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# Building the Bridge for Diversity and Inclusion: Testing a Regional Strategy

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## Key Points

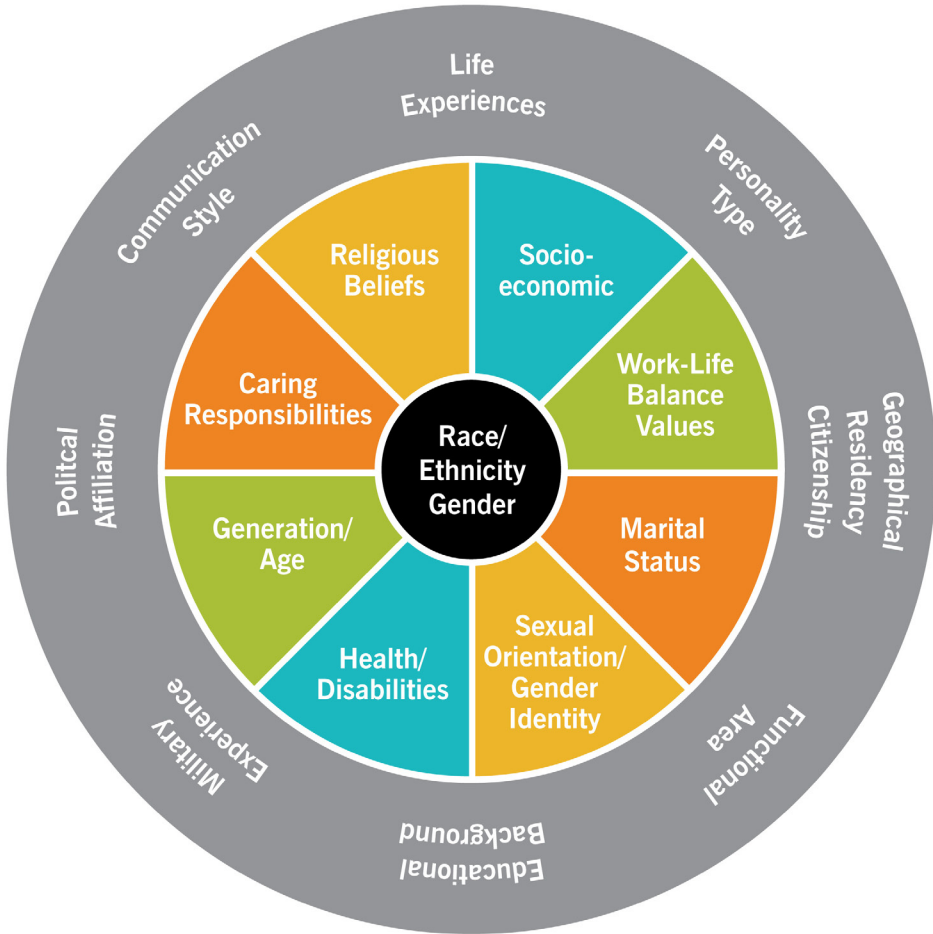
- Transforming Michigan Philanthropy Through Diversity & Inclusion (TMP) is a six-year research and development effort of the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF). A unique experiment, TMP is the only statewide, comprehensive effort to promote diversity and inclusiveness among foundations in the country.
- Organizational excellence through diversity and inclusion requires an organization to find a goal that resonates with its stakeholders and then create collaborative communities that focus on achieving that goal. This strategy positions an organization to use the full diversity of those stakeholders for tasks such as problem-solving, innovation, quality initiatives, and the acquisition of resources.
- Diversity and inclusion work is hard, and it's not enough to have a vision. The real challenge for organizational members is translating the vision into action. This requires a change in practices and policies to support a shift in the mindset and behavior of organizational members.
- A build-through-doing approach on diversity and inclusion entails learning, doing and reflecting as practices are implemented. For this approach to work, organizations have to be willing to experiment and create psychologically safe spaces for the learning to occur.
- Thus far, for the Council of Michigan Foundations bridge-building work for diversity and inclusion has involved recognizing the inherent risks; engaging champions, experts, allies, and colleagues as partners and supporters; and having the monetary resources and dedicated staff needed to carry the work forward.

## An Experiment in Michigan

Many leaders who embrace their role as change agents are familiar with the expression “building the bridge as you walk on it,” a term coined by Professor Robert Quinn (2004) to describe a journey of change where the destination is organizational excellence. To embark on this journey, organizations adopt a mindset that excellence is a form of positive deviance and requires experimenting, reflecting, and learning as you go. Imagine what this journey might look like if the goal were excellence across a network of organizations in a particular region. Now imagine that those organizations were working on excellence in an especially tricky area of work: managing diversity and building inclusive cultures. What kind of bridge would you need to build? And how would you build it?

That has been the challenge faced by Michigan foundations participating in Transforming Michigan Philanthropy Through Diversity & Inclusion (TMP), a six-year research and development effort of the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF). A unique experiment, TMP is the only statewide, comprehensive effort to promote diversity and inclusiveness among foundations in the country. It provides an important test case for regional diversity strategies in organized philanthropy. This article will examine TMP in terms of the bridge it is building and, in particular, the way it is building it. We explore five stages of the process:

FIGURE 1 The Diversity Wheel



1. deciding to build (the rationale for such an initiative);
2. creating the blueprint (development of a strategic plan);
3. assembling the support structure (engagement of trustees, partners, and experts);
4. laying the roadway (member mobilization); and
5. reinforcing the bridge (plans for future work).

