equitably incorporating lived experience first requires reckoning with these trends and challenges, both locally and nationally.

Now is the time for funders to refine grantmaking approaches to better meet the needs of community members by incorporating lived experiences into the grantmaking and decision-making processes. This includes residents and staff within community-based organizations (CBO). In doing so, funders will design better programs and solutions that close systemic gaps and drive opportunities for economic mobility.

> **"The lack of incorporating voices on the ground is why systems are essentially broken. When we start aligning solutions to on the ground experience, we strengthen systems and better meet the needs in the community."**
>
> **– Anonymous community resident**

> **"The value of incorporating lived experience into grantmaking and decision making is the chance for a more just and equitable society."**
>
> **– Stephanie J., community resident**

WHO SHOULD USE THIS BLUEPRINT?

Operationalizing lived experience to ensure equitable grantmaking processes is an iterative process that can start at any point within the organization. Although organizational leaders may typically set the precedent, staff should also acknowledge that they too have the power to move the organization towards equity and inclusion.

This blueprint is primarily intended for boards, leadership, and staff across departments to guide their efforts to better incorporate lived experiences throughout the grant-making process. The toolkit portion of this document provides flexible framing and exercises that may also be useful for community based organizations (CBO) in their efforts to better incorporate and leverage context experts.

WHEN SHOULD YOU USE THIS BLUEPRINT?

The short answer: as much as you can! This blueprint is intended to move you closer to creating a more equitable and long-lasting impact in the communities you serve. Users of this blueprint may find that it requires you to ask difficult questions, grapple with complex problems, and foster creative solutions. It is OK to get uncomfortable on your journey; just remember that any step made is considered progress, and continuous progress takes you closer to your goal. Small steps can catalyze further conversation and larger actions. They are a necessary and worthwhile contribution in and of themselves and as part of continued equity work.

"Funders, nonprofits, and government agencies need a guide like this. Often we as residents feel like organizations and government agencies are only coming to us as a checkbox. Our perspectives, experiences, and input is not really valued."

– Karen. H., community resident

WHERE TO INSTILL LIVED EXPERIENCE INTO YOUR PROCESS

For most funders, grant-making processes and practices vary across departments and programs. That is why lived experience should be incorporated into both your organizational values and operations as well as within grant-making processes. Doing this helps to ensure that, despite tight grant deadlines or program parameters, community voice is central and integrated.

During community-based organization (CBO) focus groups, when asked, "What do you think funders could do better to have more equitable grant processes and improve the ways they are incorporating lived experience?" CBOs expressed a desire to see funders dedicate staff to community engagement and implement participatory practices that involve community members in various parts of their processes. They noted a lack of people of color in decision-making roles and offered suggestions for improving how they can more authentically engage people with lived experience. Some of those suggestions included:

- *Co-designing and co-learning with community panels of residents and CBOs to inform policies, priorities, and processes.*

- *Find talent in the communities you serve to sit on your board and join your staff.*

- *Look internally to understand how your staff demographics reflect the community and pay attention to who is receiving your funds most often. Do those organizations reflect the communities in which they serve?*

IN YOUR OPERATIONS

Operationalizing lived experience, which is instilling lived experience into your organizational values and operations, requires deliberate measures that "drive inclusive behaviors and actions into the organization at the group, team, and individual level to identify both the positive behaviors and the biases/resistances that may prevent inclusion from flourishing." [29] People with lived experiences should be reflected in your board and on your staff. Increasing the number of context experts on boards and in staff is an appropriate step towards operationalizing lived experience. Recruiting context experts for board or staff positions may require your organization to leverage new and existing community relationships and existing staff with lived experience to bridge connections that will support your outreach efforts.

The board, along with the organization's leadership, has a vital responsibility to build the foundation that will support operationalizing lived experience, which includes building in protocols and policies that monitor and track advancements in the organization's culture of practice. **See Operations Tools in the Additional Resources Section.**

"I'd like to see funders lower barriers and become more inclusive as to who qualifies for funding"

— Tommie O., community resident

"Grantors want a fully fledged program from the get-go that will be effective but it takes some time, experimentation, system building, refinements, and yes, failures to make a program good and effective. This means investing for the long haul and recognizing that we move an ecosystem forward when we are allowed to learn from our failure. Our current system of funding leaves so many nonprofit leaders feeling like failures and then they leave the sector, but it is those leaders we need to invest in because they will build better organizations next time."

— Lisa M., Executive Director at Local Nonprofit

IN YOUR GRANT-MAKING

Centering community voice throughout the grant-making process creates an opportunity to combat power imbalances among foundations and nonprofits and people with lived experience. This shift in grant-making shares power with context experts, giving them agency to change systems and produce more equitable outcomes in their community. Funders should instill lived experience throughout the entire grant-making process, which includes three primary stages: **pre-grant, granting, and post-grant.** At each stage, there is the opportunity to incorporate lived experience, which may inform outcomes, funding priorities, distribution plans, and overall impacts.

"I shouldn't need to chat with a CPA and a nonprofit lawyer to understand how to fill out the application and/or where to find how to apply to the grant. It's hard enough to be black, a woman, a founder of a grassroots nonprofit that's already not funded broadly because of systemic racism - can someone cut us a break already?"

— Vic B., Executive Director of local nonprofit

"Funders need to include us throughout the entire process, But most importantly during the pre-grant stage."

— Clare C., community resident

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCE

Authentic engagement is described as "the intentional process of co-creating solutions in partnership with people who know best, through their own experiences, the barriers to opportunity. This is grounded in building relationships based on mutual respect that acknowledges each person's added value to developing solutions together." [5] When authentically engaging people with lived experience, remember to embrace them as experts, respect their power, give them credit and refrain from tokenizing or sympathizing with them.

Being a champion for authentic engagement activities occurs throughout various levels of your internal processes, including when you are engaging people with lived experience or community-based organizations (CBOs), or evaluating the CBOs' approaches to involving context experts as well. The five principles on the following page should guide you in being a champion of authentic engagement activities.

1. BE OPEN, TRANSPARENT AND RESPONSIVE

Be open, honest, and vulnerable when engaging people with lived experience to maintain relationships that are rooted in trust and shared accountability. Modeling openness signifies to the people you are engaging with that they can show up more fully and genuinely.[28]

2. SOLICIT AND ACT ON FEEDBACK

When obtaining input from those individuals with lived experience or CBOs, "acknowledge and affirm" by sharing what you heard, explaining how the feedback will impact your actions, and following through on those actions. This helps to strengthen trust and create accountability.[28]

3. HIGHLIGHT THE STRENGTHS OF THE COMMUNITY

Highlight the strengths of the community or organization rather than its needs. This process, known as asset mapping, will help your organization unlock and activate the full potential of community spaces, community leaders, and business partners that can help support ongoing engagement. Asset mapping also fosters mutual accountability and creates environments of engagement that are accessible and hospitable for all.[1] See the Asset Mapping Tool on page 45 to facilitate this approach.

4. BE AWARE OF YOUR BIASES

"Unconscious biases are the implicit positive or negative preferences for things, individuals, or groups shaped through our individual experiences."[4] These biases may lead you to make decisions or judgments about someone's abilities, competence, or experiences that are untrue to that person or group.[4] Be aware of your biases before engaging to reduce the chance groups and individuals are left out of funding opportunities or that they feel tokenized. Establish internal practices to prevent unconscious bias from trickling into your work and how funds are distributed. See the Implicit Bias and its Role in Philanthropy and Grantmaking Tool in the Additional Resources section on page 47 for a list of interventions that may support you and your team.

5. BE GENUINELY INCLUSIVE

Being genuinely inclusive requires "listening with attention, addressing concerns in ways that are relevant to the community, framing engagements in terms of shared values and opportunity, and cultivating a sense of belonging. This is important, especially, in communities with long histories of distrust, disaffection, and disenfranchisement between community members and established institutions of power, such as schools, police departments, or local governmental bodies." [11]

DETROIT CHAMPIONS FOR HOPE : A STORY FROM A LOCAL INITIATIVE

"Parent and Caregiver Engagement team started our engagement with a focus on parent-serving organizations , parents, caregiver, child care providers, and community members towards creating an early childhood advocacy network. The participants quickly let us know the network needed to include engagement and advocacy because families must be engaged to be able to advocate. The community also indicated the network should be made up of at least 50% parents and caregivers, as the priorities needed to be created for and by parents and caregivers.

Listening and following parent/community voice began the process of building a parent engagement and advocacy network, complete with an infrastructure that paid parents and caregivers for their expert contributions to outreach, engagement activities, and advocacy efforts. Community voice led to us switching from three geographic areas of focus (called HUBS at the time) to seven areas, aligned with the seven City Council districts of Detroit. The new infrastructure created opportunities for participants to build their resumes and get paid for their time, while leveraging their perspectives and experiences to engage more hard-to-reach families in making real change for all of Detroit's children.

Because our team members are paid more than$16 an hour, many have been able to secure reliable transportation, buy homes, secure better housing, purchase appliances, and increase their overall standard of living for themselves and their families. This has been critically essential during the pandemic.

Funders and CBOs must do a better job of truly including people with lived experience, specifically those most impacted by the program, policy, system or service to be created/delivered. Feedback for a strategy created without them is insufficient. Rather co-creation in the beginning with continuous engagement and updates throughout is essential for true impact.

Take the time to hear, value, and integrate the community voice. They may not express things the way you would, but their lived experience is expertise that should be valued and compensated for."

