

# The Foundation Review

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Volume 13  
Issue 2 *Shifting Power in Philanthropy*

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## Front Matter

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## Shifting Power in Philanthropy

### Results

Shifting Power in a Community-Based Health Initiative..... **7**

Walking the Talk in Participatory Philanthropy..... **23**

### Reflective Practice

(In)equality Through Unrestricted Grantmaking ..... **38**

Strategy Resilience..... **52**

Holding Foundations Accountable for Equity Commitments ..... **64**

Integrating Youth Voice and Community Expertise ..... **79**

Partnering With Grantees to Build Organizational Capacity ..... **91**

The Revolution Within..... **105**

Book Review ..... **119**

Executive Summaries..... **122**

Call for Papers ..... **125**

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# THE FoundationReview®

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*The Foundation Review* is the first peer-reviewed journal of philanthropy, written by and for foundation staff and boards and those who work with them implementing programs. Each quarterly issue of *The Foundation Review* provides peer-reviewed reports about the field of philanthropy, including reports by foundations on their own work.

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People gathered in Minneapolis, Minn. for the George Floyd family memorial service on June 4, 2020. (Unsplash)

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# Editorial

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Dear readers,

Themes for issues of *The Foundation Review* often arise from our observation of what we see happening in the field or the interests of sponsors. Appropriately, the genesis for this issue on *Shifting Power in Philanthropy* was bottom-up — we received several submissions for open (unthemed) issues that were related to how philanthropy is engaging more and differently with communities and thought it warranted a focused issue.

Over the past eighteen months, the deep racial disparities in everything from access to basic needs (food, housing), to policing practices, to the ability to work and learn remotely, were laid bare. While many foundations had already begun re-examining how they could center equity in their work, this internal work has accelerated and the external scrutiny of the sector has ramped up. Demands for greater transparency, increased distribution of funds, and broader participation in decisionmaking about where money goes have increased. Articles in this issue address some of the opportunities and challenges in making these shifts.

**Foster, Doksum, and Dwyer** share the results of an evaluation of the Maine Health Access Foundation's place-based funding to communities to address systems issues that impede the access to essential services and supports. The evaluation and learning process spanned five of six years of the initiative, and generally found that partnerships contribute to effective systems change and that community-generated ideas spark innovative interventions. They adopted changes in practice like including those affected by systems problems to participate in the grant review process and offering longer-term, general operating support grants.

"Participatory grantmaking" has entered the lexicon and toolkit for grantmakers. **Meyer, Goering, Hopkins, Hyde, Mattocks, and Denlinger** examine the participatory grantmaking process of a Baltimore, Maryland, community foundation that invested \$1.5 million in an initiative to support community-building and improvement activities in two communities. Deep trust and understanding the history and politics among community members are identified as critical to success.

While multiyear general operating support has been identified as one way to share power with grantees, **Hunnik, de Wit, and Wiepking** share insights into how unrestricted grantmaking influences the relationship between funders and grantees. Hidden and invisible power dynamics exist in the relationship, even when there are few formal restrictions on grantees' spending. Relaxing formal restrictions gives rise to some uncertainty about what grantees actually have to "prove" to get or maintain funding.

**Lynn, Nolan, and Waring** argue that developing resilient strategies that can withstand shocks like a pandemic is critical; sharing power to develop and adapt strategy is key to developing resilient strategies. They argue that strategy resilience centers people and organizations instead of the power of financial resources. At the core of this theory is the assumption that given today's complexities, philanthropy must use its power differently — releasing control over organizations and their change strategies while using its unique position, reach, and voice to work in solidarity with community leaders.

While much attention is paid to decision-making about awarding funding, **Beer, Patrizi, and Coffman** examine how foundation strategy, evaluation, grantee reporting, and monitoring processes have allowed foundations to retain their power and sidestep direct accountability to the people and communities they say they want to serve. They argue that substantial shifts in decision-making power and how foundations act in relation to others are needed if funders are to be held to their commitments to equity and justice.