Along the way, we examine the turning points, challenges, and lessons that emerged from building the bridge as we walked on it, and explore the implications for future diversity efforts in the field.

*Defining the Terms*

For organizations, diversity can be understood in both internal and external terms. On the internal side, diversity is typically defined as the extent to which an organization has people from diverse backgrounds and communities working as board members, staff, volunteers, consultants, and vendors. But some take it a step further and see diversity work as extending beyond an organization's walls to include the communities it serves.

In planning TMP, the Council of Michigan Foundations took this broader, external view.

Diversity was defined as follows: Diverse individ-

FIGURE 2 Relationship Between Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Equity



uals are from different genders, national origins, ethnicities, races, cultures, generations, religions, economic backgrounds, gender identities and sexual orientations, and possess different skills, abilities, lifestyles and beliefs. In this way, diversity was seen as encompassing the full breadth of societal differences included in the “diversity wheel” (Figure 1), such as race, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and life experiences (Perry, 1993).

As CMF's work progressed, the understanding of diversity evolved to emphasize inclusion. CMF defined inclusion as: Inclusive philanthropic organizations seek out and consider the perspectives of diverse individuals to overcome current and historic systemic barriers and exclusion thus ensuring that all individuals have equitable opportunity to participate in society and philanthropy.

By the end of the second year of TMP, as board and staff worked on an overarching vision for the initiative, a third shift occurred in the scope of work to incorporate social equity. As illustrated in Figure 2, building the bridge for philanthropy requires not only managing the diversity of stakeholders (the “who”) and their inclusion in the process (the “how”), but also adopting a social-equity lens. To consider social equity as an aspect of bridge-building is to reflect and act upon the goal of creating a state (the “what”) where people experience equality of opportunity and are not denied access to resources as a result of their backgrounds, personal attributes and group char-

acteristics (Pease, 2009). In turn, a social-equity lens leads organizations to reassess their policies, practices, outcomes, and culture in terms of fairness (Capek & Mead, 2006).

*Diversity and Inclusion as a Pathway to Excellence*

Foundations play a significant role in the United States by being stewards and distributors of resources for public benefit that otherwise would be contributions to the federal and state treasuries (Capek & Mead, 2006). They create value by maximizing resources for philanthropic purposes through their core work of grantmaking, how they organize human capital and their relationships with partners, colleagues, and grantees. Foundations are not only grantmakers but also employers, economic entities that consume services and products, investors in financial markets, and community leaders that serve as civic partners and conveners of collective capacity-building activities (Chao, Parshall, Amador, Shah, & Yanez, 2008).

Against this backdrop, many foundations have looked to diversity and inclusion as a pathway to organizational excellence and ultimately sustainable impact.

This idea was a key ingredient in TMP. The team recognized, for instance, that a key characteristic of excellent organizations is a learning culture that provides safe psychological space for all members and collaborators to share knowledge

and capitalize on different perspectives (Thomas & Ely, 1996; Edmonson, 1999). They also believed that excellence requires an organization to find a goal that resonates with its stakeholders and then create collaborative communities that focus on achieving that goal. This can position an organization to use the full diversity of those stakeholders for tasks such as problem-solving, innovation, quality initiatives, and the acquisition of resources (Bell, 2007). When differences are given a voice in organizations, it challenges stakeholders to take a holistic systems perspective, see new possibilities, take risks, and explore untested terrain (Senge, 1990; Wooten, 2006). It also creates a work environment where individuals feel valued, which in turn generates engagement, high-quality connections, and effective teamwork among employees (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). In short, building diversity and inclusion allows stakeholders to co-create a learning organization, one that unlocks the potential of differences.

“Becoming a learning organization is a continuous journey, and a major component of that journey is managing diversity and inclusion,” says Lynn Perry Wooten, clinical associate professor at the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business and CMF’s Diversity & Inclusion Scholar in Residence (Wooten, 2010). “Becoming an inclusive partner, reaching out to diverse communities, being open to a variety of perspectives – in these and other ways, diversity can lead to learning, and learning to excellence.”

### Deciding to Build: A Natural Move, But a Risky One

Over the last decade, trustees and staff at the Council of Michigan Foundations have been working to increase their awareness of diversity and inclusion issues in general and CMF’s leadership role and commitments in this area in particular.<sup>1</sup> In light of that commitment, and as

<sup>1</sup> The board of trustees formalized CMF’s organizational commitment to diversity and inclusion in February 2002 when it approved the following: *Resolved that the Council of Michigan Foundations adopt this value statement on diversity and inclusion: We strive to model and promote diversity and inclusion as a means to strengthen the work of grantmakers. We do so by working to create an environment in which men and women from different national origins, ethnicities, races, and cultures, of different generations,*

diversity and inclusion issues increasingly began to surface in national philanthropy conversations, CMF President and Chief Executive Officer Rob Collier and Vice President and then-Chief Operating Officer Vicki Rosenberg decided to increase their engagement in those conversations. They were eager to explore how diversity related to Michigan philanthropy – in particular the more than 350 foundations and corporate giving programs in their membership – and share lessons nationally.

