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# ENACTING CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY: A Commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



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# ENACTING CHANGE IN OUR COMMUNITY: A Commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Akron Community Foundation stands for diversity, equity and inclusion. We pledge to commit our time and resources to empower and give voice to those who have often felt unheard and who have been systemically, consciously and unconsciously, left vulnerable in our community.

This document not only calls attention to current research and narrative surrounding the United States' ingrained racism, but outlines the immediate and ongoing action steps that Akron Community Foundation will take, or has taken, at an individual, organizational and community level to embark on an intentional journey to positively impact the lives of **all** who live, work and play in Summit County. As a community funder, leader and convener, we recognize our role to set a positive example for necessary change in our community.

## BACKGROUND

In Spring 2020, George Floyd's death sparked national outrage and wide-ranging calls for change in how this country deals with racism. Akron residents took to the streets to protest the killing of George Floyd and held events calling for an end to racism and police brutality. Summit County and the City of Akron – along with municipalities across the country – both quickly declared racism a public health crisis and enacted work to begin bringing racism to an end locally.

Akron Community Foundation is painfully aware of the structural and systemic racism that creates wealth, social and health disparities in our community and realizes that work to combat racism cannot rest solely on our government. We realize that at the philanthropic level there are steps we can take to help ensure that our community is a place where all are afforded equal opportunities to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In 2018, Akron Community Foundation established an internal staff Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee. This committee came about in part because of feedback from Summit and Medina county residents' On The Table Greater Akron discussions where they indicated that equity and social inclusion was one of the biggest issues facing our community. Diving deeper on this topic in 2018, participants in these discussions shared that race, racism and discrimination were of specific concern. Having identified equity and social inclusion, race, racism and discrimination as major issues in our community in the previous years, On The Table Greater Akron discussions in 2019 saw Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as the primary topic of three issues discussed. The DEI committee at Akron Community Foundation has been working with staff over the past few years to identify opportunities for learning and growth, but the recent local, national and global protests signal that we must continue to take steps in the right direction, however, we must do so at an accelerated pace. **The community is in need of immediate and continued action.**

For Summit County to thrive, **all people must be included, respected and afforded equitable opportunities.**

As stewards of our community, we must push with small, uncomfortable actions that will help us reach the tipping point.

## TIME TO ACT

Akron Community Foundation is committed to responding to the call for action. Hearing the message being sent from those who have demonstrated and voiced their discontent with business as usual, we are laying out a plan to continue enacting the changes necessary to move our organization and the community forward.

The following plan organizes our work around four distinct but intertwined entities:

- Individual (ACF Staff)
- Individual (ACF Board)
- Institutional (Akron Community Foundation as an organization)
- Community

Ahead we highlight the work that we've already begun or completed, as well as outline research-based steps that will be considered as our foundation embarks on this intentional journey.

### INDIVIDUAL (STAFF)

Individuals hold the key to sustained organizational and systemic changes. When changes occur at the individual level, we set the stage for change beyond the individual to occur. Both recognizing this potential and realizing that we could not move forward on this topic until we determined our staff's cultural competency, Akron Community Foundation began by investing in the personal development of our staff.

The first step in this process was creating an internal Diversity, Equity and Inclusion staff committee tasked with reviewing ACF's policies, procedures and day-to-day work for areas of growth and improvement as mentioned above.

Following the creation of the group in summer 2018, Akron Community Foundation began the following initiatives:

- Attended the Akron Urban League's lunch and learn series during the Summer/Fall of 2018 on becoming culturally competent. ACF paid for all tickets and all staff were encouraged to attend as many of the luncheons as possible. 100% of staff attended at least one session.
- Solicited formal proposals from three organizations for DEI focused staff training, ultimately selecting Project Ujima for the initial next steps due to their extensive experience and reputation in the DEI space.
- Through Project Ujima, the entire staff completed the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment to determine where participants individually fell on the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC), as well as where the staff fell as a whole. The IDI is a nationally known survey tool that helps assess and provides an understanding of one's intercultural mindset.