> **– Furqan Khaldun**
> *Family Engagement & Advocacy Co-Coordinator*
> *Hope Starts Here, Detroit Champions for Hope*

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT FOR INCORPORATING LIVED EXPERIENCE

Proven engagement tactics fall into three categorical levels of participation: **co-learning, co-designing, and power-sharing.** Tactics that include co-designing and power-sharing activities tend to involve people with lived experience more intimately and have the most transformative potential. Marginalization should be avoided, and informing should be combined with a deeper level of engagement that involves people with lived experience.

> "Listen to us, and take our suggestions into consideration. Don't just engage us to say that you've engaged the community."
>
> — Lakila S., community resident

	Levels of Engagement and Approaches				
Level of Engagement	**Marginalization** *(excluding)*	**Informing** *(one-way communication)*	**Co-learning** *(feedback, input, consulting)*	**Co-designing** *(involving, advising, and consulting)*	**Power-sharing** *(collaborating, agenda-setting, and decision-making)*
Description	Excludes certain populations from decision making and creates barriers to participation.[7]	This involves one-way communication out to the community to provide objective information.	This is a two-way exchange that establishes transparent dialogue and a feedback loop that offers the community an opportunity to provide input on plans or concepts, plans, or analysis.	This is a two-way exchange that strengthens peer networks and contributes to sustainable programs and initiatives. Community members are involved throughout processes and their input is integrated into plans.	This is a two-way exchange that creates a strong, long-term bond between an organization and the community by integrating the community in decision-making processes and placing decisions in their hands.
Example Activities	• Developing funding opportunities based on assumptions • Over-relying on previous relationships or a good history with certain organizations • Not taking time to identify who is missing	• Newsletters • Emails • Websites • Webinar presentations	• Focus groups • Asset mapping • Learning communities	• Advisory boards and councils • Workshops • Working groups	• Participatory budgeting • Participatory grant-making

CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICE
TOOLKIT

ASSESSMENTS AND TOOLS

This toolkit provides user-friendly assessments and tools to support funders on their journey to improving the ways in which they incorporate lived experience in the grant-making process.

The assessments are fillable forms that your organization can use to assess where the organization is on its journey to incorporating lived experience. Each assessment identifies tools to support you on your journey and includes space to list out goals, action steps and ways you intend to connect your actions to the outcomes you wish to see. The assessments can be done alone, but are most impactful if filled out and discussed among your team, board, or the entire organization. These assessments will help you examine four areas:

> **OPERATIONS**   **PRE-GRANT**   **GRANTING**   **POST-GRANT**

Following the assessments are tools that your organization can implement to better incorporate lived experience. In addition to the tools provided in this blueprint, there are a plethora of additional tools and resources that can be accessed online. A condensed list of some of these tools and resources is included in the **Additional Tools and Resources** section.

Consistent, continual steps towards your goal will yield positive results for your organization and those you seek to serve. As you proceed on this journey, be clear about the value of this work for you, be a champion for authentic engagement activities, and build in time to check in on your progress and assess your next steps.

YOUR ROADMAP TO CENTERING COMMUNITY VOICE

Operations	Pre-grant	Granting	Post-grant
Operationalize internal practices to strengthen commitment to incorporating lived experience among board members and staff.	The period within the grant-making process where the funder is setting priorities, determining equity metrics, and preparing their grant opportunity.	The period within the grant-making process where the funder is ensuring there is a diverse applicant pool, providing necessary assistance, and developing an inclusive review board.	The period within the grant-making process where a funder is incorporating qualitative feedback and assessing the impact of their grants to inform the next grant cycle.
Indicators and Considerations			
1. Board commitment 2. Board structure 3. Hiring practices 4. Performance measures	1. Evaluate grant pipeline 2. Engage unfamiliar CBOs 3. Involve community members setting funding priorities 4. Develop RFPs that are centered on lived experience 5. Spend time in communities you seek to support 6. Simplify and streamline the grant process for grantees	1. Inclusive decision board 2. Technical assistance and office hours 3. Disseminate RFPs to unfamiliar, under-resourced, or grassroots groups 4. Support indirect costs and unrestricted funding 5. Provide multi-year support 6. Support grantees after the check	1. Collect qualitative data 2. Assess program metrics to promote system change 3. Hold close-out meetings with grantees and people with lived experience
Tools			
• Comprehensive tools • Navigating difficult Conversations • Participatory grantmaking • Trust-based philanthropy project • Who is at your table?	• Asset mapping • Community engagement • RFP tool • Root Cause Analysis • Site visit • Unconscious bias • Who is at your table?	• Asset mapping • RFP tool • Unconscious bias • Who is at your table?	• Community engagement • Data • Empathy map • Trust-based philanthropy project • Who is at your table?

BEGIN WITH AN ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

Using the following scorecards, assess your progress toward centering lived experience in your grant-making practices before using the tools in the toolkit. There are four scorecards, one for each pillar on the roadmap:

1. **OPERATIONS**
2. **PRE-GRANT**
3. **GRANTING**
4. **POST-GRANT**

OPERATIONS
CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCE
ASSESSMENT

Scoring Descriptions

0 = not achieved, no activity/involvement
1 = minimal achievement or involvement
2 = making progress, noteworthy achievement, or involvement
3 = fully achieved or integrated

Indicator	Where are we now? (Score)	What tool can help us get there?
1. The board and organizational leadership value lived experience and believe that incorporating lived experience in the grantmaking process is relevant and valuable.		• ABFE's responsive philanthropy in black communities • Empathy map • Navigating difficult conversations • Site visits
2. A commitment to incorporating lived experience is reflected in the strategic priorities of the organization, in the mission statement, and/or the organizational values.		• Empathy map • Navigating difficult conversations • Operations tools
3. People with lived experience serve on our organization's board.		• Operations tools • Who is at your table?
4. People with lived experience make recommendations to the board and inform board decisions (e.g. through an advisory committee).		• Asset mapping tools • Community engagement tools • Unconscious bias tools
5. We incorporate lived experience as part of performance measures within our organization.		• Operations tools
6. We hire people on our staff with lived experience.		• Operations tools • Who is at your table?

OPERATIONS
ACTION PLAN

Goals:	
Actions steps:	
Anticipated barriers:	
Approach to address barriers:	
How often will we revisit this plan:	

PRE-GRANT
CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT

Scoring Descriptions
0 = not achieved, no activity/involvement
1 = minimal achievement or involvement
2 = making progress, noteworthy achievement, or involvement
3 = fully achieved or integrated

Indicator	Where are we now? (Score)	What tool can help us get there?
1. Staff spend time in the communities being served through our grant-making to establish relationships and bridge connections.		• Community engagement tools • Comprehensive tools • Site visits
2. Funding priorities are identified with the priorities of community agencies or individuals with lived experience.		• Community engagement tools • Participatory grantmaking tools • Root Cause Analysis • Who is at your table?
3. We take time to learn the ecosystem and identify under-resourced and grassroots organizations that could be served through our grant-making.		• Community engagement tools • Mapping assets and engaging community
4. We have simple and streamlined grant processes that are transparent and easy to access.		• Designing equitable grant opportunities and review processes • Operations tools • Root Cause Analysis
5. We engage people with lived experience in the development of our grant opportunities.		• Designing equitable grant opportunities and review processes • Unconscious bias tools • Participatory grantmaking tools
6. We evaluate our grant pipelines to ensure unfamiliar or grassroots have access to our grants.		• Designing equitable grant opportunities and review processes • Unconscious bias tools

PRE-GRANT
ACTION PLAN

Goals:	
Actions steps:	
Anticipated barriers:	
Approach to address barriers:	
How often will we revisit this plan:	

GRANTING
CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCE
ASSESSMENT

Scoring Descriptions
0 = not achieved, no activity/involvement
1 = minimal achievement or involvement
2 = making progress, noteworthy achievement, or involvement
3 = fully achieved or integrated

Indicator	Where are we now? (Score)	What tool can help us get there?
1. We have an inclusive and diverse review committee that includes people with lived experience.		• Designing equitable grant opportunities and review processes • Who is at your table?
2. We support multi-year and unrestricted funds to better meet the needs of the community.		• Designing equitable grant opportunities and review processes • Operations tools
3. We use an inclusion lens when evaluating proposals to understand how potential grantees include lived experience in their processes.		• Designing equitable grant opportunities and review processes
4. We disseminate RFPs to unfamiliar, under-resourced, or grassroots groups.		• Designing equitable grant opportunities and review processes
5. We support indirect costs and unrestricted funding which strengthens CBOs capacity to better meet community needs.		• Designing equitable grant opportunities and review processes • Operations tools
6. We assess previous granting efforts to identify gaps and improve our grant-making.		• Data tools • Site visits

GRANTING
ACTION PLAN

Goals:	
Actions steps:	
Anticipated barriers:	
Approach to address barriers:	
How often will we revisit this plan:	

POST-GRANT
CENTERING LIVED EXPERIENCE ASSESSMENT

Indicator	Where are we now? (Score)	What tool can help us get there?
1. We collect qualitative data centered on community voice and experience to better understand the impacts of our grant beyond the numbers.		• Data tools
2. The categories and metrics we use to evaluate our impact include metrics that predict power and access.		• Data tools
3. We disaggregate data, including all identity markers that aren't associated with access and privilege, to understand where gaps and/or inequities exist.		• Data tools
4. We hold close-out meetings with our grantees to learn what can be improved.		• Participatory grantmaking tools
5. Our close-out meetings include people with lived experience who are being served by our grantees.		• Community engagement tools • Empathy map • Who is at your table?
6. We are assessing program metrics to promote system change.		• Data tools
7. We support grantees after the check is distributed.		• Operations tools: trust-based philanthropy project

POST-GRANT
ACTION PLAN

Goals:	
Actions steps:	
Anticipated barriers:	
Approach to address barriers:	
How often will we revisit this plan:	

TOOL LIBRARY

33 **DESIGNING EQUITABLE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES AND REVIEW PROCESSES**

This tool can be used to help you develop equitable grant opportunities that center lived experience by guiding you in evaluating your existing grant pipeline, integrating RFP questions that place value in incorporating lived experience, determining equitable indicators to evaluate applications, and creating an equitable review plan that includes people with lived experience.