*The initiative’s objectives included strengthening CMF’s internal diversity and inclusion practices, an area where the organization had made only limited progress through the first phase of its work on diversity.*

Also eager to explore diversity opportunities for Michigan philanthropy were a handful of key foundation leaders and program officers in the state. Following Rosenberg’s report to CMF’s leadership committee for diversity and inclusion in May 2007, committee member Ernie Guttierrez, former senior program officer at The Kresge Foundation, called her and invited CMF to submit a five-year strategic plan for Kresge’s

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*religions, economic backgrounds, and sexual orientations, and with different skills, abilities, lifestyles, and beliefs are respected, valued, and encouraged to participate. We seek to understand, represent, and share the range of philanthropic perspectives held and traditions followed by our members. And we actively attempt to serve a diverse membership, be governed by a diverse board of trustees, and to attract and retain diverse staff members. We encourage members to join with us by developing their own commitment to diversity and inclusion for the future of philanthropy in Michigan.* (Board of Trustee Minutes, February 10, 2002) CMF has since developed a number of programs to realize this commitment, including TMP as well as the Communities of Color Initiative, through which CMF worked with Michigan community foundations to develop marketing materials to reach donors of color.

funding consideration, and the idea for building the bridge was set in motion. Soon the team was joined by Kimberly Roberson, program officer at the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation; Carol Goss, president and CEO of the Skillman Foundation; and a team from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Those funders, with the Arcus Foundation subsequently joining the group, encouraged CMF to move forward with a comprehensive regional strategy on diversity and underscored the likelihood of financial support to do so.

*One overarching lesson from CMF's nearly ten-year effort to advance diversity on a regional scale is to aim high.*

As a critical success factor in TMP's creation and subsequent progress, the role played by Guttierrez, Roberson and other CMF trustee and foundation member champions can't be overstated. Change efforts benefit from the work of champions because they bring the vision and values of diversity and inclusion to fruition (Kotter, 1996). These individuals envision the changes, advocate with other change agents, and act to realize the changes. In the case of TMP, initiative planners say CMF's regional strategy might well have "trudged along" were it not for those champions.

Still, despite this support, the decision to lead regional diversity and inclusion work carried risks. It would automatically put the spotlight on CMF's own organizational performance on diversity. Indeed, this was by design – the initiative's objectives included strengthening CMF's internal diversity and inclusion practices, an area where the organization had made only limited progress through the first phase of its work on diversity (2002-2007). The risk didn't stop there. As TMP developed, it became clear that the initiative would only create sustainable change if it were sufficiently comprehensive, designed by a diverse group of stakeholders, and supported by a critical

mass of high-profile champions – obviously a tall order.

More broadly, there was the risk of moving into what was relatively uncharted territory for a philanthropy association, despite CMF's experience and capabilities. "We weren't choosing from a menu," says Rosenberg (Rosenberg, 2010). "We were creating a menu."

### Creating the Blueprint

In response to the funders' request, CMF developed a five-year strategic plan for the regional diversity initiative in the summer of 2007, consulting several internal and external partners<sup>2</sup> along the way. Doing the strategic plan was a pivotal move for the TMP initiative. It built on a set of lessons learned in the first phase (2002-2007) of CMF's work on diversity, including:

- Be strategic right from the start.
- Be aspirational enough to engage members who have become cynical about change ever happening.
- Build internal capacity to effectively manage the initiative and find recognized experts to help.
- Secure multiyear funding and dedicate significant staff time at all levels of implementation.
- Focus the change inside CMF as much as among members to build credibility.

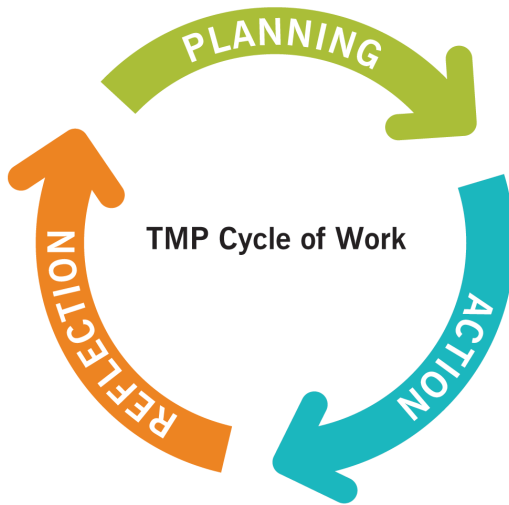
"We had fallen into enough potholes by 2007 that we really understood what a diversity and inclusion effort on this scale would take," Vicki Rosenberg says (Rosenberg, 2010). "That knowledge made it possible to design a strategic plan, something we were unable to do in 2002. We were humbled but committed, and ready to take the risk of learning as we went forward."

One overarching lesson from CMF's nearly ten-year effort to advance diversity on a regional scale is to aim high.

<sup>2</sup> The most active of the external partners were project evaluator Dr. Mary McDonald, then director of the Community Research Institute at the Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership at Grand Valley State University, and Anna Pond, a lead member of the Diversity in Philanthropy Project (DPP) consulting team.



FIGURE 3 The TMP Cycle of Work



“Diversity and inclusion work is hard, and it’s not enough to have a vision,” says Lynn Perry Wooten (Wooten, 2010). “The real challenge is how to translate that vision into action. How are you going to achieve it? We find many for-profit and nonprofit organizations will come up with a vision but not tie it to actions. That’s why developing the blueprint, the map of where the initiative was heading, was such an important aspect of CMF’s process.”

