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Human-Centered Design and Foundation Staff: A Case Study in Engaging Grant Beneficiaries

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Tools

Introduction

A regional grantmaking focus affords the staff at the Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation the opportunity to get to know the communities where they fund. When you work in just six counties — two in western New York and four in eastern Massachusetts — and focus primarily on at-risk youth, you can spend time interacting with your grant partners and, if you choose, with the young people your grants are intended to benefit. But meaningful interactions, particularly the latter, don't just happen. There is a real temptation to let the relationships you build with grant partners — in our case, the community-based service providers that work with young people —be a proxy for getting to know the young people themselves.

Staff engagement with grant beneficiaries has happened at the Tower Foundation, albeit sporadically and not very strategically. Over the last five to six years, engagement strategies included focus groups with young people and family members, immersive site visits, and art shows in our offices. Sometimes these strategies informed grantmaking, but usually they did not. Beginning in 2018, the foundation's seven-person staff took on a human-centered design project that shows more promise of authentic engagement than most past efforts. With human-centered design methods as a framework, the team worked to unpack assumptions about social and recreational programming for young people with intellectual disabilities. Staff interviewed youth directly in developing a project

Key Points

- As part of ongoing efforts to engage grant partner voices in their work with young people who have intellectual disabilities, program staff at the Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation have explored the notion of being physically proximate to these young people as a way to more authentically listen to them and their families — those for whose benefit the foundation's grant dollars are ultimately intended.

- The staff's most recent engagement strategy looked at a way of solving problems and designing solutions for people that puts those people at the focal point of the process: human-centered design. For the Tower Foundation, this approach proved an effective team-building initiative with the potential to make grantmaking more participatory and to generate grantmaking opportunities that better incorporate beneficiary voice.

- This article describes human-centered design and its applications in a foundation setting. It briefly discusses philanthropy's history with the approach, recounts the foundation's past efforts to engage grant beneficiaries and shares the journey with one project that sought to understand barriers to a particular grantmaking objective, reflects on some learning for the field, and concludes with thoughts about where human-centered design can take us next.

To expand on its commitment to four funding areas — intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health, and substance-use disorders — the foundation's board of trustees looked at the change it envisioned for each.

to create an advisory group to review and give feedback on grant proposals, beginning with the foundation's grant cycle in the fall of 2019.

The foundation is excited about the potential of this work to advance a number of objectives:

- Achieve genuine staff engagement with young people with intellectual disabilities, one of the key populations our grantmaking serves;

- Provide a socially engaging opportunity for young people with disabilities to share their lived experiences in service of community change;

- Make our grantmaking more inclusive and participatory, incorporating grant beneficiary feedback in funding decisions; and

- Create an opportunity for shared learning with existing and potential grant partners, other funders, and the general community.

This article will recount the foundation's past efforts to engage grant beneficiaries, discuss its initial foray into human-centered design, look briefly at philanthropy's history with the approach, share our journey with one particular project, reflect on some learning for the field, and conclude with some thoughts about where human-centered design can take us next.

Prior Engagement Strategies

The Tower Foundation's first concerted effort to actively engage youth and their families stemmed from the drafting of funding priorities at a board retreat in early 2011. To expand on its commitment to four funding areas — intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health, and substance-use disorders — the foundation's board of trustees looked at the change it envisioned for each. It came up with four to six results statements per funding area, crafted as statements of well-being (e.g., "Young people make healthy and informed choices about alcohol and drugs").

Over the course of the year, these statements were tested and validated at over 30 community focus groups. Focus group participants included professionals from each respective field; educators; government representatives; law enforcement personnel; parents, guardians, and other family members; and, where possible, the young people at the center of the work. For example, one focus group, conducted in the library of a school for young people with dyslexia, asked 10 15- to 18-year-olds to critique the priorities and language around the foundation's learning-disabilities results statements. Many results statements were revised based on focus group feedback.