39 **WHO IS AT YOUR TABLE?**

This tool can be used to help you determine who your currently involved stakeholders are, as they relate to the target population or issue area, identify gaps in representation and discuss opportunities to engage appropriate people with lived experience.

41 **SITE VISITS**

This tool helps you create a more meaningful, inclusive, and equitable site visit that incorporates the voice of program recipients. This checklist can serve as a guide for site visits with current grantees or for site visits with a potential grantee.

44 **MAPPING ASSETS AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY**

This tool helps you to leverage people with lived experience in identifying the strengths and resources that currently exist within a community, the assets that may inform current or future programs or initiatives, and determine community-led solutions to community challenges.

47 **ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS**

This tool can be used to help you identify current inequities, understand the root causes for inequities you seek to address through your work, and prioritize resource allocations.

TOOL 1: DESIGNING EQUITABLE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES AND REVIEW PROCESSES

Purpose of this tool:

To help you develop equitable grant opportunities for potential grantees by systematically and authentically centering those with lived experience by guiding you in:

- *Evaluating your existing grant pipeline*
- *Integrating RFP questions that place value in incorporating lived experience*
- *Determining equitable indicators to evaluate applications*
- *Creating an equitable review plan that includes people with lived experience*

Suggested use:

The RFP process is a complex and essential part of the grant-making process. This tool was developed to support grant-makers with developing an RFP that is equitable from beginning to end. This tool is divided into three components, which can be used concurrently or on their own. The components of this tool includes:

- ***Creating Equity Focused Grant Opportunities*** *which offers a checklist of considerations to support you in designing your next grant opportunity.*
- ***Developing Equity Focused Grant Application Questions*** *which provides you with a sample menu of equity-focused questions that can be used in your grant application.*
- ***Developing your Review Board*** *which helps you design an equitable review process.*

TIP: Consider reaching those you want to engage through trusted organizations and networks (e.g. current or past grantees) and/or identifying individuals with lived experience within your own organization.

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [9, 18, 24]

TOOL 1: DESIGNING EQUITABLE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES AND REVIEW PROCESSES

CREATING EQUITY FOCUSED GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

This checklist offers considerations to support you in designing your grant opportunity. It includes a mix of best practices and suggestions from community-based organizations that participated in focus groups. Choose at least one option from each of the sub-headers below and on the next page to support you in developing an equity-focused grant opportunity.

TIP: Before designing your funding opportunity ask: What are the current inequities in the community around a specific focus area (e.g. workforce development, education, health)? What does equity look like?

Remove barriers to accessing your grant opportunities

☐	Gather user experience feedback by asking past or current grantees about their experience with the grant application and process and make changes that reflect that feedback. *Some examples may include how much time did it take to complete the application, was it overburdensome, was there enough time to apply, did you receive any/enough technical assistance, how did you find out about our grant opportunities?*
☐	Give applicants more time to apply by setting a minimum application period. *A minimum of five weeks may be appropriate, but a longer application period is ideal.*
☐	Provide technical assistance and/or office hours to answer questions and clarify funding goals to applicants.

☐	Make your application language accessible for all. This may include reducing jargon, having multiple language options, or using simpler wording in your application. *Use this Readability Test to check your application language*
☐	Provide multiple options for submission. *Some examples include: non web-based options, videos of the program "in action", or applications that have been submitted to other funders.*
☐	Build your scoring rubric into the application so that applicants are aware of how they will be assessed.
☐	Build in time to provide customized feedback to applicants that are not funded.

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [9, 18, 24]

TOOL 1: DESIGNING EQUITABLE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES AND REVIEW PROCESSES

Analyze who is a part of the process
☐ Involve those with lived experience in the process of designing the opportunity so they can help shape the goals, criteria, and questions that will be asked.
☐ Compensate people with lived experience for their time and input.
☐ Engage people with lived experience to identify appropriate equity metrics and identify community assets.

Analyze your current and past grantmaking with an equity lens
☐ Analyze what populations your current and past grantees (race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, etc.) serve to determine who is missing.
☐ Analyze the composition (race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, etc.) of staff at funded organizations.
☐ Evaluate how your current and past grantees authentically engage people with lived experience.
☐ Conduct targeted outreach for each opportunity that is customized for key groups that have been historically underrepresented in your grant process.

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [9, 18, 24]

TOOL 1: DESIGNING EQUITABLE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES AND REVIEW PROCESSES

DEVELOPING EQUITY-FOCUSED GRANT APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Below and on the following page is a sample menu of equity-focused questions that can be used in your grant RFP application. Incorporating some of these questions into the application or into conversations with potential grantees will provide an opportunity to learn how organizations are thinking about equity and incorporating lived experience into their operations and programs. Consider including at least one of these questions in your application. These questions can also serve as a guide when developing your scoring system for evaluating proposals.

Question	What is the value in asking this question?
How are community members engaged in your work?	Describes engagement between potential grantees and the community/communities served and illuminates the depth and authenticity of engagement.
How are the perspectives of community members with lived experience included in program design and delivery?	Identifies mechanisms by which clients and community members are involved in the planning and development of program, services, and community initiatives. This can help funders identify how the potential grantee understands the needs of the community.
How do you gather and document feedback from program participants?	Shows the level of engagement a potential grantee has with its service recipients.
What actions have you taken as a result of feedback you have received from program participants?	Ensures equitable and authentic engagement practices in the community that are truly addressing community needs and concerns. This ensures funder dollars are used to best meet the needs of the community as described by the community itself.

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [9, 18, 24]

TOOL 1: DESIGNING EQUITABLE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES AND REVIEW PROCESSES

DEVELOPING EQUITY-FOCUSED GRANT APPLICATION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

Question	What is the value in asking this question?
Do you currently or have plans to collect demographic information about your organization's staff, board, and senior leadership?	Shows that the applicant includes or intends to include lived experience as part of their operations by reflecting the demographics of the communities they are serving.
How does your thinking about equity inform how you create and implement programs?	Highlights potential grantee's strategies (or lack thereof) to increase focus on marginalized groups.
Do you currently include equity measures in your service delivery?	Demonstrates commitment to data-driven and equitable service delivery, ensuring that community needs are more equitably met.
Do you identify specific demographic groups (age, race, ethnicity, income, gender, etc.) that may not be accessing services/resources? If so, how? And if not, how might you?	Describes actions that the organization is taking to reduce disparities and increase equitable outcomes.
How does your programming support long-term impacts in the community that you serve?	Increases the likelihood that your funds will have lasting impacts in the community.

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [9, 18, 24]

TOOL 1: DESIGNING EQUITABLE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES AND REVIEW PROCESSES

DEVELOPING YOUR REVIEW BOARD

Developing an equitable review board should start early. Determine your equity metrics early, develop a diverse review board, and address biases directly.

During the RFP development and while in conversations with potential applicants, be open and transparent with your applicant from the beginning about how final decisions will be made and who will make them. Use the matrix below to support you in developing an equitable review board.

EXAMPLE: Organization ABC sought to hire an evaluation team to assess a new program. Before releasing the RFP, they spoke with several leaders in the field and learned that independent evaluators were typically outbid for opportunities by large entities like universities and evaluation companies. This resulted in Organization ABC to include equity criteria for independent consultants upon release of the RFP.

Tool	Activity	Purpose
Who is at your table?	Diverse review team	A truly diverse review team will be inclusive of those with lived experience, content experts who are knowledgeable about the community without directly being a part of it, and people who more broadly understand the inequities that exist in the ecosystem.
Root Cause Analysis	Identify equity metrics to evaluate RFPs	Be intentional about identifying where there are inequities early on to make sure you are doing your due diligence at this stage. These metrics may vary by program focus.
5 Sources of bias in your grant application	Combat bias in the review process	Carefully structure your review process to reduce bias. Not doing so can unintentionally distort results, which in turn can distort your mission." By combating bias in the review process, you are better positioned to select the best organizations for your grant.[20]

TIP: To ensure accessibility, develop user-friendly scoring systems (a simplified RFP process benefits the potential grantee as well), provide training on how to conduct the reviews, and encourage open communication and questions throughout.

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [9, 18, 24]

TOOL 2: WHO IS AT YOUR TABLE?

Purpose of this tool:

- *To determine who your currently involved stakeholders are, as they relate to the target population or issue.*
- *To identify gaps in representation and discuss opportunities to engage appropriate stakeholders.*

Suggested use:

Use this tool with your currently involved stakeholders to determine who is at your table and derive a plan to recruit appropriate stakeholders. If your table is not developed yet, you can use this tool to help initiate your stakeholder group.†

1. Begin by ensuring the group has a common understanding of the intended beneficiaries or the issue being addressed.

2. Provide each member of the current group an opportunity to identify where they fall within each of the four quadrants (Direct Engagement, Geographic Relevance, Demographic Relevance, Issue Experience).

3. Discuss where the group primarily lies within each quadrant. How does this affect your work (positively or negatively)? If there is only one person in the inner circle or in any of the inner rings, are they comfortable sharing their experience working with the group (do they feel fully valued, included, and/or equipped? Tokenized? Dismissed? Negative group behaviors may be unconscious but should still be identified and addressed if possible).