According to Rosenberg, another major turning point came in naming the initiative, when Rob Collier pushed the broad frame of “transforming Michigan philanthropy.” It was an ambitious statement and signaled that the effort would be an organizational priority, build a significant body of work, focus on organizational excellence, and aim to have a major impact on the field, going well beyond a desultory series of workshops and meetings.

#### *A Build-Through-Doing Approach*

The work cycle for TMP (Figure 3) was patterned after the action research framework (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). A plan of work identifies actions. While being implemented, those actions are observed by predefined groups. They then reflect on what they’ve learned and reframe the plan accordingly. Then the cycle begins again.

Two examples from TMP planning illustrate this approach.

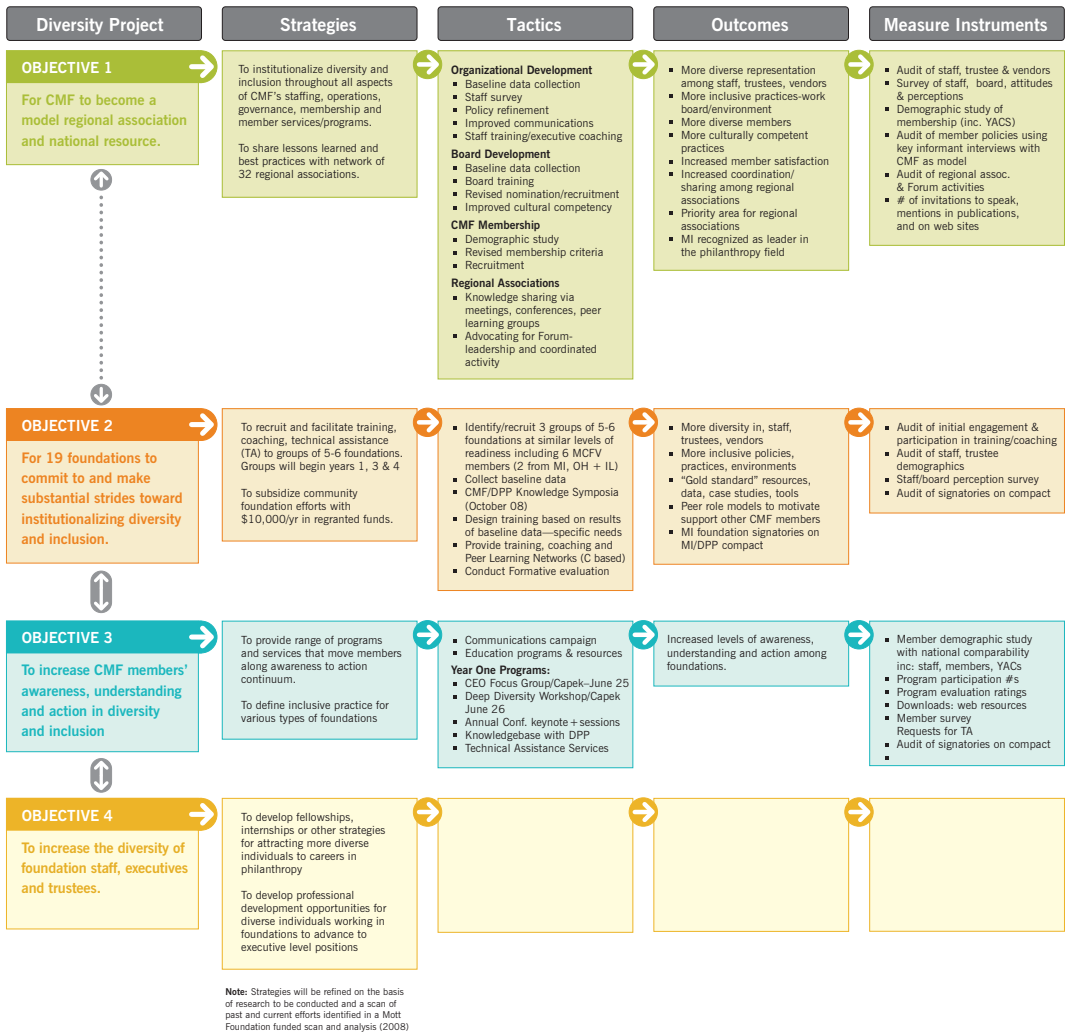
One was the development of the initiative’s objectives. TMP’s original goal was to increase the effectiveness and accountability of organized philanthropy in Michigan. Originally, four initial objectives were identified to advance this goal:

1. Become a model regional association and national resource.
2. Increase CMF members’ awareness, understanding, and action in diversity and inclusion.
3. Help member foundations commit to and make substantial strides toward institutionalizing diversity and inclusion.
4. Increase the diversity of foundation staff, executives, and trustees.

But after a good amount of both action and reflection, the team revised TMP’s goal and objectives.<sup>3</sup> The new goal was shortened to: Increase the effectiveness of organized philanthropy in Michigan. The word “accountability” was removed to address the concern that diversity and inclusion were being presented as required, and even potentially regulated, rather than voluntary.

<sup>3</sup> For the latest information on TMP, please go to [www.michiganfoundations.org/tmp](http://www.michiganfoundations.org/tmp).