Stakeholder engagement in identifying what needs to be changes is probably the most basic first step in power-shifting. **Yonas, Sloan, Hollis, Sizemore, Elliott, McMurray, and Pearlman** describe how discussion groups empowered young people to reflect on events that impacted their lives. Recommendations on school discipline reforms, greater access to diversion and prevention programs, and changes to court-related fees, fines, and restitution policies informed the foundation's grantmaking.

**Dymnicki, Hooker and Goldberg** reflect on the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation's National Character

Initiative to support organizations seeking to advance character development among youth. In order to shift the grantor-grantee power dynamic, the initiative focused on building grantee capacity, based on grantee priorities.

**Ricci, Csuti, and Ramirez** follow up on an article in *The Foundation Review* published in October 2016 that described a new vision for grantmaking at The Colorado Trust that shifted power from the foundation to community residents. Based on learning from the first five years, The Trust is pivoting to a new approach based on community organizing. The focus will be on building community capacity, rather than individual organizational capacity.

Each of these articles provide a view on what it means to shift power and what it takes to do it. They define power-shifting differently, focusing on varying levels of decision-making and various aspects of the whole change-making enterprise. Fundamentally, all aspects of a foundation will need to change in order to truly share power — it has to be embedded in everything from strategy to proposal review to evaluation processes. These articles offer some insights into how to begin this journey.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Teresa Behrens'.

Teresa R. Behrens, Ph.D.  
Editor in Chief, *The Foundation Review*  
Executive Director, Dorothy A. Johnson Center  
for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University

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# Contents

---

## Results

### **7** Shifting Power in Maine: Findings From a Six-Year Community-Based Health Initiative

Susan Foster, M.P.H., M.S.S.W.;  
Teresa Doksum, Ph.D., M.P.H.; and  
Charles Dwyer, B.A.

### **23** Walking the Talk in Participatory Philanthropy

Megan Meyer, Ph.D., Emily Goering, Ph.D.,  
Karen Hopkins, Ph.D., Cheryl Hyde, Ph.D.,  
Nicole Mattocks, Ph.D., and Jonalyn  
Denlinger, M.B.A.

## Reflective Practice

### **38** (In)equality Through Unrestricted Grantmaking: Examining Trust and Power in the Collaboration Between the Dutch Charity Lotteries and Their Grantees

Olivier Hunnik, M.A., Arjen de Wit, Ph.D.,  
and Pamala Wiepking, Ph.D.

### **52** Strategy Resilience: Getting Wise About Philanthropic Strategy in a Post-Pandemic World

Jewlya Lynn, Ph.D., Clare Nolan, M.P.P.,  
and Peter Waring, M.A.

### **64** Holding Foundations Accountable for Equity Commitments

Tanya Beer, M.P.A., Patricia Patrizi, M.S.S.,  
and Julia Coffman, M.S.

### **79** Youth and the Juvenile Court System: A Community Foundation's Commitment to Integrating Voice and Community Expertise

Michael A. Yonas, Ph.D., Jennifer C.  
Sloan, M.P.H., Anna Hollis, B.A., Tiffany  
Sizemore, J.D., Kathi Elliott, D.N.P.,  
Michelle McMurray, M.S.W., and Jeanne  
Pearlman, Ph.D.

### **91** How to Encourage Sustainable Change: A Reflection on How Philanthropy Can Partner With Grantees to Build Organizational Capacity

Allison Dymnicki, Ph.D., Alex Hooker, B.A.,  
and Rebecca Goldberg, B.S.

### **105** The Revolution Within: What It Really Takes to Partner With Communities

Courtney Ricci, Ph.D., Nancy Csuti, Dr.P.H.,  
and Mia Ramirez, M.P.H.

## Plus...

### **119** Book Review

### **122** Executive Summaries

### **125** Call for Papers