4. Discuss the goals of the group and where the group is in the process. Given that information, what is the ideal representation?

5. Identify any gaps and discuss opportunities to bring more people into the work.

† This tool is a modified version of the Kent County ENTF toolkit, which was developed by Inclusive Performance Strategies to equip a Kent County action team with tools that foster inclusive and collaborative environments designed to achieve equitable outcomes throughout.[13]

TOOL 2: WHO IS AT YOUR TABLE?

EXPERIENCE WITH THE ISSUE

How many people on this team have been directly impacted by this issue?
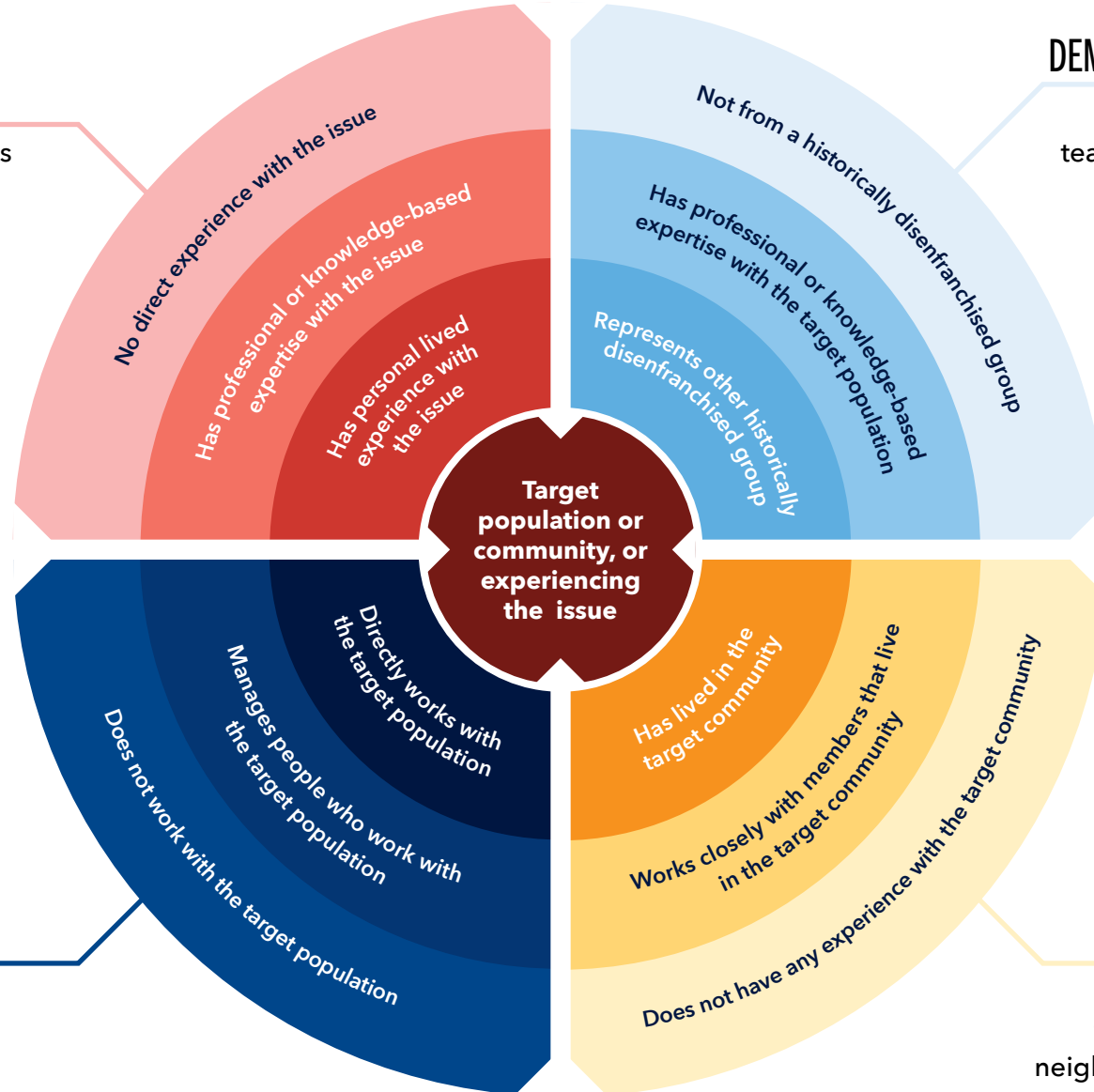
DEMOGRAPHIC RELATIONSHIP

How many people on this team demographically reflect the target population?

No direct experience with the issue

Has professional or knowledge-based expertise with the issue

Has personal lived experience with the issue

Not from a historically disenfranchised group

Has professional or knowledge-based expertise with the target population

Represents other historically disenfranchised group

Target population or community, or experiencing the issue

Directly works with the target population

Manages people who work with the target population

Does not work with the target population

Has lived in the target community

Works closely with members that live in the target community

Does not have any experience with the target community

DIRECT ENGAGEMENT

How many people work directly with the target population?

GEOGRAPHIC RELATIONSHIP

How many people on this team grew up or live in the neighborhood you are serving?

† This tool is a modified version of the Kent County ENTF toolkit, which was developed by Inclusive Performance Strategies to equip a Kent County action team with tools that foster inclusive and collaborative environments designed to achieve equitable outcomes throughout.[13]

TOOL 3: SITE VISITS

Purpose of this tool:

To create a more meaningful, inclusive, and equitable site visit that centers community voice and incorporates the voice of program recipients. This checklist and sample questions can serve as a guide for site visits with current grantees or for site visits with a potential grantee.

Suggested use:

Use this tool to help you during your next site visit. This tool helps you approach your engagement with CBOs more meaningfully and equitably.

TIP: Be transparent, express vulnerability, and use your authentic engagement principles in your conversations with grantees.

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [23, 30]

TOOL 3: SITE VISITS

A CHECKLIST FOR EQUITABLE SITE VISITS

Before the visit
☐ Schedule the site visit well in advance by giving the CBO at least two weeks advance notice so they have ample time to prepare for your visit.
☐ Co-create the agenda with the CBO and invite their input in designing the site visit.
☐ Ask to see the program "in action."
☐ Do your homework and prepare appropriate questions beforehand that are relevant to the CBO. Share the agenda and questions you'll be asking with the organization in advance of the visit.

During the site visit
☐ During the site visit, pay attention to what is happening both at the organization and in the community surrounding the site Look and listen to what is happening both at the site and in the community surrounding the site.
☐ Remember the site visit is not an inspection, it is a conversation.
☐ Ask questions about how the group includes community in their work. Are community members involved in decision making, ideation, evaluation? What methods are used to engage? Are they authentically engaging community members?
☐ Ask the CBO what the funder can do for them/what they can do to be more supportive.
☐ If you decide to engage program recipients, ask the CBO what kind of client engagement is appropriate (all requests should be in the best interest of the client, NOT the funder or the organization).
☐ Express your thanks and inform the CBO of the next steps, the decision-making process, and your timelines.

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [23, 30]

TOOL 3: SITE VISITS

Sample questions for site visits
What are you working on now that you're really excited about or proud of?
What success story can you share about this program or your organization? What was the impact on the community you serve?
If we were to give a grant to your organization, what do you think the best use of our dollars would be?
Tell us about your budget: How does it reflect your organization's model, mission, and priorities? If there are indirect costs or operational costs, how are you currently supported?
What are some of the greatest opportunities to better meet the needs of the community you serve?
Do you involve people with lived experience in your organization, either as participants or volunteers?
How do you engage community members with lived experience in your program design and implementation?

This tool was informed and developed from a variety of sources. [23, 30]

TOOL 4: MAPPING ASSETS AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY

Purpose of this tool:

- Identify the strengths and resources that currently exist within a community.
- Identify the assets that may inform current or future programs or initiatives.
- Identify community-led solutions to community challenges

Suggested use:

The foundation of this tool is intended to center the strengths of the community with respect to the variety of assets that exists within it.

1. Begin by reviewing the values below to better understand the framework of this tool and to guide you in this activity.

2. Align your mission, values, and goals for doing this activity.
   - *How does this effort align with our organizational mission?*
   - *How does our organizational values manifest in this?*
   - *How does this effort help us meet our goals?*

3. Review the descriptions of asset dimensions on the following page. This will help you understand the layers within the community to explore for an equitable asset-mapping experience.

4. Explore the critical questions to ask to help you identify the assets based on the asset dimensions. The Critical questions

to ask chart provides you with a list of questions for each dimension. Each question helps you to identify the individuals and organizations who form the structures and strengths in the community and those that stand to benefit from services.

5. Then, review the Types of Assets Diagram to help you determine the types of assets you want to identify in the target community.

6. Use the form at the end to develop your asset-mapping plan.

Values:

Transparency: Embrace potential conflicts, histories of actions/inaction, power dynamics, and the history of limited resources.

Collaboration: Shift from a paradigm of seeking feedback on programs to an effort indicative of an authentic co-construction of ideas and plans based on assets.

Equity: Align with current educational standards of equity which means intentional examination of organizational practices in both a historical and sociocultural context.

Ways to engage:

- *Interviews*
- *Site visits*
- *Survey*
- *Focus group*
- *Neighborhood visit*
- *Grantee application*

**TIP:** A community can be any target group you are seeking to map out assets for. Like an organization, a company, a specific geographic area, a sector, etc.