This process quickly sold foundation leadership and program staff on the value of engaging youth voice. Over the next few years, program officers worked to make site visits more immersive and participatory. Staff members have spent a day as campers at summer programs for people with disabilities, joined in therapeutic yoga classes, shadowed street outreach workers, sat in on vocational skills classes, and joined peace circles. Twice, the foundation offices functioned as gallery space, showcasing client artwork from several grant partners working with disabled youth. An artists' reception with cabaret-style performances closed out both exhibits.

While staff found value in these activities, it was hard to qualify that value. Client voice was not really being captured in any formal — or actionable — way. And staff acknowledged this

in conversations about inclusion. Foundation leadership has consistently provided the time and space to look beyond purely transactional grantmaking to relational grant-partner interactions that are less formal, promote conversation, and build on personal connections. Foundation staff carved out time to reflect on barriers to active engagement and empathy. The entire team completed several of Harvard University's Implicit Association Tests[1] and reflected on individual and collective room for growth in overcoming implicit biases. Finally, the foundation landed on human-centered design as a way for staff to further and more genuinely engage and react to the voice of grant partners and the youth they serve.

Initial Exposure to Human-Centered Design

The Tower Foundation was first exposed to the human-centered design model in the spring of 2016 by a health conversion foundation that was interested in exploring the model for applications to its own grantmaking. The Health Foundation for Western & Central New York hoped to make its programming for older adults more responsive to real community need. With that population front of mind, several members of its staff began an online human-centered design course. The hope was to explore a problem-solving approach that expressly leverages the knowledge, experience, and input of the end user — the person benefiting from a product or service — in order to design potential solutions to social problems. The Health Foundation invited several other individuals from the nonprofit community, including a Tower Foundation program officer, to learn alongside its staff.

A five-person team came to the table with varying degrees of familiarity with the human-centered design approach. Taking an online class together provided the team with a shared orientation to the framework and language of human-centered design.[2] The course led students through the three phases

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of human-centered design: inspiration, ideation, and implementation. The team members selected a pre-scoped design challenge, food insecurity in aging adults, which allowed them to jump right into practicing with some human-centered design tools. Over six months, team members immersed themselves in settings where aging adults gathered for meals, designed interview questions that spoke to the issue of food access, and interviewed experts on aging and nutrition as well as aging adults themselves. They practiced strategies to make sense of what they had heard through these interviews and designed some potential solutions to food insecurity. Team members brought back to their respective organizations enthusiasm for a tool with the potential to more actively engage their target populations.

Tower Foundation staff saw human-centered design as a chance to improve upon efforts to capture the voice of grant beneficiaries. For a few months, it remained a standing agenda item for program staff meetings. But the ongoing attempts to get physically and empathetically closer to our grant partners and the young people they work with, whether through site visits or the art shows in our office, felt just not quite

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[1] See https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html

[2] The course, "The Course for Human-Centered Design," was offered through Acumen, an online leadership platform. The curriculum was co-developed in partnership with IDEO, a global design company.

Predictive models that grant-makers have long favored are not the best at accommodating iterative processes and repeating feedback loops. But with the advent of emergent strategy in the last few years, the grantmaker toolbox is expanding.

sufficient. So the program staff signed on for an online course of their own. The intent was to test the human-centered design model, whether it led to a project or not.

Human-Centered Design and Philanthropy

In trying on human-centered design for size, foundation staff were by no means pioneers. The notion that the end-user experience should be integrated in the development and testing of new products and services has informed commercial and industrial design since the 1950s. Design thinking, the practice of designing through a process of multiple iterations of user feedback with real empathy for the end user, has brought us the computer mouse and the Airbnb user experience. But only in the last decade have the principles of human-centered design been adopted for use in addressing social issues. And it should not be particularly surprising that philanthropy would be a little late to the party. Predictive models that grantmakers have long favored are not the best at accommodating iterative processes and repeating feedback loops. But with the advent of emergent strategy in the last few years, the grantmaker toolbox is expanding.