**While Akron Community Foundation's collaboration with targeted nonprofit partners to tackle key issues facing our community, such as racial and social equity, is a step in the right direction, it is only one of many actions that we have taken and will take to help give a voice to those who have been left voiceless by the systems in our country.**

## Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC™)



- ACF's staff landed on the collective mindset of Minimization (see diagram above). Based on these factors, and the recognition that we have as much to learn as we do to unlearn, Project Ujima led the staff through a group discussion circle on the book "White Fragility" by Robin J. DiAngelo.
- Worked with Business Volunteers Unlimited (BVU) to provide a third-party employee satisfaction survey to evaluate company culture and ensure that the workplace is a welcoming and safe space for all. Healthy culture helps the organization retain its employees. Concurrently, employee retention can signal whether employees feel welcomed, safe, valued, recognized and like they can bring their authentic self to their workplace. Results from the survey were overwhelmingly positive and were shared with both board and staff with potential next steps outlined to continue the positive momentum.

### Next Steps

While we believe these initiatives were productive first steps on our organization's path to inclusivity, we recognize that there is still much work to be done. To that end, we are:

- Seeking to engage with a proven DEI-focused firm that can provide self-paced e-learning modules for staff addressing lessons on diversity, inclusion, race & ethnicity, multigenerational workforce, gender, ability, LGBTQ+, bias, microaggressions, and global cultural competency, among others. Staff will be asked to complete the modules throughout the year, and incoming employees would be enrolled in the modules as well.
- Staff will continue to be encouraged to attend seminars and learning opportunities, similar to the Akron Urban League lunch and learns, when they are able.

## INDIVIDUAL (BOARD)

Just as we recognize that work must be done at the individual level with our staff, this same work needs to also take place with our governing board members. In Summer 2018, Dr. Sarah Friebert began serving as Governance Committee chair and quickly created a process to be more inclusive in our search for board members who best represent the community and can help us become more equitable in the governance of our foundation, while also contributing to the backgrounds and skill sets needed to steward the resources and legacies entrusted to our foundation. Of the 24 board members currently serving ACF, 63% are male and 80% are white.

In addition to this increased focus on board diversity, and under the guidance of current Governance Committee Chair Katie Smucker and member Dr. Rachel Talton, the board began the following DEI-focused work in Fall 2020:

- Board members completed the same Intercultural Development Inventory assessment that the staff completed one year prior to determine both individual cultural competency, as well as the collective mindset of the board.
- Following the completion of the assessment and individual review sessions with Project Ujima staff, the board met for a two-hour session to debrief on the results and determine how those results will impact future DEI training and other governance and board-level initiatives.

### *Next Steps*

- The Governance Committee will continue to look at prospects to be inclusive not just of race, but LGBTQ+, age, gender, ability, etc.
- Like staff, board members will be enrolled in the self-paced e-learning modules. We believe it is critical for our board and staff members to have shared language and understanding of the issues we seek to tackle. By engaging both staff



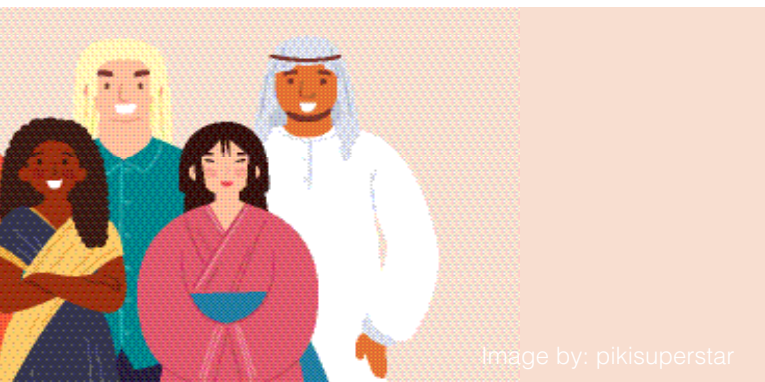
and board members in shared learning, the individuals will band together as a whole bringing about synchrony to meet the mission and vision of the organization to do greater good for all people in our community

- Additional steps to follow based on IDI assessment review and Governance Committee training proposals.