FIGURE 4 April 2008 TMP Logic Model<sup>4</sup>



In turn, TMP objectives were changed as follows (Figure 4):

1. Become a diverse and inclusive membership organization. (By removing the word “model” and the mention of the “national” level, the intent was clearly shifted to CMF and its members.)
2. Increase member awareness and understanding and support voluntary action to become more diverse and inclusive. (Adding the word

“voluntary” addressed the concerns mentioned above about diversity being required and regulated.)

3. Help member foundations achieve their goals for diversity and inclusion. (No change.)
4. Increase the diversity of individuals serving, leading, governing, and advising foundations and corporate giving programs. (Changing the language to include advisors emphasized the opportunity to increase the diversity of consultants engaged by organized philanthropy in Michigan.)

<sup>4</sup> Monitor [www.michiganfoundations.org](http://www.michiganfoundations.org) for updates to the logic model.



Another example of TMP's learn-by-doing approach was the creation of the initiative's "ultimate goal" in September 2009, nearly two years into the initiative, as catalyzing positive social change in Michigan through diversity and inclusion. This change was crafted by a communications working group of CMF trustees and staff. It ended up being essential for establishing metrics for change and achieving a unified vision of success for CMF, its trustees, and TMP funders.

### *Leading With Research*

CMF commissioned four pieces of research in the early stages of TMP. This commitment to rigor resulted from CMF's diversity efforts in the first part of the decade, when its leaders realized they didn't have a solid sense of what realities its mem-

bers were facing in this area. It also came from a longstanding interest in expanding research on philanthropy and in particular state-by-state data.

The analytical emphasis came to characterize every step of TMP. "It's often, 'Show me the numbers,'" says Lynn Perry Wooten (Wooten, 2010). "Having the numbers and the research to support it can help you engage with the naysayers. At the very least, they can't be in denial anymore. Once you show them the data, then you need to show them why they should care."

Each study has been used to inform discussion, establish baseline data, and support priority setting.

TABLE 1

## Lessons Learned From the Landscape Scan<sup>5</sup>

### *What is the value of diversity and inclusion in philanthropy?*

Michigan foundation leaders agreed that diversity and inclusive practice are essential for impact in philanthropy. The point is not to be diverse and inclusive just to do the "right thing," they asserted. More specifically, foundation leaders identified the following interwoven motivations driving their efforts:

1. to be relevant and secure a positive public image,
2. to maximize effectiveness, and
3. to respond to political realities.

### *Why is diversity work so hard?*

Even foundations with sincere and stated commitments to being diverse and inclusive find it difficult to build diverse and inclusive boards, staff, grantmaking programs, and foundation operations. There are real reasons that foundations have trouble moving beyond the rhetoric: The issues seem intractable, foundations are often culturally complacent, and the questions that need to be asked are hard, even taboo, to discuss. The issues within any given foundation are compounded by broader social, organizational, and sector-wide factors.

### *Real approaches to growing diversity among Michigan foundations*

1. Shout and model a commitment to diversity and inclusion from the top.
2. Clearly and intentionally define what you mean by diversity.
3. Build the values of diversity and inclusion into formal policies.
4. Test practices and structures that can nurture and incubate diversity and inclusion.
5. Bring on the right people – develop boards and staff with a diversity lens.
6. Shore up organizational culture to support diversity.
7. Establish measurable goals, collect data, and model transparency.
8. Find creative ways to get the perspectives you need.
9. Create grantmaking programs that directly address diversity and inclusion issues.

<sup>5</sup> These lessons were developed by Jessica Bearman with Anna Pond and Vicki Rosenberg.

A *demographic study* was completed in late 2008 by a representative sample of Michigan foundations. This study found that board chairs and CEOs were predominately white and revealed there was more racial diversity among board chairs and CEOs in southern parts of Michigan than in northern parts of the state. The data indicated that there was low minority representation among executive foundation staff (2.4 percent Hispanic/Latino and 6.3 percent Black/African American, on average) and trustees (1.1 percent Hispanic/Latino and 8 percent Black/African American, on average), and also suggested greater racial diversity among younger and less-tenured CEOs. Meanwhile, the ethnic/racial composition of full-time staff below the vice president level was notably similar to that of the population of the state of Michigan. In another significant finding, 43 percent of the reporting foundations indicated they had some diversity language in their foundation policies. Compared to other respondents, those 43 percent were found to have more diversity at both the staff and board levels.

A *policy review*, the third piece of research, was conducted on the organizational policies of CMF and 11 member foundations that sent teams to the March 2009 CMF/Diversity in Philanthropy Project (DPP) Symposium on Diversity and Inclusion in Philanthropy: The Michigan Story (see next section). Analysis of the review indicated that most foundations include policies that define their values, visions, and goals and that policies including statements encouraging diversity among boards, committees, and officers were rare. Those organizations that did have such policies more often addressed staff diversity than diversity among trustees.

An *internal survey*, the fourth research component, looked at the attitudes and perceptions toward diversity and inclusion among CMF staff and trustees. The survey found that while staff and board generally have positive attitudes about diversity and inclusion, there are differences in those attitudes and perceptions based on gender, race, and ethnicity. Respondents of color perceived themselves to be more active agents of change for diversity than white stakeholders. Respondents of color also tended to perceive themselves as more dissimilar to their team members, both in terms of visible attributes and of values and motivations that drive their work, than white respondents. While respondents of color perceived lower levels of openness among colleagues to visible difference, they perceived greater openness to dissimilarity of work values and motivations among their team members. Finally, board and staff members of color showed greater acceptance and appreciation for the differences and similarities between individuals.