This tool is a modification of two tools, the American Institutes for Research Community Asset Mapping: A Planning Tool for Your Program and the Community Engagement Framework. Review the Community Engagement Framework for a comprehensive asset mapping tool.[1,2]

TOOL 4: MAPPING ASSETS AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY

Critical questions to ask	
Primary Assets	Who are the people involved with the most direct influence on the project/relationship? Who can help us do what we want to do better?
	Who are the clients targeted for service as part of the project? How are they being included?
Secondary Assets	Who else is in the organization might support the work of the relationship? (i.e. research, finance, funding, planning, graphic design, technology, other programs etc.)
	Who are other clients you serve who are not targeted by the project/relationship, but might benefit from it?
Community Assets	Who are some people in your community you already partner with or whose knowledge and expertise might support the relationship?
	Who are some people in the community who might use your services but do not work in your organization? Who are people who currently/can benefit from the relationship? What are potential new program areas to start?
Historical and Sociocultural Assets	Who are the people who started your organization? Are they still around? Who traditionally has been a part of designing and developing relationships?
	Who has the organization typically served? How would the organization like that to grow or change? What efforts have been made to reach out to potential clients, customers, and stakeholders, especially from underserved communities? What opportunities exist to collaborate on regional needs in the community?

Types of assets diagram
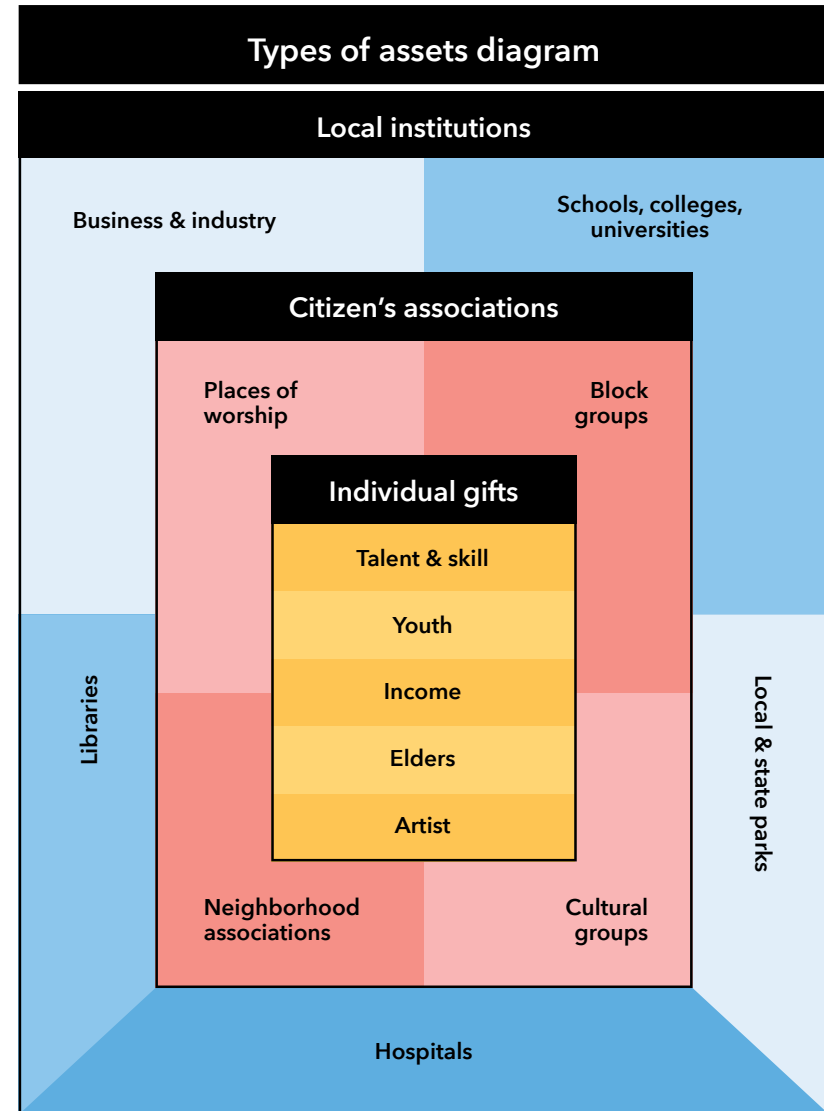
Attribution: Srmjohns, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

This tool is a modification of two tools, the American Institutes for Research Community Asset Mapping: A Planning Tool for Your Program and the Community Engagement Framework. Review the Community Engagement Framework for a comprehensive asset mapping tool. [1,2]

TOOL 4: MAPPING ASSETS AND ENGAGING COMMUNITY

	Your Plan:		
1	**Define your community geographically**		
2	**Align your mission, values, and goals**	**Mission:** How does this align with our organizational mission/vision?	
		Values: How does our organizational values manifest in this?	
		Goals: How does this project help us meet our goals? What specific goals of this project will help us meet those goals?	
3	**How will you involve stakeholders?**		
4	**Critical questions to ask**	*Primary assets:*	*Secondary assets:*
		Community assets:	*Historical and Sociocultural assets:*
5	**Types of assets to identify**		

This tool is a modification of two tools, the American Institutes for Research Community Asset Mapping: A Planning Tool for Your Program and the Community Engagement Framework. Review the Community Engagement Framework for a comprehensive asset mapping tool. [1,2]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM

Purpose of this tool:

This tool was designed to help you identify current challenges in programming and decision making and to understand the root causes for the problems you seek to address through your work. Determining meaningful solutions to problems requires an understanding of the root causes associated with that problem. Conducting a root cause analysis helps you to address community issues, foster system-change efforts, and strengthen your return on investment.

Suggested use:

This exercise may be most useful in the pre-grant stage of the grant process as you determine the issues you wish to address and how resources can be most effectively allocated to do so.

1. **IDENTIFY CURRENT CHALLENGES**

2. **CONDUCT A FISHBONE ACTIVITY**

3. **DETERMINE YOUR PRIORITIES AND NEXT STEPS**

TIP: Review the Key Considerations on page 52 as you complete your root cause analysis. These considerations can support you on your journey to identify the root causes to the issue or challenge you seek to address through your work. The considerations listed are examples issues that may be impacting your issue or challenge. Identifying the key considerations that are connected to your issue may come from conversations and/or data collected.

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM

1. IDENTIFY CURRENT CHALLENGES

Identify current challenges that you wish to address for your project. Your identification of this challenge or inequity may come from assessing the data you currently have on the topic or conversations you have had. To inform the challenge you would like to address, you can collect preliminary or additional data around the topic. This step may be as simple or complex as you deem appropriate for your project. **Below are a few considerations of who to involve in your data collection efforts and how you can involve them:**

Ideas on who to involve	Ideas of ways to collect input	Sample questions to ask
• Internal team members • Grantees • Grantee program participants • Peers and other subject matter experts • Champion(s) of authentic engagement (see page x)	• Survey • One on one interviews • Group setting • Grant application • End of grant report • Site visit	• Where do you see opportunities to improve processes or outcomes? • What still needs to be addressed as it relates to this issue? • What contributes to your success and what needs do you have to continue or strengthen success? • What challenges have you faced obtaining grants to support your initiative? • What are the biggest challenges or issues you see persisting in your community?

TIP: Be aware of power dynamics and bias when engaging people in these conversations. See the Additional Tools & Resources section - Navigating Difficult Conversations and Unconscious Bias for resources on these topics.

After you identify the current challenge that you wish to address for your project, move on to the fishbone activity to determine the root cause of that challenge.
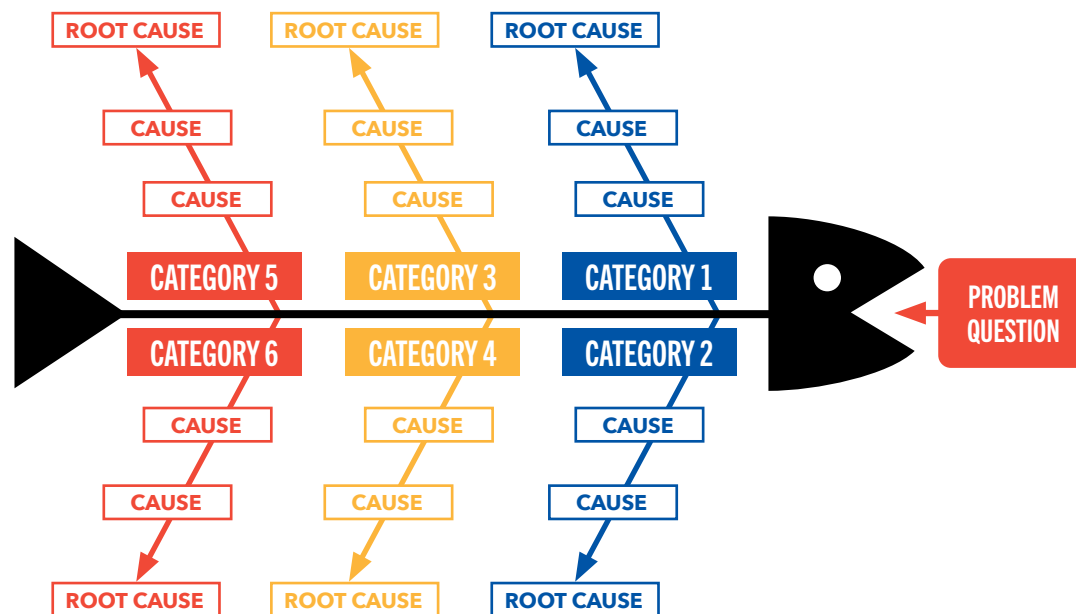
This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM

2. CONDUCT A FISHBONE ACTIVITY

The Fishbone Diagram chart below is a tool for conducting root cause analysis. It allows you to identify specific drivers of an inequity in a single chart. To the extent possible, it is valuable to have multiple key stakeholders participate, including, but not limited to, staff, board members, grantees, and those with lived experience in the issue area. You may also already have existing data that you can draw upon to complete the activity. Having a facilitator to guide the conversation may be a valuable resource to alleviate any power dynamics and to cultivate an engaging environment.

