

**KALAMAZOO  
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION**

**OUR APPROACH TO  
COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY**

## **OUR MISSION**

To make life better for all through leadership and stewardship of resources that last forever.

## **OUR VISION**

A community where every person can reach full potential.

## **OUR PRIORITIES**

- Equity
- Education

## **OUR CORE VALUES**

- Relationships matter
- Do it better every time
- Expand our cultural lens
- Do the right thing

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# INTRODUCTION

The Kalamazoo Community Foundation has been serving Kalamazoo County since 1925. We are one of the oldest community foundations in the country, and our successes are a testament to the generosity of the greater Kalamazoo community. As a community foundation, we are unique because we are a permanent source of community resources, offer personalized opportunities for giving, and can be flexible in purpose, evolving with our community's ever-changing needs.

Kalamazoo County is a community with many assets, but it also has considerable needs. Our poverty level is one of the highest in the country. Too many children are not ready for kindergarten and too few Kalamazoo County students don't graduate from high school. The infant mortality rate for African American babies is considerably higher than that of white babies. Unemployment, food insecurity and housing instability rates are significantly higher for people of color compared to the total population. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning people are more likely to experience housing and

employment discrimination than non-LGBTQ residents of Kalamazoo County. These are just some of the inequities we see when we consider the multiple identities and circumstances of people in our community. We want our community to be one in which these identities are not barriers to an individual's access to opportunities and resources. But the truth is, right now, they are.

Our vision is a community where every person can reach full potential. As we see it, a community where every person can reach full potential is one in which all children enter school ready to learn, are supported throughout their academic career and are prepared for life after high school. It is one in which all adults have the skills they need to live their best life and can support themselves and those who may depend on them. It is one in which every person feels safe to live in and move freely through every neighborhood. It is one in which identities and attributes such as ethnicity, race, age, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, national origin, economic background/circumstances, physical and/or

mental abilities, veteran status, marital status, resident legal status or philosophy/religion are not predictors of an individual's ability to live a high-quality, self-determined life.

For some time now we have applied an equity lens to our work and have gradually increased our support of education-related programs and initiatives. We believe removing barriers and addressing the needs and challenges of our community's most marginalized members will help Kalamazoo County be a more equitable community overall. We also believe improving educational outcomes will help improve the wellbeing of the entire community.

When we work with partners across the community to remove barriers that keep individuals from reaching their full potential, every child in our community will attend quality pre-kindergarten and be ready for kindergarten when it's time. More students will graduate from high school on time and be prepared for whatever they choose to do next, which could be college, learning a trade or entering a career. More African American babies will reach their first birthday. The income gap — community wide — will decrease. LGBTQ people will receive fair treatment when they seek housing and employment. These are just a few examples of the strides our community could make.

**Equity** is achieved when social, legal, economic and other barriers are overcome and all people are able to take advantage of opportunities to live positive lives. **Marginalize** Confining a group of people to a lower social standing in society through laws, policies, cultural norms and interpersonal interactions. It is often based on ethnicity, race, age, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, national origin, economic background/circumstances, physical and/or mental abilities, veteran status, marital status, resident legal status or philosophy/religion or other identities. **Self-Determination** Having the authority and ability as an individual to make life choices based on one's own preferences and pursue one's own goals and means of survival, which is often based on the abilities of and opportunities presented to a person.

# AN EQUITY APPROACH TO COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY

A community is defined as people connected by geography and to each other. A foundation is a platform for growth. Philanthropy is the act of advancing the welfare of others. A community foundation is a platform for building community through philanthropy.

We recognize our work in and with the community will not be effective if we do not require a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion from ourselves as well as our community partners. Therefore, we continuously examine, challenge and evolve our organizational policies, practices and culture to reflect our values. We are committed to:

- Continuously increasing our awareness and understanding of privilege, inequity and how the entire community benefits from achieving equity for all;
- Devoting more time and resources to identifying and eliminating barriers to achieving equity;
- Engaging with our partners to share and learn about data, research and best practices to impact equity in our community; and

- Playing a leadership role in strengthening existing collaborations and creating new ones among nonprofit, public and private sectors.

More specifically, we apply an equity lens to our work related, but not limited, to:

- **Human Resources** How we recruit, hire and retain a diverse workforce;
- **Community Investments** How and where we grant our unrestricted resources;
- **Scholarships** How we support students as they pursue education beyond high school;
- **Endowment** How we create social impact through investments that grow our endowment;
- **Leadership** How we invest our time and influence in partnerships and collaborations;
- **Donor Relations** How we engage with donors to facilitate their personal philanthropy; and
- **Governance** How our board of trustees and committees set and oversee policy.

**Inclusive** organizations value and actively seek out and honor the full identities and perspectives of diverse individuals to advance organizational learning, understanding and decision-making for the benefit of our community

# OUR RESOURCES AND HOW WE USE THEM

As a community foundation, we have two kinds of resources available to address community needs: restricted and unrestricted.