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A *landscape scan* of policies, practices, and experiences was drawn from more than 60 interviews of leaders from 15 CMF member foundations as well as national experts and field leaders (see Table 1). The landscape scan presented stories, lessons, opportunities, and challenges encountered by Michigan foundations that had been working on becoming more diverse and inclusive. It provided an important snapshot of diversity and inclusion among engaged CMF member foundations and served as both a baseline and context-setter for TMP.

### Assembling the Support Structure

CMF built momentum and a solid network of support and influence for the initiative through five key moves: engaging trustees, forming national partnerships, holding a galvanizing symposium, bringing a respected scholar inside, and having an executive team drive the strategy.

### Trustees Lead the Way

Since it first made diversity and inclusion an organizational value in 2002, CMF's 27-member

board of trustees has been driving the organization's work on diversity and inclusion. Trustees co-chaired a 16-member leadership committee on diversity and inclusion (2002-2007) that guided staff work, reported to the board at each meeting and participated in meetings, retreats, annual conferences, and focus groups. "When I think of excellent boards, in the corporate or nonprofit sector, they challenge the status quo, push the organization to achieve excellence, and think about the implications of an initiative like TMP for their role as trustees," says Lynn Perry Wooten (Wooten, 2010). "And that's what this board did."

The TMP strategic plan assumed an even greater leadership role for the board and an explicit expectation that the board itself would become more diverse and inclusive in its practices by 2013. Engagement by the full board in TMP began in 2008, with the recording of baseline trustee demographics, an online survey of trustee attitudes and perceptions, and a review of board policies. This work led to a revision of the trustee nominations policy and procedures and a series of interactive workshops for trustees that began in summer 2009. Trustees also were engaged in regular reflection on the initiative's progress and results, discussion of ways to engage more CMF members in the work, and development of key messages about TMP, including a vision statement that added equity to its already formal commitment to diversity and inclusion, the third such shift since 2002.

#### *National Partners Help the Cause*

CMF's progress with TMP owes much to an extensive network of colleagues within the state and across the nation. Through these relationships, CMF managed to get a seat at the table on key national taskforces and at invitational meetings about diversity, inclusion, and social equity. In that role, CMF helped build and participate in a national community of practice that vets ideas on diversity, shares emerging research and initiatives, and identifies new partnership opportunities.

The most catalytic partnership CMF developed was with the Diversity in Philanthropy Project (DPP). Growing out of a chance meeting between

Vicki Rosenberg and DPP team member Anna Pond in the summer of 2007, the connection met CMF's need for trusted, expert advice and DPP's need for access to a community of foundation practitioners. The goal of the partnership was to transform foundation practice by developing, testing, and sharing a comprehensive regional association model, including strategic plans, data, tools, case studies, and other resources with the field. The partnership with DPP provided CMF with even greater entrée into the national network of leaders and experts and invitations to meetings and conversations, and it created an interconnectedness and commitment to helping each other succeed. The national spotlight DPP placed on CMF's work raised expectations that in turn intensified staff determination to achieve the TMP goal and objectives.

*Other partnerships, such as those with the Council on Foundations, BoardSource, and the Michigan Nonprofit Association, provided valuable opportunities to learn from each other's experience, get early access to research reports and data, exchange advice on new initiatives and strategies, expand the networks of colleagues, and provide leadership opportunities to respective members.*

The experience working "on the ground" with Michigan foundations and CMF proved to be influential for DPP as well. Working with CMF provided an opportunity for DPP to examine how diversity and inclusion was happening in a variety of foundations of different types and sizes working in a state context and provided insight about

the work and role of infrastructure organizations such as CMF. This experience had a direct impact on DPP's decision to build a coalition of leading philanthropic infrastructure organizations to assume a leadership role for advancing diversity, equity and inclusion after DPP was to sunset in 2009.

Other partnerships, such as those with the Council on Foundations, BoardSource, and the Michigan Nonprofit Association, provided valuable opportunities to learn from each other's experience, get early access to research reports and data, exchange advice on new initiatives and strategies, expand the networks of colleagues, and provide leadership opportunities to respective members. A recent example is the CMF/BoardSource Community Dialogue for Diverse Foundation Trustees, the first of three BoardSource dialogues conducted in the U.S. and the only one focusing solely on foundation trustees.

#### *A Symposium and a Scholar Galvanize the Work*

The most notable product of the partnership with DPP was the Knowledge Symposium on Diversity & Inclusion in Philanthropy: The Michigan Experience, held in March 2009 in Detroit. The more than 80 participants in the three-day event included representatives from 23 CMF member foundations – many attending in CEO-led teams – national experts and partners, CEOs or senior staff from other regional associations of grantmakers, CMF trustees and staff, and DPP consulting team members.

To build the symposium, a CMF/DPP team first interviewed 60 individuals targeted for participation, including CEOs of 15 CMF member foundations, most of whom voluntarily provided copies of organizational policies that the TMP evaluation team analyzed for explicit statements about diversity. Other interviewees included senior staff of regional associations of grantmakers, grantmaker associations and affinity groups, along with individual thought leaders and national experts working on diversity and inclusion from inside and outside the philanthropic sector. The result was the “landscape scan” discussed in the previous section.

