

Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI): How Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation can learn, grow and advance DEI in Iowa

Introduction

Delta Dental of Iowa Foundation's vision is for robust community systems and partnerships that empower and engage all Iowans to have optimal dental, vision and overall health. To realize this vision, we must focus on the inequities that create obstacles to fair and just opportunities to achieve full health potential. Health inequities are preventable. They are the results of social, economic, political, structural and other factors that affect some groups of people more than others.

The Foundation recognizes that a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion is at the core of our work. We believe that achieving equitable outcomes in our grantmaking is critical to improving the health and smiles of all Iowans. We also believe that advancing to true equity is an ongoing process and is not something we can simply 'check the box and move on' from, or will 'get right' or perfect. As a learning organization, working to advance equity will require our commitment to continuous growth and learning, which is at our core. We will continue to develop and refine this plan, work to become a more open and trust-based funder, refine our own practices, learn publicly and invite our partners and grantees to engage with us along the way.

We recognize **key characteristics of being an equity focused funder** as outlined below:

- A clear mission which is committed to equitable access, processes, treatment, and outcomes for all organizations and staff, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, religion/spiritual beliefs, physical and mental ability, or socioeconomic status.
- Recognizes that at every point of engagement the funder has the option to choose equity.
- Is guided by the vision that the nonprofit leaders, staff and communities have for their work and missions.
- Reflects and works in collaboration with stakeholders who represent the diversity of the community within which they work by nationality, ethnicity, native language, race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religious/spiritual beliefs and practice, physical and mental ability.
- Employs a wide variety of strategies to meet different learning styles, backgrounds and organizational needs.
- Utilizes organization's knowledge and outside resources to provide diverse tools, strategies, and role models.

- Aims for the involvement of all stakeholders in all facets of the program, including planning, delivery and evaluation.

The Foundation identified four critical areas in which we can advance our focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, which are outlined below:

1. **Work to become a strong equity focused funder.** Continue to refine, center and advance our diversity, equity and inclusion work through our mission and goals while recognizing this is an ongoing process and daily practice.
2. **Work to become a trust-based funder.** Pursue more trust-based and open funding practices that seek to advance the work of community-based organizations that lead diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across Iowa and support racial justice and equity.
3. **Work to become representative and transparent.** Through board and staff education and an ongoing opportunity to seek more reflective representation of the communities and partners we seek to support; we will seek opportunities to be representative and transparent.
4. Engage in and commit to thoughtful, ongoing **equity journey, self-reflection and action.**

The Foundation envisions a world where health equity is a reality. Health equity is achieved when every person has the opportunity to attain their full health potential. To achieve this goal, the Foundation will focus on building and supporting systemic solutions to address health inequities to create fair and just opportunities to health for all Iowans.

Critical Area 1: Work to become a strong equity focused funder

As a foundation, we will work to be more equitable and transparent in our practice, awareness and funding. We recognize that barriers to health exist and addressing those barriers is a key component to achieving healthy outcomes for all Iowans. As a Foundation, we will continue to build our knowledge base, act accordingly and communicate. We will adopt the key values of an equity focused funder outlined in the introduction of this plan.

Critical Area 2: Work to become a trust-based funder

Trust-based philanthropy focuses on better balancing power between the Foundation, nonprofits and the communities we seek to support through funding and engagement strategies. These strategies include giving multi-year funding, funding operational support, encouraging innovation, simplifying forms and processes for grantees and providing opportunities to new and emerging organizations and leaders.

The Foundation has engaged in trust-based funding for several years. An example is through the Lifelong Smiles Coalition and the empowerment of the coalition to address issues, collectively agree on high impact solutions that are funded by the Foundation. Another

example is through the work of the Foundation to address equity issues and trust-based funding through the intentional design and implementation of nonprofit organizational strengthening fund and health equity response to COVID-19. Through these specific grant programs, the Foundation will work to ensure:

- The organizations receiving funding are diverse and inclusive relative to their context.
- That the grants help to decrease oral/overall health disparities and/or advance oral/overall health equity.
- The Foundation is aware of and actively addressing both what and whom they may be missing with their grantmaking.

This will be an ongoing focus of grant programs going forward and a continued opportunity to further advance organizational strengthening and trust by:

- Playing an essential role as a catalyst and innovator of new ideas and support of talent in the sector.
- Broaden the sector infrastructure and involve marginalized communities and populations in work that has been the historical domain of an insular circle of actors.
- Seed, encourage and effectively strengthen links between social justice and the overall foundation and social sector goals and activities.

It is our intention that through these opportunities the Foundation can:

- Increase respect and mutual understanding among key stakeholders.
- Increase creativity in problem-solving through new perspectives, ideas, and strategies.
- Increase participation and involvement of people of color, disabled, LGBTQ+ and additional minoritized voices and communities.
- Increase trust and cooperation.
- Help overcome fear of mistakes, competition or conflict.
- Promote inclusion and equality.

As we focus on transparency and trust-based philanthropy, we will share our plan and process with our partners and invite them to work collaboratively with us and engage in areas we seek to strengthen.

Critical Area 3: Work to become representative and transparent

As a leader in oral and overall health funding across Iowa, the opportunity exists for the Foundation to lead in the area of better representation. While the long-term focus will remain on staff and board members that represent the communities we serve, we also have a role in building future leadership. The Foundation will continue to look at ways to bring in and support diverse leaders for example, through educational opportunities, committees/coalitions and stakeholder engagement. The opportunity exists to focus on building and fostering leadership for people with lived experience as well as those with learned experience, as often, lived experience is overlooked but can bring key skills to the table.