(Step-by-step instructions on following page)

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

Bonus Application

An inequity describes the unique circumstance(s) that effect a person or group of people. You can also use this process to identify equity metrics that you want to use to help you make more equitable decisions.

EXAMPLE: A local nonprofit runs an annual mini-grant program which awards grassroots groups and small businesses with grants to improve environmental conditions in their community. After its first year, the program manager used data from all grant applications, results from grant reports, and discussions from site visits to learn about each grantees experience and identify opportunities to improve the program's next cycle.

The program manager asked these questions:
- *Where do you see problems that need to be addressed?*
- *Where do you see additional challenges or barriers existing in our process?*
- *What challenges have you faced obtaining grants to support your initiative?*

Learnings from these activities were:
- *Many applicants, especially applicants of color, felt they needed grant writing supports*
- *Residents that were new to the city came with external knowledge and skills that made their applications stronger.*
- *Maintenance for projects that involved beautification was challenging and without support could exacerbate blight in the community.*
- *There was a concentration of applications that came from the part of the city that had the highest concentration of blight and vacancy.*

As a result, the program manager established equity metrics into the scoring rubric that provided points for native residents, included maintenance dollars in the grant, and strengthened their outreach to reach more grassroots groups.

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM

STEP 1: State your problem in the form of a question, and place your problem question at the head of your fishbone diagram. Note: you can start with either an outcome–or a process–based problem.

- *Starting with an outcome will allow you to be as inclusive as possible and to see the big picture. It can take longer to see a change in outcomes than to change processes, however.*
- *Starting with a process can yield early wins that inspire your team to continue working toward improving outcomes and may be part of your overall strategy to reduce inequities in outcomes.*

TIP: It's best to frame your question in a way that is as open to as many possibilities as possible. Be sure to keep your problem question free of assumptions and solutions.

STEP 2: Label the category boxes, along the body of the fish, with the answers to the question - "What might be contributing to this problem?" Some commonly used categories include, but are not limited to, people (staff, leadership, context and content experts, other stakeholders, etc.), policies, procedures/workflows, equipment/supplies, and environment.

STEP 3: For each category, ask "Why does that happen?" List possible causes and attach them to the appropriate branches.

STEP 4: For each cause, again ask "Why does that happen?" Attach that information as another, smaller branch. Keep asking "Why?" and attaching smaller branches until you or your team arrives at

a root cause. Make sure you drill down deep enough to get at a root cause. Don't stop asking "why" too early, or you may tackle a superficial issue rather than the underlying problem.

- *After repeatedly asking "why," you may come to a point when you've identified root causes that are social determinants, like poverty or lack of education. Think about the ways in which your organization, or a team of organizations, can work with community partners and policymakers to address systemic causes of inequities and inequity in your issue area.*

TIP: It may be challenging to determine when you're done asking "why". Therefore, it might be useful to stop asking "why" when the answer is something you cannot affect through your programming.

STEP 5: Highlight the root causes. Review your fishbone and identify the root causes that uniquely impact the population(s) identified in the first phase of this process. The Key Considerations will be helpful with this step because it will help you think of specific issues involving the three Cs – culture, communication, and context – that are often implicated in inequities.

> Now that you have identified root causes of your problem, you can utilize your learnings to complete an impact matrix, which can help you determine your priorities and next steps. ▶

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM

3. DETERMINE YOUR PRIORITIES AND NEXT STEPS

Now that you have identified root causes of your problem, you can utilize your learnings to help you determine your priorities. Create an impact matrix to prioritize which root causes you want to address.

Sort each of your root causes/issues by level of importance and feasibility to determine which ones you can address to produce the most sustainable and equitable impact versus the ones that may be a waste of time or produce low benefit.

Consider asking yourself the following questions:

1. How important is it to undertake this issue?
2. How feasible is it to undertake this issue?
3. How much time will it take for us to undertake this issue?
4. What would be the effort needed to address this issue?
5. What is the benefit of addressing this issue?

Use those answers to complete your impact matrix:

	Low Effort	**High Effort**
High Impact	**Easy win - high priority** Issues in this quadrant that will produce the highest return on your effort. Items in this quadrant should be your primary focus.	**Long term process – mid priority** Issues in this quadrant will produce long term returns but may be more complicated to implement. Items in this quadrant should be carefully addressed. Be very selective and aware of your capacity to pursue.
Low Impact	**Insignificant - low priority** Issues in this quadrant that are generally less important. Items in this quadrant can be addressed when there is increased capacity or if they are necessary to reach an easy win.	**Avoid – least priority** Issues in this quadrant are considered time and resource consuming. Items in this quadrant are generally not worth addressing. They are generally not worth completing so avoid, delegate, or defer them.

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - THE FISHBONE DIAGRAM

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

The key considerations below are a list of examples of possible types of issues related to your problem question. This is not a comprehensive list of key considerations and is included to support you on your journey to identifying the root cause(s) for your current challenge.

Substantive issues

- Financial
- Literacy
- Language
- Availability of public transportation
- Safety/security
- Trust in the system
- Organization's history and reputation as perceived by the communities it serves
- Access to quality employment
- Daycare/Early childhood education
- Access to capital
- Neighborhood/housing conditions
- Disability/mental health/health

Issues of operations or structure

- Lack of mutually beneficial partnerships with community-based organizations
- Limited capacity/staff
- Low quality data on demographics at point of entry or registration
- Existence, capacity, and influence of organization's community advisory board
- Lack of opportunity to assess satisfaction with programs/services
- Lack of implementation of feedback mechanisms with effective follow-up
- Lack of comprehensive orientation and ongoing training for all staff around cultural values, beliefs, and issues important to service recipients
- Lack of equity-focused technical assistance and capacity building services
- Lack of state and municipal support for programming and infrastructure
- Insufficient state-level legislation and reform efforts

Equity is "just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential"[18] and "involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives."[5] Applying an equity lens means that you are recognizing that each person and certain groups has their own unique circumstances. Using an equity lens in your work should involve an allocation of resources and opportunities to those specific groups to meet their needs and support their ability to reach their full potential.

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - SEE THE TOOL IN ACTION!

An example from a practitioner

Tameka is a program officer at a local foundation, whose mission is to advance equitable educational outcomes for students in the city that lead to economic prosperity. Two years ago, the foundation sought to address chronic absenteeism by launching an initiative to support students with safe and reliable transportation options. Through the initiative, investments were made to forge partnerships and strengthen institutional capacity to launch a bus service to help children get to school every day and on time. Investments were concentrated in the schools that had the highest rates of absenteeism.

After two years of investment, Tameka evaluated the program to identify opportunities for improvement and to document success. After completing the evaluation, Tameka learns that despite improvements in each city, there is one city in the region that is not experiencing strong improvements in absenteeism (see below). As a result of this finding, Tameka conducts a root cause analysis to better understand what might be impacting absenteeism in this city.

School	Absenteeism rate before grant period	Absenteeism rate after grant period
School 1	18%	9%
School 2	16%	5%
School 3	20%	17%

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - SEE THE TOOL IN ACTION!

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING THE MAIN CHALLENGE OR INEQUITY

To do this, Tameka:

A. Involves grantees during site visits to ask questions about the program and to understand the lived experience aspect of the results. During her site visit, she asks:

- *Where are you seeing existing problems that still need to be addressed?*

- *What barriers still exist that aren't being met through this grant?*

- *What are you hearing from program recipients that informs the outcomes of this effort?*

B. Involves grant reports by including these questions:

- *What was the absenteeism rate before the grant and after?*

- *Why might absenteeism persist after this grant?*

- *What needs to be addressed to support sustainable, long-term improvements in absenteeism?*

C. Involves people with lived experience by providing resources to each grantee to retrieve survey responses from families in each school that helps uncover challenges in the households of families that are impacting chronic absenteeism.

After collecting preliminary information around the topic, Tameka determines that she would like to understand why absenteeism persists in School 3. She then moves on to her fishbone activity.

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - SEE THE TOOL IN ACTION!

STEP 2: FISHBONE ACTIVITY

Before beginning the activity, Tameka convenes a group of recent grantees, community members, and colleagues to workshop the fishbone diagram. Together they complete the following steps to fill out the fishbone diagram and identify the root cause(s) to the problem question. See the completed fishbone diagram on the following page.