The symposium was filmed for a DPP documentary on Michigan's experience. Three major reports captured the proceedings and findings from the interviews and policy reviews. Together, this documentation provides an important touchstone and baseline of Michigan foundations' policies, practices, experiences, and aspirations for becoming more diverse and inclusive. These outcomes continue to inform and ground TMP's work.

Another outcome of the symposium was CMF's relationship with Lynn Perry Wooten. Wooten had been invited to present on organizational culture as an element of organizational excellence, a focus of her work at the University of Michigan. Recognizing the value of framing its commitment to diversity and inclusion through the lens of organizational excellence and results, CMF actively engaged Wooten as an advisor to TMP. Wooten soon became an invaluable resource for CMF, which created its first Scholar in Residence position and appointed Wooten in January 2010. In that role, she serves as a trainer, sounding board, researcher, knowledge broker, and advisor on all aspects of the initiative.

#### *An Executive Team Drives the Strategy*

From its Phase 1 work on diversity between 2002 and 2007, CMF learned that building internal capacity to effectively manage an initiative was essential and required securing both multiyear funding and dedicated staff time at all levels of implementation. To build that capacity, the TMP budget included a new half-time director of diversity and inclusive practice at CMF. That position was filled in fall 2008 by Kimberly Burton, a former corporate grantmaker from Detroit who, in January 2010, became co-leader of the TMP with Rosenberg. With the new team in place, Rosenberg and Burton began a steady and continuing effort to engage every CMF staff member – from administrative to executive levels – in some aspect of the initiative's work.

#### *Laying the Roadway*

##### *A Campaign Builds Member Awareness*

By 2008, CMF understood that the majority of its members were not actively engaged in becoming more diverse and inclusive and decided to focus

on raising member awareness of and interest in diversity and inclusion work through a long-term communications campaign. (For the small group of engaged and committed members, a different strategy would be developed.) It also knew that success would rest on finding rationales that resonate with and inspire members who hold a wide range of perspectives on the value and relevance of diversity and inclusion.

The communications campaign began with a letter from board Chairwoman Diana Sieger, president and CMF Board Chairwoman of the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, in the spring 2008 issue of CMF's "Memo to Members" newsletter. In the letter, Sieger announced the TMP initiative, framed it as a logical next step in CMF's long-term commitment to diversity and inclusion, and raised the level of urgency based on the very real threat of legislated diversity and inclusion measures, represented at the time by likely passage of California Assembly Bill 624. It was a call to action that used external pressures to raise member interest in the work.

Today, the awareness campaign continues through regular CMF NewsWire articles, updates in "E-News," annual conference sessions, web postings, in print and electronic newsletters, and convenings. Through these communications tools, CMF is positioning TMP as: (1) one of several diversity and inclusion initiatives underway in the sector and thus part of a broader movement (rather than an outlier); (2) responsive to and supported by CMF's board and members, represented in quotes, photographs, and participant lists; (3) substantive, rigorous, and driven by research (rather than moral arguments).

#### *For the Committed, a Learning Network*

Meanwhile, CMF set out to more deeply engage the small group of members who were already committed to the work. The strategy was to involve these members in a series of events and opportunities toward securing their participation in the TMP Peer Action Learning Network, slated for piloting in 2010. During and after the March 2009 symposium, CMF engaged these members through surveys, interviews, and advisory groups.

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The learning network is guided by Beth Zemsky, principal of One Ummah Consulting, and Professor Lynn Perry Wooten, and incorporates the following program elements:

- CEO-led teams of five to six staff members from each organization;
- baseline Intercultural Competency Development Inventory (IDI) assessments of each team member, team and organization (all staff of each participating organization took the assessment);
- expert feedback on assessment results and help setting personal and organizational learning objectives;
- a customized curriculum based on assessment results and objectives delivered in six one-day seminars;
- a CEO-only peer learning group;
- team projects supported by monthly coaching;
- online meeting space; and
- tools and resources.

The first cohort, limited to 36 participants, includes CEO-led teams from three community foundations, a staffed family foundation, CMF, and the Michigan Nonprofit Association, which is taking steps toward developing a parallel initiative to TMP to increase diversity and inclusion within Michigan's nonprofit sector.



## Reinforcing the Bridge

### *CMF Focuses Within*

For the Council of Michigan Foundations to achieve its objective of becoming a model regional association in the area of diversity, and to maximize its credibility as TMP organizer generally, it had to become diverse and inclusive itself. It has employed five strategies to do so.

1. *Workshops.* Through her work as CMF's Diversity & Inclusion Scholar in Residence, Lynn Perry Wooten has designed and is facilitating staff, board, and organizational development workshops, designed based on findings from a 2009 staff and trustee survey conducted by the TMP evaluation team and a 2010 baseline IDI.
2. *Policies.* CMF's commitment to diversity and inclusion is being formalized through new and updated policies covering staff, board, and vendors. For example, in 2009 the board adopted the following nominations policy:

The CMF board of trustees seeks to recruit individuals as board members who are committed to the organization's mission and governing process. CMF will seek diversity among its board of trustees to ensure that a range of perspectives, opinions, and experiences is recognized and acted upon in achieving its mission. The foundations represented on the board will encompass a variety of philanthropic organizations, from diverse geographic regions, and asset sizes. Among individual members CMF will promote diversity in expertise, disability, national origin, ethnicity, race, culture, generation, religion, economic background, sexual orientation, gender identity, and with different skills, abilities, lifestyles, and beliefs.

