

W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation Grantee Convening 2018

Early Childhood, Youth Development and K-12 Grantees

The W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation values equity across its portfolios. In September 2018, the Foundation hosted a convening of grantees from its early childhood, education, and youth development portfolios to discuss equity, reduce silos, and create a learning community.

The convening was focused on deconstructing the process of specific practices, tools, and strategies that advance equity in grantee work and identifying opportunities for application of these to the work of grantees.

Authentic engagement is critical to achieve equity, and it was at the core of the practices, tools, and strategies presented and explored during the convening.

What do we mean by equity?

For the purposes of this convening, **equity** is the state that would be achieved if how one fares in society was no longer predictable by race, gender, class, language or any other social/cultural factor. This is not true right now. We have not achieved equity.

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Why is authentic engagement essential to advancing equity?

Grantee Respondent:



LaShawn Routé Chatmon
Executive Director

With an understanding that systems and policies are only as good as those who implement them, National Equity Project works to shift the culture within educational systems by working with individuals and their understandings of equitable practices and how they can be achieved. National Equity Project is committed to achieving equity in education and engages in authentic and supportive partnerships to do so.

We are all individuals with individual stories that have been developed by circumstances and experiences that are beyond our control. While our stories are personal and individual, they have been shaped by systems that were not designed to produce equitable outcomes. These inequities are reinforced through the practices, beliefs, and policies that contribute to our individual stories. So, to better understand the inequities of a system, one must first begin with the individual stories of those impacted by a system.

Learning and understanding these individual stories is a process of authentic engagement. It requires co-creating solutions to inequities in partnership with people who have experienced the problems that exist. Through authentic engagement, the value of individual stories and the insights of those most impacted by an inequitable system are valued in developing solutions.

Advancing equity requires work at the intersection of authentic engagement and actions that lead to racial equity.

How do we operationalize “authentic engagement” to advance racial equity?

Grantee Respondent



**Teresa Ramos,
Director of Community
Engagement**

The Issue:

The regressive education funding system used by Illinois results in 78 cents being spent on a low-income student for every dollar spent on a non-low-income student, making it one of the most inequitable education funding systems in the country.

Tactic/Strategy:

In coalition with other key stakeholders, Advance worked with communities across the state that have historically viewed their interests as competing with one another. Advance performed analysis of and outreach to these communities to help them better understand the impacts of inequitable funding. Through outreach, social media, and a continuous feedback loop, Advance was able to coalesce these communities under a shared, mutually beneficial, policy solution designed to fix the funding formula.

Result:

After nearly five years, the concentrated and collective effort resulted in the adoption of a new formula that drives dollars to the neediest school districts, those that have the fewest local resources, and are the least well-funded.

Lessons Learned:

Systems are sets of relationships. Deep engagement is critical to change these systems.

Policymakers are not good at having community voices at the policy table and few focus on organizing the community.

How do we operationalize “authentic engagement” to advance racial equity?

Grantee Respondent



Sylvia Puente
Executive Director

Based in Chicago, Latino Policy Forum builds the power, influence and leadership of the Latino community through collective action to transform local, state, and federal public policies that ensure the well-being of community and society as a whole.

To achieve authentic engagement, there must be intentionality in nurturing relationships and intention in making space at the table so people feel empowered to speak about their experiences. Creating access can feel so simple. However, it is often overlooked. It is important to meet people where they are when building relationships.

Things to remember:

- Social media is a tool for people to express themselves.
- It's difficult to have authentic conversations when you don't have staff that speaks the language of beneficiaries.

Authentic Engagement is Inclusive

“Helping” vs “Including” and “Engaging”

Equity can be achieved when it is **inclusive** of the population of people the system is intended to benefit. There is often the assumption that people don't know what's best for them. This assumption can be even more prevalent when decisionmakers and stakeholders see it as their job to “help” disadvantaged and marginalized communities. Working under this assumption often neither values the community nor the solutions that exist within the community. Because of this, it is vital that engagement is inclusive of community and a variety of voices. To do this, we must engage in community work vs. asking the community to engage in our work. Engagement should respect and make room for differences. “The work is not static. It requires a constant checking in with those intended to benefit.”

I listen deeply, intently to how others answer. I ask them “what inhibits you from living your best life?”

-Convening Participant
Gillian McNamee, Erikson Institute

Nothing about us without us

Authentic Engagement has a shared agenda and mutual benefit

5 questions to ask in getting to a shared agenda with mutual benefit:

1. Whose solution are we trying to create?
2. Who's at the table?
3. Whose resources are being used?
4. What resources will be needed to sustain?
5. Whose values are guiding the work?