A few years ago, Kania, Kramer and Russell described the shift from strategic philanthropy to emergent philanthropy:

Emergent strategy does not attempt to oversimplify complex problems, nor does it lead to a "magic bullet" solution that can be scaled up. Instead, it gives rise to constantly evolving solutions that are uniquely suited to the time, place, and participants involved. It helps funders to be more relevant and effective by adapting their activities to ever-changing circumstances and engaging others as partners without the illusion of control. (2014, p. 3)

And, as their essay goes on to suggest, human-centered design is one of several tools better aligned with approaches that recognize the complexity of many societal issues:

Today's strategy-setting activities often fail to incorporate the dynamic nature of complex systems, miss the interdependence of players affecting an issue, and under-appreciate the human dynamics that accelerate or impede change. No one decision-making framework can capture all the dynamics of a complex system. Nevertheless, greater use of systems maps, stakeholder analysis, cultural frames, and story-telling frames such as scenario planning — combined with an orientation to hypothesis testing and prototyping (via methodologies such as human centered design) — can provide more useful frameworks for strategic decision-making that addresses complex problems. (Kania et al., 2014, p. 13)

IDEO, the international consulting firm that was behind the Apple mouse, supported the emergence of design thinking and human-centered design as tools for improving lives and conditions in vulnerable communities. In 2009, IDEO developed the HCD Toolkit for applying human-centered design concepts to social-sector projects and, in 2015, followed that up with a field guide. Philanthropy took notice.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is probably the best-known champion of human-centered design. It has partnered with the U.S. Agency for International Development to "encourage more global health practitioners to build their programs around the wants and needs of the people they aim to serve" (Cheney, 2018, p. 1). Projects supported by the Gates Foundation have included work to increase use of contraceptives by young women in Africa and initiatives in Africa and Southeast Asia to improve access

to mobile banking services for communities in poverty. At the core of these efforts is a better understanding of the lived experiences of the people most affected.

While foundations can support grant partners on the ground that employ human-centered design approaches, foundation staff can use these approaches, too. The Raikes Foundation, in Seattle, Washington, used human-centered design principles to explore why high-wealth donors tended not to be strategic in their gift-giving habits. One of the central notions of human-centered design is the idea that we are all designers. In this case, the design team included several Raikes trustees, the executive director, a program director, and a consulting advisor. After an intensive series of interviews with donors, the team constructed profiles of hypothetical donor types that provided insights about donor motivation. The Raikes team found value in the experimental and iterative process of engaging stakeholders, but also cautioned that it was time-consuming and resource-draining work (Roumani, Brest, & Vagelos, 2015).

Engaging Human-Centered Design at the Tower Foundation

In spring 2018, the Tower Foundation team forged ahead with its own experiment in human-centered design. The primary goals of this effort were for the team to learn the human-centered design model and assess its fit with the foundation, and in addition, this internal project would prove to offer a ready-made team-building exercise. It also provided a chance to be more proximate to the young people served by the foundation's grantmaking — particularly young people with intellectual disabilities. Barnes and Burton (2017) articulated the significance of getting proximate for grantmakers:

> In this proximate stance, we can understand that we are not dealing with people in need of saving, or with people who are inherently challenged or responsible for their own poverty. Instead, we must acknowledge advantages, privileges, and power dynamics, and approach our work alongside individuals to fix or replace broken systems. In

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this proximate stance, grantmakers can engage in meaningful dialogue and develop public kinship. (p. 3)

Fast forward a little more than one year, and the process led to creation of an advisory team of young people with intellectual disabilities. (See Figure 1.) This team's task was to review and offer feedback on grant submissions received through the fall 2019 and winter 2020 grant cycles.

The foundation team of program officers, administrative staff, and the executive director took the same online course that the Health Foundation for Western & Central New York had taken about a year and half earlier. After getting familiar with the methodology, the team worked to choose a design challenge. Four of the foundation's results statements, drafted by trustees at that 2011 board session, pertain to young people with intellectual disabilities. Given the gaps in the quality, breadth, and even the existence of community-level data for the field of intellectual disabilities, the foundation team decided to look at a portion of a result statement that speaks to engagement and socialization: "Young people with intellectual disabilities have access to meaningful social pursuits." By selecting this as the focus, the team hoped to get a handle on what "meaningful social pursuits" could look like, and how young people with intellectual disabilities would articulate those opportunities when given the chance.