At the staff level, the Employee Handbook has been updated to include more inclusive language and policies covering hiring, vendors and domestic partner health benefits (same and opposite sex) added.

3. *Trustee and staff engagement.* Engaging all trustees and staff in baseline surveys, stakeholder interviews, interactive workshops and regular discussions has clearly raised awareness about TMP and communicated

the seriousness of CMF executive and board commitment. And it has laid the necessary groundwork for the very difficult work of examining, openly discussing and building plans for a different, more inclusive culture at staff and board levels.

4. *Recruiting and retaining diverse members.* In its Peer Action Learning Network project plan, CMF's CEO-led team has committed to becoming an association serving philanthropy as it evolves from the more traditional form that prevailed when CMF was created in 1972. Two core assumptions are behind this new aspiration – first, that CMF is open to transforming its criteria for membership and, second, that organized philanthropy is changing.

### *Widening the Pipeline*

Expanding opportunities for diverse individuals to serve, lead, govern, and advise foundations and corporate giving programs in the state is another TMP objective. This was revealed as a critical need by both the 2009 demographic survey of Michigan foundations and a related survey of youth grantmaking committees to Michigan community foundations.

To widen the pipeline, three strategies were developed:<sup>6</sup>

1. *Expand opportunities for diverse youth to experience organized philanthropy.* From TMP's earliest planning stages, CMF recognized its unique opportunity to work through the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP), a program it has run for close to 20 years. Today, MCFYP engages more than 1,500 teens per year in grantmaking through service on youth advisory committees (YAC) to community foundations

<sup>6</sup> CMF selected strategies that build on its core competencies, including community philanthropy and youth philanthropy; influential relationships with corporate and nonprofit sector leaders and their associations; and support and engagement with affinity groups of members such as the Michigan Forum for African-American Philanthropy and the Michigan chapter of Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy and close ties to the Arab-American community.



across the state. In 2010, TMP and MCFYP piloted a train-the-trainers program and toolkit designed for YAC advisors and engaged 425 youth and adult advisors in a workshop on being a diverse and inclusive youth grant-maker at its annual Summer Youth Leadership Conference. Research is under way to identify Michigan nonprofits serving diverse youth as additional partners.

2. *Provide professional development for diverse entry- and mid-level foundation and corporate giving staff.* CMF's 2009 baseline demographic survey of Michigan foundation staff and trustees – a related survey of YAC members and advisors was also conducted – found that a greater percentage of diverse individuals are in lower- to mid-level positions than in executive or trustee roles. To overcome existing barriers, CMF is partnering with the Michigan Forum for African-American Philanthropy, one of its member affinity groups, on designing a mentorship program for mid-level foundation staff seeking executive level positions. It is also exploring other opportunities.
3. *Connect diverse private-sector professionals to foundation networks.* Recognizing the challenges diverse individuals interested in philanthropy face in connecting to networks of foundation professionals, CMF is talking with colleagues at the Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Black Chamber of Commerce, and other associations to connect respective memberships and increase the relationship-building opportunities that are key to getting access to foundation jobs.

### Conclusion

Transforming Michigan's philanthropy for diversity and inclusion has put CMF trustees, staff, consultants, and partners into a continuous change cycle of planning, acting, and reflecting. At every phase of this difficult bridge-building work, initiative leaders encountered resistance and were forced to articulate – and, indeed, expand their sense of – why diversity and inclusion matters. The effort to close the gap between the reality of diversity and inclusion practices and TMP's aspirations led CMF to take a hard look at not only its member organizations' practices, but

its own. It also led the players to recognize how essential it is to create a network of champions to provide insights, resources, and personal advocacy to move the work forward.

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Five specific factors have proven critical to building the bridge for diversity and inclusion:

1. recognizing the inherent risks as well as benefits of innovative diversity work;
2. learning through an ongoing cycle of planning, action, and reflection – a fixture throughout the TMP process;
3. understanding the connection between diversity and inclusion on the one hand and organizational excellence on the other;
4. engaging champions, experts, allies, and colleagues as partners and supporters; and
5. having the dollars and dedicated staff needed to carry the work forward.

More broadly, the success of CMF's regional diversity strategy has rested on three fundamental elements: thinking strategically, building capacity, and inspiring commitment.

First, the TMP team's strategic thinking drew on both CMF's substantial knowledge base as well as the purposeful development of new knowledge. It was a generative process of integrating multiple knowledge sources and multiple stakeholders and it was the catalyst for the focus on capacity.

Second, CMF was able to build its capacity through a careful examination of the landscape of Michigan philanthropy and its greatest opportunities for seeding diversity and inclusion initiatives. This required visionary leadership, resources to support CMF's work, and an infrastructure to implement projects.

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Third, TMP's success would not be possible without the careful, steady cultivation of urgency and commitment among the initiative's participants. Leading such diversity and inclusion initiatives must be done with the head (thinking strategically) and hand (building capacity for implementation). But it's important to not forget the heart – how it is the passion and commitment of participants that will ultimately decide if Michigan philanthropy can be transformed through diversity and inclusion.

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