STEP 2.1: **Problem question:**

- *Why does absenteeism persist in School 3? (outcome approach)*

STEP 2.2: **What might be contributing to this problem?**

- *The team reviews the relevant key considerations and begins to answer the question. They consider: language, public transportation, safety/security, daycare, access to quality employment.*

STEP 2.3: **What causes this?**

After the group completes the fishbone activity (see following page for completed diagram), they identify that the root causes for absenteeism are:

- *Fear and distrust in others and authority*
- *Lack of quality, affordable healthcare*
- *Lack of job opportunities that offer quality, affordable healthcare*
- *Limited language resources in the community*
- *Limited or no affordable childcare options in the community*

- *Poverty*
- *White supremacy*
- *Historic housing policies that caused segregation*
- *Society values preparation for the workforce, which requires punctuality, following rules, and attendance*

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]
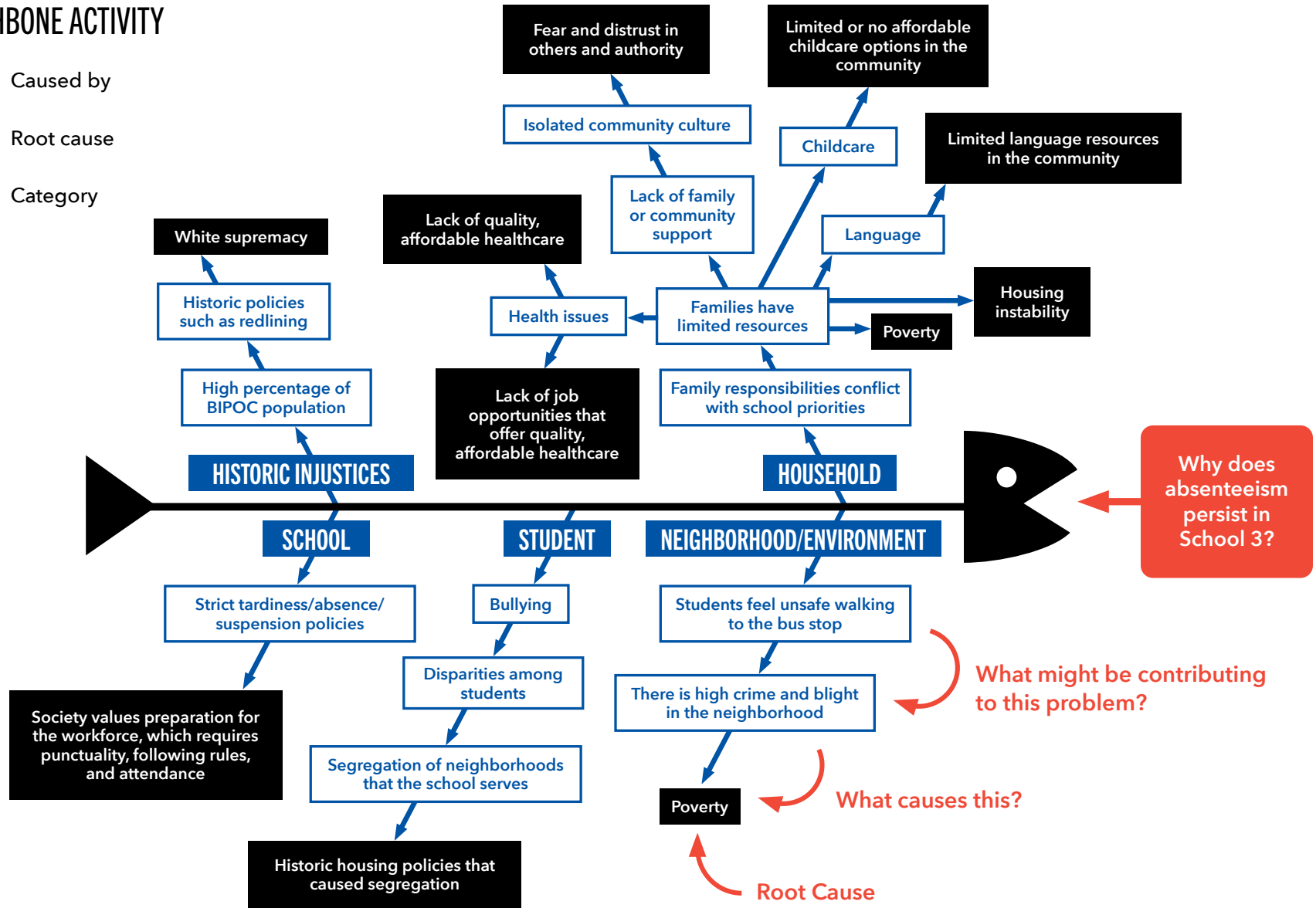
TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - SEE THE TOOL IN ACTION!

STEP 2: FISHBONE ACTIVITY

→ = Caused by

Text = Root cause

TEXT = Category

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - SEE THE TOOL IN ACTION!

STEP 3: DETERMINE YOUR PRIORITIES AND NEXT STEPS

They then utilize the impact matrix to prioritize which root causes they will dedicate resources to.

High Impact

Easy win - high priority

Limited or no affordable childcare options in the community

Historic housing policies that caused segregation

Society values preparation for the workforce

Limited language resources in the community

Lack of job opportunities that offer quality, affordable healthcare

Long term process – mid priority

Poverty

White supremacy

Lack of quality affordable healthcare

Fear and distrust in others and authority

Insignificant - low priority

Avoid – least priority
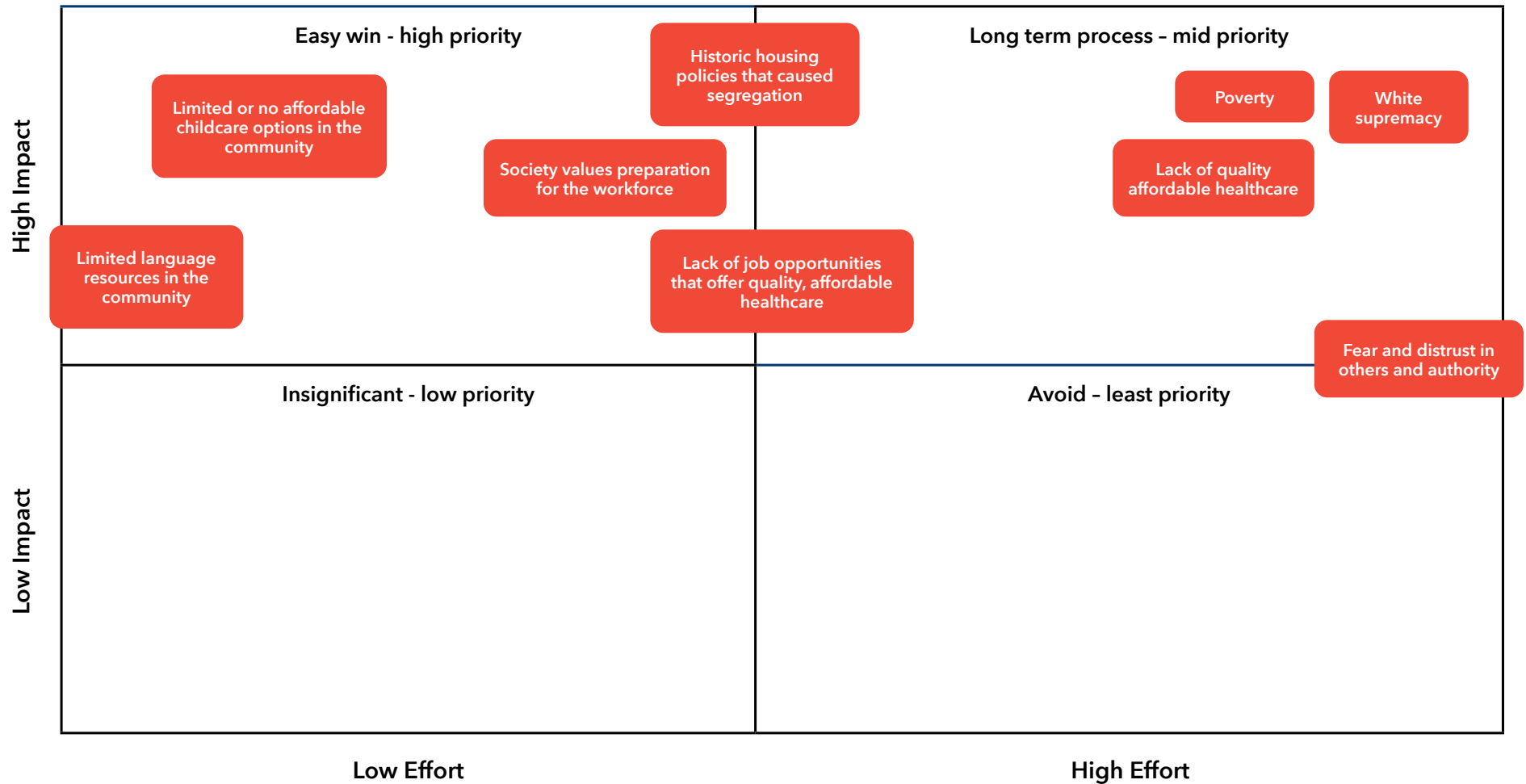
Low Impact

Low Effort

High Effort

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

TOOL 5: ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS - SEE THE TOOL IN ACTION!

RESULTS

After prioritizing the root causes, Tameka uses the results from this root cause analysis to develop her project plan. Her plan involves:

Partnership development

- Limited or no affordable childcare options in the community
- Limited language resources in the community
- Poverty
- Lack of job opportunities that offer quality, affordable healthcare

Resource reallocations

- Professional development trainings for program and school staff:
  - *Society values preparation for the workforce*
  - *White supremacy*

Implementing these activities, Tameka invites people with lived experience to support the development of a new grant opportunity that includes resources for no-cost and affordable early childcare for parents who have younger children and relied on older siblings to support with childcare, translation services to ensure that the ESL residents in the community are abreast of opportunities available to them relating to transportation and attendance policies, and development of convening tables and trainings to schools and local employers to cultivate a culture shift related to the culture of white supremacy. This process took Tameka about 12 months, as she began the process (identifying the current challenges) six months before the conclusion of her original grant cycle.