## **RESTRICTED RESOURCES**

Our restricted resources, which represent the greatest portion of the Community Foundation's community investments, include **scholarships** to individuals for education beyond high school, **endowment funds** established by or in support of specific nonprofit organizations, and endowment funds created to support specific **fields of interest**. In addition, we hold more than 200 **donor-advised** funds, through which we help donors support their unique interests. Investments from our restricted resources represent the largest proportion of dollars distributed to the community. Sometimes these investments directly align with our community investment priorities of equity and education; most often they complement them and support broader community needs and opportunities. This is the role of a community foundation: to facilitate philanthropy across many issues, in many forms.

## **UNRESTRICTED RESOURCES**

Our unrestricted resources are used to address Kalamazoo County's most pressing needs, as informed by community conditions, feedback from community partners and supporting data. These investments are primarily managed through our responsive grantmaking process by our Community Investment team. We also make program related investments (low-interest loans) that strengthen the economic wellbeing of our community and have a social impact.

We are working to increase our unrestricted resources through a variety of donor relations efforts. However, our unrestricted resources are limited and we expect all our responsive grants to demonstrate potential for high impact as well as alignment with equity and education. Our highest investments will support work that is best able to address a demonstrated community need, work towards changing systems and change life trajectories for individuals.

# WHY EQUITY AND EDUCATION

Kalamazoo County has always been a diverse community and is becoming even more so. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, from 2000 to 2010, the population of people who live in Kalamazoo County and identify with more than one race grew by 61 percent, our Hispanic/Latino population grew by 58 percent, and people of color accounted for 22 percent of Kalamazoo County's population.

However, some of the systems designed to serve our community's residents were not designed to serve all residents equitably. This creates disparities — some people thriving and some people struggling even as they make every effort to thrive themselves. Disparities exist because within systems there are inequitable laws, policies and procedures that were created or unintentionally evolved to benefit some people and disadvantage others. There are members of our community who struggle to meet their basic needs because they are regularly affected by those laws, policies and procedures, creating cyclical and generational issues and disparities.

We focus on equity and education because community conditions and local data indicate that despite our community's collective best efforts, we haven't been able to break its cycles of poverty and low academic achievement or attainment for marginalized individuals. There are still too many people who don't have safe and affordable homes, healthy or enough food, or the skills or education they need to get and excel in a job that pays enough to provide for these basic needs.

When educational and career advancement for adults is supported and achieved, the effects of generational poverty are minimized, which helps neighborhoods and households become more stable. Stable neighborhoods and households improve educational outcomes for children. When children get the support they need to learn and perform at or above grade level, the academic playing field is leveled. We want our community to be one in which all children enter school ready to learn, are supported throughout their academic career and are prepared for life after high school.

**Disparities** The differences for demographic groups in community-level statistics and data generally used to measure quality of life such as, but not limited to, rates of educational attainment, income, employment status, health outcomes, incarceration, and life expectancy and infant mortality.

Likewise, we want our community to be one in which all adults are well-prepared to succeed in the types and highest levels of education they desire to ensure the greatest opportunity for self-determination.

### **EQUITY WITH AN EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION**

We have come to a fundamental understanding that unless we address the underlying issues of inequity, we will not be able to make life better for all people in our community or create the community we envision. Equity does not mean treating everyone the same. We must consider individual needs and customize efforts to address them. We must change the systems in which inequitable, discriminatory laws, policies and procedures exist. We must ensure marginalized people can live authentically, embracing and celebrating their identities and cultures. For the members of our community who have been marginalized, we must correct imbalances, expand opportunities and improve access to resources, which will make our systems work better for everyone.

We believe organizations from all sectors (e.g. individual and family support, economic and community development, education, youth development) can advance equity in our community. We also believe programs that advance equity as well as improve education-related outcomes will lead to sustained individual and community prosperity. Therefore, our highest investments will be in projects that impact education-related outcomes and use an equity lens.

### **Equity**

We will invest in work that:

- **Addresses current community needs**

Improves conditions and/or impacts life trajectories for people who have been marginalized by:

- o Providing basic services like health care, child care, food assistance and housing, and removing barriers and adapting strategies for those who are underserved;
- o Providing job training, leadership and life-skill development opportunities that improve self-sufficiency and self-determination of individuals and families;
- o Supporting grassroots efforts that address unmet community needs; and
- o Helping organizations be more culturally and inter-culturally competent, equitable and inclusive in policy, procedure/practice and program development.

- **Creates long-term solutions**

Focuses on systemic change and collaborative efforts to reduce disparities and improve community conditions by:

- o Improving effectiveness and coordination of service delivery within a sector;
- o Supporting organizations whose missions are to advance equity through leadership, cultural work and raising awareness of issues of inequity;
- o Supporting equity-related advocacy work at the local and state level, including citizen engagement; and
- o Supporting community-wide initiatives and coalition-based efforts that impact community-level outcomes and address root causes.

**Grassroots** Efforts and organizations created by and for the groups most impacted by the issues they wish to address. **Root Causes** The underlying factors that create community problems and make them likely to persist, even though efforts to address and eliminate them may exist.