## INSTITUTIONAL

In Fall 2019, ACF announced its first round ever of Proactive Grants that focused on three different causes: Seniors; Drugs & Addiction; and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. A total of \$125,000 was awarded to the Greater Akron Chamber and the Women's Network for DEI-focused programs, with an additional \$150,000 being distributed to the Akron Urban League and Conxus NEO in Fall 2020. A \$100,000 grant went to Direction Home Akron Canton in Fall 2019 for an initiative to make Summit County a more livable and accessible community for people of all ages over the next five years.

Additionally, ACF surveyed local nonprofit leadership to identify the diversity at both the staff and board level of their organizations. ACF is currently aggregating this information and will be using it to both inform future grantmaking and evaluate past grantmaking to help identify areas of improvement.



As mentioned above, the Governance Committee has also instituted a process to ensure better diversity on our board of directors. Additionally, the Governance Committee has added three Ad Hoc Committee Members to both Community Relations and Community Investment, providing additional opportunities for diversity at the board committee level.

While we believe these are all necessary steps, we know there are many more opportunities for equity at the organizational level.

### *Next Steps*

Using Equity in the Center's "Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture" as a guide, senior leadership and the DEI Staff Committee will work to create a more equitable organizational environment. The DEI Staff Committee will be responsible for establishing outcomes and metrics to measure progress.

Akron Community Foundation understands that the impact of our actions is greater than that of our words or intentions. Below are actions our foundation will take to better engage in practices and processes that promote and achieve an inclusive, diverse, equitable and authentic organization.

### Human Resources:

- Leadership has received contact names for several HR consultants who are available on a contract basis to assist ACF in examining our HR policies and practices. Given the continued growth of the staff team, such expertise is valuable and necessary in continuing to shape and grow the positive culture we've established.
- Evaluate hiring practices and procedures to determine roadblocks to diversity and ensure a more diverse pool of candidates for every available position. For instance, minority staff could be included in the initial hiring process to ensure a more inclusive approach.
  - Benefits of a diverse workforce are well documented, and while our foundation will strive to diversify the composition (by race/age/ability/LGBTQ+) of the staff, we understand that checking boxes in the name of diversity does not ensure diverse employees feel welcome, safe and able to fully express themselves. Ensuring Akron Community Foundation maintains an inclusive environment will lead to increased ability to attract and retain diverse employees while maintaining increased levels of productivity. One way we're monitoring our inclusivity is by measuring staff satisfaction through the survey managed by BVU that was mentioned in the staff section of this document, which will help us uncover whether the vision and intention for an inclusive environment is present, while also establishing a baseline to either maintain or enhance.

### Marketing & Communications:

- Update our Brand Guidelines document, specifically the Glossary to include terms surrounding race, gender and other diversity-focused language so that all staff have a shared language on a complex topic and knowledge of language that elevates the oppressed.

### Fund Development:

- Explore ways to further ensure that our giving vehicles are accessible and attainable for a broader audience. For the past decade, Akron Community Foundation has been focused on donor-centricity and has eliminated or altered some barriers to entry by lowering donation minimums, allowing invasion of principal and encouraging multi-generational involvement, but we will continue to explore ways we can more equitably engage with diverse donors.
- Work with affiliate funds to embed a DEI focus within their grantmaking, governance, communications, training, etc.