Phase I: Inspiration

For grantmakers that deploy the human-centered design model, the inspiration phase challenges

FIGURE 1 2019 Tower Foundation Advisory Team

The members of the 2019 Tower Foundation advisory team are Anthony Frail, seated front left; Bradley Wunderlich, Anthony Salvo, and Niko DelValle, seated, from left; and Marshaun Walton, Sydney Leszczak, and Kalina Rumph, standing, from left.

them to get as close as possible to the lived experiences of the people they are "designing" for. The Tower Foundation team made a point of seeking more immersive experiences than were generally afforded by a typical site visit to an intellectual-disabilities service provider. Program officers spent a day at an inclusive camp, talked with campers and counselors, and helped set up for the evening's semiformal dance. Other activities included group yoga classes and a playground painting project. In working or playing side by side with young people, one's perspective can shift from an orientation toward specific programs and how they are implemented to one focused on individuals and what engages and motivates them. There was a significant benefit to having real conversations. Unlike most site visits with grant partners, these were about personal interactions and not about outcome reporting and budget modifications that tend to reinforce power imbalances. With these experiences still fresh, the foundation's human-centered design team came together to share observations about activities that resonated

with young people, as well as their interactions with peers, friends, and program staff.

To further capture the perspectives of young people with intellectual disabilities, the foundation team conducted 15 separate interviews with young people between the ages of 15 and 30. Two grant partners were able to help facilitate these interviews, whose questions were designed to focus on how and with whom the young people preferred to socialize: What do you do for fun? Whom do consider a friend, and why? What do you wish you could do more of? Responses were revealing and poignant:

- One young man described his future career ambitions and the strong social network that supports him. He has been able to find many opportunities to meet new people and maintain friendships while also working a part-time job.

- A young woman shared the tension between wanting to have independence and

to be able to see her boyfriend when she wants to while at the same time being reliant on her parents for transportation.

- A young man shared his desire to make friends and his anxiety about doing so; his experience in school as a youngster was very lonely. He is considering changing his college major so that he can be around more like-minded people.

- Another young man recently started participating in a vocational program where he is paid for his work; but, more important to him, he is surrounded by people who have become his close friends. Since graduating high school, he had been extremely lonely, neither employed nor involved in any clubs or organizations.

While every interviewee was unique, some key themes emerged: As important as it is to make friends, programming with structured (but not forced) opportunities to socialize naturally are infrequent. Barriers include transportation, basic time constraints, and family expectations.

Human-centered design encourages interviews with field experts, too. The Tower Foundation team identified eight experts representing a range of perspectives, from on-the-ground service providers to funders, academics, and state officials. In one interview, a family support specialist shared this observation:

> What we want for ourselves and our own children is exactly what young people with intellectual disabilities want. It's no more and no less. … They want to have typical life experiences: They go to school, they make friends, they get to be a teenager, they want to have more independence, they want to date, they want to get married, they want to have kids, they want to have a job, they want a career, they want money in the bank. It's the exact same thing. It's just adapting the situation to fit their individual needs.

Broad themes that emerged from conversations with experts included the following:

- The best programs that promote socialization for young people with intellectual disabilities are those that are integrated with typical peers, where natural consequences and authentic interactions can occur. While all programs should promote acceptance, friendship and collegiality should not be forced. Programs should make room for people to make friends, but not devalue experiences if this doesn't happen.

- There is a need to normalize inclusion. The best way to promote socialization for young people is not necessarily through programs at all, but through everyday life in the community.

- There are extensive gaps in recreational opportunities for young people with intellectual disabilities due to funding cuts. These gaps are particularly pronounced for individuals who have aged out of the education system.

What did we really learn from these conversations? We learned about the ableism that exists within systems, standing in the way of people with disabilities realizing their goals, underestimating their abilities, and devaluing their contributions. We were not surprised to learn that young people with intellectual disabilities crave the variety of social and recreational opportunities that we all do. But it really came home to us that these experiences — a beer with friends, a play they wrote and performed — are the cornerstone of well-being for these youths. The conversations we were having felt like the right conversations.

