

# The Foundation Review

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## Editorial

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DEAR READERS

We are extremely gratified by the positive response to our first issue of *The Foundation Review* and pledge to continue to meet the high standards that we set. Please keep the feedback coming! My email address is [behrenst@foundationreview.org](mailto:behrenst@foundationreview.org).



In this issue we are introducing a new section, “Reflective Practice.” We will include this section when we have articles that present important, unique perspectives on foundation practice. These are peer-reviewed, but based upon the reflections of the authors on their experience, rather than being more traditionally data-based.

The authors in this issue tackle “civic engagement” from a wide variety of perspectives. **Lesley Grady** contributes a reflection on her 20+ years of grantmaking and what she has learned about engaging with communities. She provides examples of tools (such as a budget) and frameworks that she has found to be useful. In the second reflective practice article, **Melanie Kubo** shares some of her observations about being an evaluator in a community in which there are multiple, noncollaborating funders. As the evaluator for four such initiatives, she has an interesting suggestion about the potential for collaborative evaluation.

In the SECTOR section, **Chan** contributes a review of the literature and an application example of how to engage Asian-American youth in their communities. The importance of what community a young person identifies with is highlighted.

**Arm’s** article presents the results of a California voting initiative. She shares the tactics that were effective and not-so-effective in encouraging voting by groups with traditionally low participation rates. **Nolan’s** article highlights that different types of programming in different venues are needed to reach a diverse group of participants to engage with the arts.

**Karlstrom, Brown, et al.**, focus on the role of funders who are embedded in the communities in which they work. They are civically engaged organizations and often are inclined to use change strategies that call for engagement on behalf of community members.

**Checkoway’s** article shares the results of a particular type of civic engagement, youth who engage in multiracial discussions about race and diversity. Young people gained a stronger sense of their own identity as a result of these dialogues.

Finally, **Rechtman** explores how participatory evaluation was used in an initiative to promote mixed-income housing, and how the voice of the participants broadened the definition of outcomes and results.

The variety of contexts and types of civic engagement activities described in these articles raises a number of questions. Is civic engagement a means to an end, or an end in itself?

These activities described in these articles tend to be focused on groups or individuals who are typically *not* represented in public debate or voting behaviors. Is this engagement sought as a step toward specific social justice goals, or is having broad participation in public conversations a worthy outcome in its own right? Rechtman's article in particular seems to conclude that it is both the "hard" outcomes and the participation that are important, but it leaves open the question whether they are equally important to both funders and community representatives.

Along with a variety of types of civic engagement, this set of articles is also interesting in the variety of evaluation methods used. The full range from "reflection" to experimental design is represented. This raises questions for foundations about what level of rigor they are seeking, what level is feasible and appropriate, and why they are doing evaluation. Nolan argues for "not letting the need for rigor get in the way of usefulness." Rechtman argues that participants in community change efforts are an appropriate mechanism for assessing the validity and reliability of an evaluation's findings. In these cases it seems that the purpose of the evaluation was to support the success of the initiative.

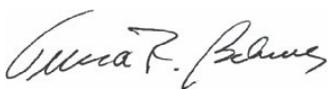
At the other end of the spectrum, the experimental design used in the voter initiative in Arm's article created extra work for the communities, but it allows for greater confidence that changes in voter participation really occurred and that the work of the initiative was a significant cause; it discusses specific activities that were demonstrated to be successful in their context. The purpose of this evaluation was to demonstrate the effectiveness of the foundation's initiative.

The reflective practice articles rely on the knowledge and experience of the authors, rather than on formal evaluation methods or designs. In these cases it is because of their perspective about broader issues, rather than specific initiatives, that the article is valuable.

There is an ongoing debate in philanthropy about evaluation and how to demonstrate the difference that it makes in the world. In addition to their contributions to understanding how to encourage and support civic engagement, the articles in this issue highlight that there are many ways of knowing. We need to choose the one most appropriate to *why* we want to know.

Please join us on the Web at [www.foundationreview.org](http://www.foundationreview.org) to continue the peer review and conversation!

Two final notes: Thanks to the Bruner Foundation for their support. And apologies to Leila Feister (independent consultant) and Rich Janzen of the Centre for Community Based Research; both were reviewers for Issue 1 whose names were inadvertently omitted.



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