Authentic engagement is a process that takes time and involves relationships. It is about mutual respect, a two way conversation and exchange.

Successful engagement leads to a shared agenda that is **mutually beneficial**.

Solutions are co-created with common and shared goals that reflect the values of everyone being served. This requires an understanding of who is in the room and a space where all belong.

Continuing questions:

How do we create communities of belonging?

Authentic engagement rethinks power

The people closest to the pain should be closest to the power.

-U.S. Representative

Ayanna Presley

Power dynamics, in some form, exist in all relationships. To get to authentic engagement, it is important to understand where "power and privilege" lie. Individuals must be aware of their privilege and understand the ways that privilege is experienced and taken for granted day-to-day. Then comes the question: "who is the expert in the room?" Is it the policymaker or is it the people who are most impacted by the work or the policies? Authentic engagement may require organizations ceding some power to achieve co-ownership.

In our work, power dynamics are often the result of access; access to resources, access to key stakeholders, access to data and research, etc. Unevenness in access can create an unjust hierarchy in whose voices and opinions matter most. If unchecked, power dynamics can lead to an unbalanced relationship, with power being concentrated with those who have access. While access is important, it does not necessarily translate to expertise. To shift the dynamics, those with access must first be aware of the dynamic and then share access.

How do we engage beneficiaries and multiple voices? What is needed to sustain engagement and feedback loops?

Grantee Respondents



**Josh Kaufmann,
Senior Executive Director, Illinois**

Teach Plus brings the voice and expertise of effective teachers to bear on critical education policy issues at the state and local levels to create an education system driven by equity, access, and excellence for all students.



**Rapheal Randall,
Executive Director**

Youth United for Change is a democratic organization primarily made up of working-class youth of color, which builds the “people” and political power to hold school officials and government accountable to guarantee the educational rights of Philadelphia public school students.



**Amy O’Leary,
Campaign Director**

Strategies for Children works to ensure that Massachusetts invests the resources needed for all children, from birth to age five, to access high-quality early education programs. It does this through policy development and monitoring, and building constituency and partnerships within communities to lift up the voices of parents and early childhood educators.

Engaging beneficiaries and multiple voices

Stories are critical to engagement. Through stories, the voices of the most impacted can be heard and their experiences become relatable. However, sharing stories can be complicated. People don't always feel empowered to tell their story and storytelling often requires vulnerability. The storyteller has to trust that their story will be honored and recognized--not exploited. However, stories are only impactful if there is an audience to hear them.

Building an audience involves building relationships. Amy O'Leary said "communications and engagement are linked" and continued that the misconception is that a single organization has to be responsible for everything. **Leverage existing relationships** with different parties/organizations to build allies within the ecosystem of your work. Come together to ensure that there's agreement on what the problem is and a common understanding of what a "win" looks like. Document this and return to it as a "North Star" to keep the effort(s) aligned and progressing.

Then **follow-up** is essential to maintaining engagement. It is key to reflect on and document all types of engagement so that follow up is responsive and relevant to individual concerns. If you listen and are not responsive, you lose trust. Feedback loops are necessary components of authentic engagement. It is an ongoing process that may require the development of new strategies or tools designed to support the ongoing conversations. Conflict can arise when there is a gap in the community's point of view and the "expert's" point of view. It is important to be able to have difficult conversations on these differences, rather than listening for affirmations of one's own work or strategies.

*It's important to get away
from using youth for their
tales of woe and instead
see their stories as moving
history forward.*

-Raphael Randall

Final thoughts and Commitments

Attendees Respond:

Challenges to this work.

How do we navigate the tension between the importance of doing authentic engagement (takes time), the need to be nimble and responsive to the political moment (requires speed), and the desires of funders to have neat and conclusive outcomes (can be disconnected from material conditions).

Funders want to see wins. But what they consider a win often differs from what organizations see as the win or the end, including on-going engagement with the beneficiaries.

Moving Forward it is important to...

- Understand the environment in which the work takes place. It is constantly shifting and grantees need to be prepared to take advantage of shifts and changes.
- Create new ways to support beneficiaries, to partner and create coalitions to make a difference.
- Raise institutional standards to include engagement, and the necessary capacity and staffing to carry out engagement in funding requests.
Normalize authentic engagement as a way of doing business

Make a commitment to...

- Articulate, engage and facilitate racial equity conversations.
- Provide professional development on unconscious biases.
- Sustain the capacity to merge policy, research, analysis and evidence with multiple stakeholders, with organizing to make sense together in creating a new system.

For More Information:

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