Phase II: Ideation

In the ideation phase of human-centered design, grantmakers can reflect on what they learned in the inspiration phase, identify potential design solutions, and begin to test them. This is creatively demanding work, as the team works to distill takeaways from the interviews and immersive experiences into something that can generate insights on the way to possible solutions. Recounting all the twists and turns of the process is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice

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to say the team brainstormed its way through a lot of sticky notes and colored markers.

The individuality of each person we interviewed notwithstanding, the foundation team was able to identify four overarching themes to serve as guardrails throughout the ideation phase: Young people with disabilities are ambitious. They want to be independent. Like everyone else, they have individualized interests. And just like young people without disabilities, they benefit from inclusion — which should be rooted in equal opportunity and access, not one-off events or highly orchestrated interactions.

The team then generated what in the parlance of in human-centered design are called insight statements, or observations that spoke to the challenges facing young people with intellectual disabilities without preference for any specific solution. For example: Young people with intellectual disabilities often have greater potential than many systems and individuals assume or allow for. Parents struggle with the trade-off between independence and safety/support for their children. Based on these insights, practitioners of human-centered design are taught to create "how might we" questions that turn the challenges captured by insight statements into opportunities for solutions. A sampling of questions the foundation developed include:

• How might we promote leadership of young people with intellectual disabilities through our grantmaking?

• How might we show parents and caregivers that greater independence for these young people doesn't necessarily threaten safety or supports?

• How might we promote or build authentically inclusive programs in the community?

From "how might we" questions, the team transitioned to brainstorming possible solutions — actual project ideas to test and refine. It was a not entirely comfortable shift. With few exceptions, the foundation doesn't create or run programs on its own, but relies on grant partners to build programming to meet the needs of the populations they serve. Were we coming up with program ideas that we would pass down to grant partners to actually implement? This felt a bit presumptuous.

With this in mind, the team went forward. Some of the most promising ideas emerging from this process included:

• Design a tool box of inclusive methods for organizations to use when planning new programs.

• Create learning opportunities for grant partners to support and promote inclusion, building a roster of consultants with appropriate expertise.

• Create an advisory team of young people with intellectual disabilities to review a round of grant proposals.

• Support an entrepreneurial business competition for young people with intellectual disabilities.

Inclusion was a common theme; we had heard a lot about its importance and how rarely is it supported in an authentic way.

After designing storyboards based on several of the more promising ideas, the foundation team decided to develop an advisory team made up of young people with intellectual disabilities that would review grant requests and give direct

feedback to program officers. This project would not impose new programming demands on any of our grant partners, though we would engage their support and expertise.[3] But before going too far down this path, the foundation shared a high-level summary of this concept with a number of grant partners for a gut check: Is this a good idea? Where are the gaps in this concept? Buoyed by some initial positive feedback, the team identified two key components to be tested: 1) a way to translate the content of a grant proposal for young people with intellectual disabilities in an accessible and comprehensible way; and 2) integration of the steps and activities to assemble an advisory team and capture its input within the timeline of a grant application and review cycle.

For the first challenge, the foundation team converted preliminary grant applications chosen from a previous application cycle to short scripts, kept as direct and conversational as possible. These were, in turn, converted to videos of program officers explaining the concept and key details of each proposal, interspersed with a few photos and graphics. Two grant partners helped us prototype this approach, showing the videos to some of the young people with whom they work. Feedback helped us strike the right balance of detail — they wanted to know more about outcomes and the viability of strategies than we expected — and visuals to enliven and further illustrate the proposals.

For the second issue — fitting all of this within a grantmaking calendar — the team tested a number of scenarios and, in the end, advisory-team activities were accommodated by extending the grant-review period by just a few days. For the first convening of the advisory team, these activities included three events: an orientation get-together, the actual grant reviews, and a celebration in the community. The advisory team helped plan the celebration: Escape room? Rock-climbing gym? Arcade? Stipends were paid to advisors for their participation in the first two events. A second convening of the advisory team

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for the winter 2020 grant cycle was pared down slightly, keeping the review session and celebration but dropping the orientation session since everyone was familiar with the process.