This tool is a modification of two tools, the Advancing Health Equity Fishbone Diagram and the GroupMap Impact Effort Matrix. [3, 9]

ADDITIONAL TOOLS
AND RESOURCES

ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Asset Mapping `PRE-GRANT` `GRANTING`

- *This Asset Mapping Handbook provides three approaches to asset mapping: whole assets, storytelling, and heritage.*
- *This Community Engagement Framework centers the strengths of the organization using an asset-based approach.*

ABFE's Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities `OPERATIONS`

- *ABFE's Responsive Philanthropy in Black Communities (RPBC) framework and set of tools are designed to increase the capacity of all philanthropy – grant-making entities, collective giving models and donors – to do their work more effectively.*

Community Engagement `PRE-GRANT` `POST-GRANT`

- *This Community Engagement Framework centers the strengths of the organization to forge sustainable relationships between groups and individuals.*
- *King County Community Engagement Worksheet was designed to help departments and agencies increase equity and social justice work.*
- *The Power of Authentic Engagement presentation explores values and benefits of authentic engagement in collective impact work.*
- *The Tamarack Community Engagement Planning Canvas can help you work through the main considerations of community engagement.*

Comprehensive Tools `OPERATIONS` `PRE-GRANT` `GRANTING` `POST-GRANT`

- *The United Way Worldwide Equity Framework allows you to choose one or more "equity levers": data; community mobilization and engagement; communications and awareness-building; policy and advocacy; fund-raising, resource allocation, and grantmaking; and local capacity building.*
- *The Kent County Equity Toolkit includes several tools to encourage representation of target markets, understanding of racial and economic disparity, authentic engagement, identification of power dynamics, and creative problem-solving.*
- *Race Matters Toolkit provides resources around five principles to advance racial equity in your department, organization, community, or network.*

Data `POST-GRANT`

- *Racial Equity Tools has a list of tools, tips, and examples around data used in assessing racial equity work, methods for securing quality data, and some of the challenges of using existing databases.*
- *Centering Equity Throughout Data Integration seeks to encourage shifts of awareness and practice by centering racial equity and community voice within the context of data integration and use.*
- *By The Numbers provides insights on how using disaggregated data on race and ethnicity affects the lives of children and communities through two case studies.*
- *Considering Culture: Building the Best Evidence-Based Practices for Children of Color discusses the effectiveness of evidence-based programs and practices in relevant community programs.*

ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Empathy Map `POST-GRANT`

- *This Empathy Map Tool will help you consider the perspectives of those who your project serves or affects. It will help your team consider the forces around your users and customers that affect their experiences. Fill out the provided exercise worksheet template to get started.*

Navigating Difficult Conversations `OPERATIONS`

- *POWER MOVES is an essential philanthropy self-assessment guide for equity and justice to help you determine how well you are building, sharing, and wielding power.*

- *Guidelines for Authentic Conversations About Race is a brief and direct guide for engaging in candid, productive conversations about this often difficult topic.*

- *Changing the Conversation is a report that aims to bridge the gap between foundations and community organizers in Detroit.*

Operations Tools `OPERATIONS` `POST-GRANT`

- *The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project is an initiative meant to address the inherent power imbalances between foundations and nonprofits by redistributing power.*

- *Operationalizing Equity looks at the Annie E. Casey Foundation's journey to promote race equity and inclusion to help other funders and grant-making organizations as they seek to embed the values of equity into their programming and operations.*

- *The purpose of the Equity-Based Decision-Making Framework is to ensure that service providers respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, system processes and policies proactively to eliminate racial inequalities and advance equity.*

- *Awake to Woke to Work explores the levers that drive change and the stages that mark transformation to provide insights, tactics, and best practices to shift organizational culture and operationalize equity.*

- *Racial Equity Toolkit An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity is designed to integrate explicit considerations of racial equity in decisions, including policies, practices, programs, and budgets.*

- *Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens provides grant makers with reflections, frameworks and tools built from the direct experience of activists and funders for advancing racial justice in any philanthropic setting.*

ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Participatory Grantmaking `OPERATIONS`

- *Deciding Together is a guide that looks at why and how funders are engaging in participatory grant-making and shifting decision-making power to the very communities impacted by funding decisions.*

- *Learn and Let Learn is a research report that provides key teachings on learning communities through six case studies.*

- *Race Equity and Inclusion Guide is a seven-step action plan that provides a clear framework for undertaking race equity and inclusion at every stage of an organization's work.*

- *Incorporating DEI In Your Grantmaking Process is a checklist of actionable ideas on how to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion in grant-making processes.*

- *The Participatory Budgeting Project provides support for participatory budgeting processes to advance equity and inclusion.*

Racial Equity Impact Assessment `OPERATIONS` `POST-GRANT`

- *Tools for Thought: Using Racial Equity Impact Assessments for Effective Policymaking discusses how racial equity impact assessments center decision-making on facts and can lead to smarter, more targeted public investment.*

- *Racial Equity 2030's scoring rubric helps to realize racial equity in grant-making and decision making.*

Unconscious Bias `PRE-GRANT` `GRANTING`

- *Visit Project Implicit to select an Implicit Association Test to learn more about your unconscious biases.*

- *This Diversity In Action Toolkit is geared toward supporting you in your efforts to increase diversity and adopt inclusive policies and practices.*

- *5 Sources of Bias in Your Grant Application Review Process is a visual guide to bias in the grant review process.*

- *Resources to Fight Racism and Unconscious Bias includes a list of resources to support your fighting implicit bias and to advance progress.*

- *Implicit Bias and its Role in Philanthropy and Grantmaking includes a list of strategies to reduce bias in philanthropy.*

- *The Perception Institute researches the how automatic processes in the brain shape our perceptions, our actions and our decision-making. Visit their website for more on explicit bias, implicit bias, racial anxiety, and stereotype threat.*

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KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

- **Equity** is "just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential" [20] and "involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives." [6]

- **Inclusion** is "the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging."[6]

- **Authentic engagement** is "the intentional process of co-creating solutions in partnership with people who know best, through their own experiences, the barriers to opportunity. This is grounded in building relationships based on mutual respect that acknowledges each person's added value to developing solutions together." [4]

- **Power** is the ability to get things done and influence actions and behaviors to achieve a goal for the greater good.[16]

- **Community engagement** is "the process by which citizens are engaged to work and learn together on behalf of their communities to create and realize bold visions for the future" [5]; it is a method by which one can plan and problem-solve more equitably.

- **Unconscious Bias** is a social stereotype about certain groups of people that an individual forms outside their own conscious awareness.[12] These biases may lead you to make decisions or judgments about someone's abilities, competence, or experiences that are untrue to that person or group.[2]

- **Asset Mapping** is a community-engagement approach that centers the strengths of the community or organization rather than its needs. This approach builds sustainable relationships between groups and individuals.[1]

- **Empathy mapping** is a tool that encourages the user to consider the perspectives of those whom an initiative serves or affects by considering what they are thinking, seeing, doing, and feeling.[19]

- **Content experts** are "professionals, staff in your organization, service providers, and leaders with formal power who have knowledge, tools, and resources to address the issue." [4]

- **Context experts** are "people with lived experience of the situation, including children and youth. They are the people who experientially know about the issue." [4]

METHODOLOGY

United Way for Southeastern Michigan (UWSEM) partnered with Detroit Future City (DFC), a nonprofit think and do tank that focuses on economic development and environmental sustainability through a race and equity lens, to develop this blueprint. Through a combination of activities that took place in two phases — research (phase one) and engagement (phase two) — DFC sought to create a usable document that informs ways in which funders could better integrate lived experience throughout their grant-making processes to improve equitable outcomes. Getting to a blueprint involved:

- *Producing a research findings report*
- *Interviewing thought leaders in the field*
- *Engaging the UWSEM program staff through a series of workshops*
- *Conducting four focus groups with community-based organizations (CBO) and southeastern Michigan residents*
- *Disseminating surveys to residents in southeastern Michigan*

Phase One

During phase one, DFC produced a research finding report that provided a synopsis of similar literature, national models, toolkits, and interviews with thought leaders. Guiding DFC's research was the question, "How can UWSEM and other southeast Michigan funders better integrate lived experience throughout their grant-making process to improve equitable outcomes?" The report outlines three main themes from DFC's research that inform how funders can better integrate lived experience with an equity lens:

- *Operationalizing equity*
- *Capturing lived experience*
- *Participatory grantmaking*

During phase one, DFC also worked closely with UWSEM to determine the aspects of equity to be emphasized, understand current challenges, and establish a shared vision of success. These efforts informed the framework for this equity blueprint and the engagement approach that took place in phase two.

Phase Two

Phase two commenced with a series of workshops with UWSEM program staff. These individuals represented four program areas within the organizations and were not tied to or familiar with this project. The goals for these workshops were to:

- *Introduce this project to UWSEM staff*
- *Establish a shared vision of success*
- *Understand current challenges*
- *Learn best practices*
- *Establish collective values*
- *Determine the key areas throughout the grant processes to incorporate lived experience*

METHODOLOGY (CONTINUED)

Four virtual focus groups were also conducted during phase two. Two focus groups were focused on community-based organizations (CBO), and two were focused on residents in southeastern Michigan who were involved with programs or received services from a CBO. During the focus groups with CBOs DFC facilitated discussions to learn best practices for engaging residents and learn where CBOs felt funders could better incorporate lived experience in their processes. Focus groups with residents were centered on learning their needs and interests, lifting best practices in engagement, and documenting their input on incorporating lived experience in the grant-making process. Representatives of CBOs and residents not able to attend the focus groups were offered an opportunity to complete a survey focused on capturing their input and experiences.