## Education

We will invest in work that:

- **Addresses the community's current educational needs**

Improve educational outcomes for Kalamazoo County's most-marginalized learners by:

- o Reducing disparities in academic performance in reading, writing, math and other disciplines;
- o Increasing educational attainment, leading to increased high school graduation rates, college and career readiness and adult literacy;
- o Engaging parents and other caregivers as leaders and partners in education; and
- o Developing the social, emotional, developmental and life skills of school-age youth.

- **Creates long-term solutions**

Focus on systemic change and collaborative efforts to reduce disparities and improve community-level educational outcomes by:

- o Increasing access to high-quality pre-kindergarten education and programming that impacts kindergarten readiness;
- o Adapting and improving the education sector through innovative strategies and models;
- o Eliminating bias in disciplinary practices, curriculum and school culture;
- o Supporting education-related advocacy work at the local and state level; and
- o Supporting community-wide initiatives and coalition-based efforts.

# HOW WE ASSESS FUNDING REQUESTS

For responsive grants from unrestricted resources — those that are not donor-advised or reserved for scholarships, specific organizations or fields of interest — we use a comprehensive strategy.

These grants can provide project or program support, which enables the creation or continuation of a specific project; general operating support, which furthers the mission and work of an organization holistically rather than for a specific project or purpose; and capacity-building support, which can build the infrastructure of an organization, increase its understanding of diversity, inclusion and equity, and/or better position it for long-term success.

We prioritize efforts that:

- **Support and empower those who have been marginalized** because of ethnicity, race, age, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, national origin, economic background/circumstances, physical and/or mental abilities, veteran status, marital status,

resident legal status or philosophy/religion or other identity;

- **Remove barriers** to education, employment, basic needs and self-determination;
- **Reduce disparities;**
- **Improve academic performance**, educational attainment, career readiness or socio-emotional learning; and
- Demonstrate potential for **changing the life-trajectory** of individuals.

When we assess requests, we also consider if the organization:

- Has **effective leadership** to carry out the work as outlined;
- Demonstrates **cultural and intercultural competence** in its programs, policies and procedures, thereby ensuring access and quality service for the full diversity of the community;
- Uses **data and best practices** to guide strategies;
- Demonstrates an ability to **learn and adapt;**

**Cultural Competence** Understanding of and respect for differences in cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, behaviors and ways of knowing across ethnic or cultural groups. **Intercultural Competence** Shifting cultural perspectives and appropriately adapting behavior to cultural differences and commonalities.

- Leverages the strengths and resources of **partnerships** and works in **collaboration** towards shared outcomes;
- **Involves people it serves** in shaping programming or in formal leadership roles;
- Carries out **ongoing evaluation**;
- Has **measurable outcomes**;
- Has a **sustainable operational strategy**; and
- **Understands and seeks to improve the sector** they are in through technical support, collaboration or advocacy.

We also are committed to assist and support organizations that are still building their capacity in these areas.

### **Equity within our process**

Equity is one of our community investment priorities and also a strategy for accomplishing our work.

The first step in our process is the letter of inquiry, which was adopted as an online tool available to anyone to provide increased access to our funding. Throughout the process, from letter of inquiry to grant award, the Community Investment team works to provide assistance and support to organizations that are grassroots, new or

otherwise under resourced. We do this by helping them understand our process, giving guidance on their applications, and helping connect them to other resources within the Community Foundation and community.

Any organization that receives a grant from our unrestricted resources must affirm our Inclusion Statement, which states:

- No person is excluded from agency services;
- Wherever practical, all people will be considered in employment or volunteer participation regardless of ethnicity, race, age, gender, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, national origin, economic background/ circumstances, physical and/or mental abilities, veteran status, marital status, resident legal status, philosophy/religion or any other discriminatory reason; and
- The organization is continuing to intentionally increase inclusive practices.

In addition, our team approach to grantmaking helps us leverage the collective knowledge and experience of each team member and reduce bias in the decision-making process.

We cannot accomplish our mission and realize our vision working in isolation. We invite people and organizations from all sectors and walks of life to share their perspectives and expertise, and be our partners in this work.

## LOOKING AHEAD

There will always be a need for programs and services that help individuals meet their immediate basic needs and empower and enable them to live high-quality, self-determined lives. The Community Foundation will always support organizations that provide these opportunities. We believe the community investments we make in long-term efforts that reduce barriers and change systems will positively affect community conditions, reducing the necessity for immediate-needs services and programs. Therefore, over time — when community conditions indicate and data supports it's appropriate — we will direct even more of our community investments toward efforts that work to identify the roots of community challenges and create change at the system level. Creating change at the system level will make impact significant and sustainable. The systems that are already in place will be more equitable and effective, making immediate-needs services and programs the auxiliary approach rather than the norm.

This is a pivotal moment for our community. We believe if we do not engage in this work at this time, yet another generation will be caught in our community's cycles of marginalization and inequity. If we do not engage in this work now, our vision — a community where every person can reach full potential — will never be a reality. This is not an option. The only option is for this vision to someday be a reality. This vision will be a reality when every person who calls this place home has the skills and opportunities they need to live a high-quality, self-determined life. When this vision is a reality, this community — Kalamazoo County — will be one where we all love to live.