The vision for the advisory team evolved considerably over a four-month prototyping phase, with the input of service providers and the young people themselves. An important recommendation that emerged from this phase included building a role for a liaison into the grant review process whereby each advisor would work with a supportive person in their life as they reviewed the videos, recorded their reaction on a form (see Figure 2), and prepared to share their assessments of the proposals. The liaison would facilitate prescreening of the videos, assist with comprehension, help allay social anxiety, and encourage advisory team members to make their opinions known. In practice, this role really was critical.

Phase III: Implementation
The implementation phase of human-centered design offers the chance to take solutions out in the field, where they are tested and adapted. In fall 2019, as our project began to take shape, the

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[3] Given the power imbalance that makes it hard for nonprofits to say "no" to a funder, we did try to be sensitive to the commitment that would be required of our grant partners. Honorariums and staff stipends compensated for time and effort as appropriate. The leadership teams from the grant partners that worked with us on this initiative have been enthusiastic supporters of the advisory team, and have promoted the work in their own internal and external communications.

FIGURE 2 Advisory Team Feedback Form

ADVISORY TEAM FEEDBACK FORM

Name: _____

Grant Name: _____

1. How did you like the project?

Hated it   Didn't like it   It was okay   Liked it   Loved it

a. What did you like? _____

_____

b. What would you change? _____

_____

2. How important is this project to...

	Not important	A little important	Important	Very important
you?	★	★★	★★★	★★★★
your family?	★	★★	★★★	★★★★
your community?	★	★★	★★★	★★★★

3. What do you want to know more about? _____

_____

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prototyping and implementation stages began to bleed into one another. When the foundation decided to "go live" with an advisory team to help with the fall 2019 grant-review process, preparations took on the familiar look of project planning: developing a timeline, articulating a value proposition for a couple of different stakeholder groups, creating a communications plan, taking on some basic event planning, and designing evaluation protocols. Design considerations included how to create events that combined socializing with peers with a more civic-minded activity. Pizza and ice-breaking games would be a part of the mix. But we had also learned from

the prototyping work that our young advisors were prepared to take their roles as third-party grant reviewers seriously.

The first advisory team event is in the books. Over three weeks beginning in late September, we conducted a lively orientation session, got together a second time to discuss the actual proposals, and finally celebrated with dinner and arcade games. Our first steps toward participatory grantmaking are partial steps that do not cede decision-making power to the advisory team. But, we wanted input from the team to have a direct bearing on actual grantmaking.

In the preliminary grant-review process, which roughly corresponded with the three weeks of advisory-team engagement, we shared feedback with applicants and gave them a chance to respond and, if warranted, modify their program proposals. When discussing a proposal that would promote social-skill development for youth with autism through science-based programming, advisory team members told us they favored activities in more inclusive settings, including a mix of youth with and without disabilities. When advised of this, the applicant increased the number of near-age peer counselors in the program. Another application looked at improved housing-navigation supports for young people with disabilities aging out of the foster care system. Two of our advisory team members had experienced this very transition, and the applicant plans to connect with them as it goes forward with the project. Applicants welcomed advisor feedback warmly, and this sweetened the success of our early efforts. Ultimately, our trustees approved the proposals that the advisory team reviewed, proposals strengthened by their input.

Learning and Next Steps

The Tower Foundation found a lot to like in taking on a human-centered design project at the staff level. There was a team-building dimension to the project; administrative staff joined program officers in the effort. As designers, team members flexed creative muscles that could use some toning. Interviewing young people — and eventually working with them directly to discuss the merits of grant applications — felt like a natural extension of efforts to get closer to the ultimate beneficiaries of our grantmaking. Execution of the project is not expensive; the team budgeted $4,000 for activities that supported the initial round of grant reviews. But person hours for the whole process could certainly be measured in the hundreds. For the foundation team, bringing new voices to our grantmaking process felt like it elevated our work and more than justified the investment.