To ensure success, the Foundation and its partners must have trust, vulnerability, understanding and confidence, collectively, in the learning and commitment to improved actions through this equity journey. Transparency of our equity work is important to ensure inclusive processes are made public and shared proactively with partners and stakeholders to continue to engage in authentic learning and accountability to these efforts.

Critical Area 4: Engage in an equity journey and self-reflection

Every organization has a "culture" of policies, procedures, programs, and processes, which incorporate certain values, beliefs, assumptions, and customs. Organizational cultures largely echo mainstream culture in its sense of time orientation, perception, and use of time. An organizational culture may not lend itself to cultural competence, so that's where skill building comes in. A culturally competent organization brings together knowledge about different groups of people -- and transforms it into standards, policies, and practices that make everything work.

The Foundation will focus on diversity, equity and inclusion through a journey of self-reflection and education, learning to focus on transformation and competency. Staff will engage in learning opportunities, such as "Race Forward", an educational opportunity for funders with the Iowa Council on Foundations, continued equity learning with Grantmakers in Health Terrance Keenan Institute and ongoing stakeholder learning and engagement. The Foundation staff will use tools from these trainings to assess where we are, reflect on ways to advance equity and analyze opportunities to be a better and more inclusive funder.

Board meetings will have a focus on equity through sessions focused on continued learning, bringing in state and national experts. An importance will be placed on connecting the learnings and findings from feedback, surveys and evaluations from grantees and partners. A key starting point will include an examination of the distribution of funds and opportunities of Foundation programs and how those are apportioned in a way to positively affect communities across Iowa in a culturally competent, equitable manner.

As we move through the process, the board and staff will identify if and/when an equity audit may be needed. An equity audit, which is a customized and specific type of organizational or program audit, can be a powerful leadership tool. A well implemented audit can help to uncover, recognize and change inequities that are internal to an organization. Audits, when conducted collaboratively, can improve leadership's ability to challenge inequities external to an organization as well. Equity audits can help an organization set benchmarks and develop long-term plans to operationalize its commitment to equity. To be successful, those leading and implementing the audit need to be representative of the people leading, implementing and benefiting from the program itself.

Additional ongoing strategies for the Foundations consideration:

1. Give more. Continue the path we have started by focusing on organizational and operational support in light of COVID as well as authentically partner with communities of color and additional underserved populations to support advancing their work in creative and innovative ways.
2. Go to bat for our partners and grantees. Identify ways to support grantees with the greatest potential to deliver meaningful, financially sustainable results. This may include multi-year sustainability funding to materially scale their impact through flexible grant dollars and lead investing.
3. Continue to focus on equity/equity lens. Look beyond checking the box and develop long term strategies. Consider a specific population focus area for equity, for example, people of color, refugees, and/or migrant farm workers. The impact of such a focus will be much broader than just improving oral and overall health. It will empower the Foundation to invest in the people doing the work and gain support of communities most impacted by disparities.
4. Move out of our comfort zone. Focus on not being a “typical funder” and instead of allowing partnerships to come from an influential person in the professional network, identify opportunities to seek partnerships outside of that realm. This will also support better balance of power and build trust within communities. Look for community and neighborhood-based organizations and invest in the people doing the work we seek to advance and lift up those organizations.
5. Lend expertise when needed. The Foundation has access to a vast amount of expertise, such as advocacy, finance and technology as well as resources for consultants and experts across Iowa and the country. Identify areas in which the Foundation can support organizations through lending their expertise which will in turn benefit entire communities.

Glossary

Diversity - Psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals; including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and learning styles.¹

Equity - The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations, and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups.²

¹ Equity in the Center: *Awake to Woke to Work*.

² Equity in the Center: *Awake to Woke to Work*.

Health Equity - Health equity is achieved when every person has the opportunity to “attain his or her full health potential” and no one is “disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstances.” Health inequities are reflected in differences in length of life; quality of life; rates of disease, disability, and death; severity of disease; and access to treatment.³

Inclusion - The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences, offers respect in words and actions, fosters a sense of belonging for all people. Inclusion is more than simply diversity and quantitative representation. It involves authentic and empowered participation and full access to opportunities.⁴

Racial Justice – The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice—or racial equity—goes beyond “anti-racism.” It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.⁵

Racism – Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.⁶

Social Justice – Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole.⁷

Trust-based Philanthropy/Funder - At its core, trust-based philanthropy is about redistributing power—systemically, organizationally, and interpersonally—in service of a healthier and more equitable nonprofit sector. On a practical level, this includes multi-year unrestricted funding, streamlined applications and reporting, and a commitment to building relationships based on transparency, dialogue, and mutual learning.⁸

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, March 11). Health Equity. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/healthequity/index.htm>.

⁴ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - Northwest Area Foundation. NWAf.org. (2021, June 24). <https://www.nwaf.org/approach/diversity-equity-inclusion/>.

⁵ Race Forward, “[Race Reporting Guide](#)” (2015)

⁶ “[What Is Racism?](#)” – Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks) [web workbook](#).

⁷ “Racial Equity Resource Guide”, Kellogg Foundation <https://www.racialequityresourceguide.org/>

⁸ It’s time to address power and build equity in philanthropy. Trust-based Philanthropy Project. (n.d.). <https://trustbasedphilanthropy.org/>.