### Community Investment:

- Complete Grantspace's "Shifting the Narrative to Advance Racial Equity" training.
- Conduct a Racial Equity Impact Assessment of grantmaking.
- Evaluate grantmaking practices and implement a racial equity lens using GrantCraft's guide. These are some of the anticipated changes that will result in the implementation of a racial equity lens:
  - Pivot grantmaking under ACF's Community Response Fund by seeking applications from our partner organizations in support of racial equity work in our community.
  - Update our grant application to help collect and analyze data and information about race and ethnicity.
  - Convene minority-led organizations to provide input on our grant application and grantmaking process to ensure accessibility.

### Administration:

- In cooperation with the Greater Akron Chamber, audit our current vendor

relationships and utilize their Inclusion Marketplace Inventory and Directory to engage minority suppliers in our community. We will also develop a process to vet future vendor relationships for greater diversity when possible.

### Finance & Investments:

- Incorporate DE&I language in ACF's Investment Policy Statement, and survey, with the help of our financial consultant, the diversity of investment firm ownership, management and the actual managers in ACF's main asset pool.

## COMMUNITY

Even though our intentions are driven by altruism, philanthropy and passion to do good for the community, the organizational results from the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) completed by our foundation's board and staff revealed that our perceived orientation of "Acceptance" (an orientation that recognizes and appreciates patterns of cultural difference and commonality in one's own and other cultures) did not match our actual development orientation of "Minimization" (an orientation that highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles that may also mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences). Please reference the diagram on page 4 for further detail.

As indicated in our foundation's organizational results of the IDI, for us to achieve an "Adaptation" orientation - that can shift cultural perspective and change behavior in culturally appropriate and authentic ways - we must develop understanding of our own culture and increased understanding of culture-general and culture-specific frameworks. Doing so will allow us to make sense of and more fully attend to cultural differences. Developing an understanding of our own culture and culture-general and culture-specific frameworks may be achieved through continued and shared learning.



As outlined throughout this document, Akron Community Foundation has and will continue to reflect on current practices, policies and processes for internal improvement. However, as an established steward of the community, ACF must also look outwardly and help ignite and catalyze conversations and actions that will help uncover and combat hidden prejudices, racism, and social, judicial, financial, educational and health injustices and disparities. While we acknowledge we are all on a journey, we also know that steps must be taken immediately.

### *Next Steps*

Below are actionable items that will serve as our guide throughout this lengthy journey:

- In November of 2020, ACF along with Summit County ADM Board and Peg's Foundation hosted a convening of key community stakeholders surrounding racism and diversity. Topic discussions surrounding education, employment, health, housing and criminal justice were hosted with over 40 community leaders, addressing issues of systemic racism while identifying actionable solutions to these critical community needs. An Implementation Committee will be recruited and convened to examine conclusions and recommendations

from this convening and champion investment in solutions identified from community funders and donors.

- Invite donors, civic, business, education and social leaders to attend a speaking or training session with an anti-racist speaker (e.g. Dr. Robin DiAngelo / Ibram X. Kendi).
- Invite grantees to attend a speaking engagement with an anti-racist speaker (e.g. Dr. Patricia Hill Collins / Ibram X. Kendi / Dr. Nikki Lane).
- Sponsor the Intercultural Development Inventory for nonprofits (potentially requiring its completion by nonprofit grant applicants whose staff and board lack minority representation).
- Underwrite/sponsor the two-day Groundwater Training by Racial Equity Institute for nonprofits, donors, business and civic leaders, etc.
- Embark on an endowment campaign for the Vernon L. Odom Fund, an affiliate fund focused on enriching the quality of life in minority communities, to broaden its pool of donors, grow its assets and, ultimately, increase the amount the fund is able to grant out each year.

## MOVING FORWARD

The interconnectedness that technology has enabled across communities has helped amplify the voices of unrest. Similarly, it has brought on a wave of resources and suggestions for achieving positive change in our communities. While it is responsible to set out the course for our intentional journey, it is wise for us to acknowledge that we must continue to be active listeners, advocates and most importantly avid, humble learners. We will continue to stay open, and agile to embrace the call for action from experts working on replacing centuries of systemic and structural racist practices in our society.