In addition to a significant commitment of staff time, there are other potential challenges to consider. The funder power dynamic doesn't go

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away. You will very likely ask grant partners for help; recognize that they may not feel they are in a position to turn you down. The foundation team took pains to not pursue a project that would heap more programming demands on service providers. If a provider and potential grant partner has been a full participant in the process and feels like it jointly owns the solution, then new programming demands may be justified. If this has not happened, grantmaking strategy shaped by human-centered design methods can be almost as top-down and patriarchal as other approaches.

Additionally, human-centered design methods recommend that you start small and pilot your solutions. Pilot tests leave people out. The foundation's initial implementation focused on just one of several of its funding geographies. Scaling of good ideas can happen, but it is not inevitable. Finally, whether you scale or not, human-centered design methods will not take a community or target population over some imagined finish line. The foundation took steps toward more inclusive practice and created an engagement opportunity for young people. Good progress, certainly. But as components of an emergent strategy, human-centered design initiatives are small wins in an evolving campaign.

Participatory Grantmaking

In planning for our inaugural advisory team at the Tower Foundation, we were fortunate to lean on the expertise of two funders that have embraced inclusion at all levels of their work: the WITH Foundation and the Disability Rights Fund.

Some candidates for project focus include ways to support families that need to navigate mental health support systems; how communities can be supportive of young people in recovery; and what young people with learning disabilities need to become more confident learners. These feel like complex challenges best taken on with the kind of on-the-ground, person-to-person collaboration that human-centered design methods support.

The WITH Foundation, a private foundation with grantmaking focused on comprehensive and accessible health care for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, has a robust advisory-committee model. This committee engages people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to advise the foundation board (which is also inclusive of individuals of people with disabilities) on its grantmaking and programmatic initiatives.

The Disability Rights Fund, an international, intermediary grantmaker that helps to support people with disabilities in the developing world, has similarly inclusive governance and leadership team. The fund has also been a leader in providing technical assistance to other funders interested in participatory grantmaking. A partnership with GrantCraft produced the guide *Deciding Together: Shifting Power and Resources Through Participatory Grantmaking* (Gibson, 2018).

What's Next?

In the short term, we were excited to get the advisory team together again. For a January 2020 grant cycle, we reconvened the same group for input on a new set of proposals. In the spirit of human-centered design, we made some tweaks based on what we had learned thus far. We didn't ask any one advisory team member to review more than two proposals, breaking out into teams to accommodate all the submissions. In the first iteration, we had asked them for feedback on three proposals and were rushed for time in the group discussion component. Later this spring we will assemble a new advisory team — again focusing on young people with intellectual disabilities — in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, one of our other funding geographies. We do expect some modifications, in part due to travel considerations. There is a local disabilities coalition well-positioned to support us in the work. We have other constituencies to bring to the table as we further explore participatory grantmaking. We have not yet established a firm timetable, but will look to similarly engage youth with mental illness, facing substance-use challenges, and with learning disabilities. Whether these are issue-specific advisory teams or more integrated groups remains to be determined.

For human-centered work more broadly, in 2020 we look forward to beginning a project that will explore some of the issues touched upon by results statements that serve our other funding areas. Now that we have some familiarity with the methodology, we hope to invite external stakeholders to join us in the work: another regional funder, perhaps, or a local provider or collaborative. Some candidates for project focus include ways to support families that need to navigate mental health support systems; how communities can be supportive of young people in recovery; and what young people with learning disabilities need to become more confident learners. These feel like complex challenges best taken on with the kind of on-the-ground, person-to-person collaboration that human-centered design methods support.

At the Tower Foundation, we explored those methods as a strategy to "get proximate" with

one group of people, in one community, that we hope to positively impact through our grantmaking. We are not ready to "check the box" on proximity. Our human-centered design project, when we focused on variables we could control as grantmakers, has just started us on a path toward participatory grantmaking. We have other communities to engage and additional stakeholders that care about our focus areas to get to know better. We hope that this experiment continues to move us along a continuum toward broader inclusion that will inform and enrich the work of the foundation long beyond the scope of this project.

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