

MORE THAN DATA: DATA FOR EQUITY INITIATIVE

SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared by Design Impact | April 2024

A Message From the Data For Equity Funding Collaborative

As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted our world and the nonprofit ecosystem responded to urgent community needs, three funders — bi3, HealthPath Foundation of Ohio, and Interact for Health — observed grantee partners' needs for organizational capacity evolve.

Instead of assuming what capacity needs were most important to nonprofits or how they wanted those needs met, we surveyed our grantees. Organizations prioritized several areas: data/evaluation and equity through grant funding, training / technical assistance, and a learning cohort. We responded directly to that request by creating the Data for Equity Funding Collaborative.

Data for Equity is a multi-year initiative that includes \$25,000 in flexible funding for each grantee, tailored training and technical assistance, and a learning cohort designed to strengthen organizational capacity for equitable data and evaluation practice. The initiative was also designed to align with trust-based voices in design and implementation.

This executive summary offers an overview of the learnings, impact, and recommendations from Design Impact's evaluation of the Year 1 cohort.

This evaluation explored:

- Which components of Data For Equity — flexible funding, technical assistance and training, and the learning cohort model—were most and least valuable to grantees?
- Which components most and least effectively changed grantees' mindsets and practices?
- How might the funding collaborative improve the grant program's co-creation process with grantees?

WHAT WE LEARNED: EVALUATION FINDINGS

What's working? What could be improved?

Grantees in the inaugural Data for Equity cohort found the grant program to be a transformative space to challenge and expand their data literacy. The discussions and trainings helped grantees recognize the harmful impacts of data collection, and grantees valued Data For Equity as a place for unlearning and reimagining data practices with their staff and the communities they serve.

The program's first-year success stemmed from its focus on equity, trust, community, and capacity building. Grantees appreciated their partnership with funders, built strong relationships within the cohort, and gained practical skills to make their data practices more inclusive and action-oriented.

1

MINDSET & ACTION SHIFTS

How did Data For Equity shift grantees' mindsets and actions?

- Data For Equity helped grantees see the potential harm of data collection practices while offering the support and confidence to change how they collected data.
- Grantees across the cohort changed their data practices, including inviting the communities they supported as active participants in the research process and reexamining the intentions behind the questions asked when gathering data.
- Data For Equity broadened grantees' definitions of data to include stories and other forms of qualitative data.
- Grantees were able to shift their mindsets and actions because the offerings from Data for Equity gave grantees the space and permission to change how they work, think differently about social impact work, and refocus on their missions over their typical approaches to the work, which centered on sometimes arbitrary data collecting.

"Data For Equity gives you permission to say 'it's okay to reconsider a lot of your practices.' It helps to have a group of people alongside us saying we are all changing our strategies."

— Data For Equity 2023 Grantee

2

GRANT COMPONENTS

How did Data for Equity's different components support or hinder grantees' goals?

- Grantees said they are frequently strapped for time and resources, so they seldom get to invest in training to help them fulfill their mission. Data For Equity's offerings allowed organizations to build their staff's capacity beyond equitable data practices.
- Grantees have limited time and staff to accomplish their daily work. To make the most of the Data For Equity experience, grantees want more guidance from the funding collaborative on what to expect during the program and recommendations on how to maximize the opportunity with limited time and resources.
- Data For Equity's cohort came together to focus on health equity, but the cohort makeup varied by size, focus, geographic service area, and racial diversity. Grantees said this strategic mix of different types of organizations encouraged grantees to build new partnerships across their cohort and think differently about equity-related issues.

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TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY

What makes trust-based philanthropy an effective approach to grantmaking?

- Data for Equity emphasized flexibility and ease throughout the program, including within the initial grant application, in how grantees could use funds and design their projects, to the emphasis on oral reporting for the final grant reports
- Grantees welcomed this different way of working with funders where they could define success together but also grappled with the discomfort of this more emergent, responsive approach to grantmaking.
- Grantees were excited about equitable evaluation and data collection and saw opportunities to extend this education to their boards and the broader philanthropy sector. However, many questions lingered about how grantees and funders extend this culture beyond this grant.

“All funders should operate this way. The funder should be open to knowing that things didn’t go as planned. The people they are funding have the best pulse of the work.”

— Data For Equity 2023 Grantee

LOOKING FORWARD: OPPORTUNITIES

What possibilities might the funder collaborative and other funders pursue now or in the future?

1

MINDSET & ACTION SHIFTS

To continue to facilitate mindset & action shifts with grantees, consider:

HOW MIGHT WE..

...invite the communities we serve to learn about equitable data alongside us?

...support and sustain grantee organizations’ ongoing journeys toward equitable data practices?

...support a holistic approach to equitable data approaches where qualitative data is not at odds with quantitative data?

DESIGN IMPACT’S RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Keep building community.** Data For Equity’s strength is in its community of practice; don’t deviate from offering opportunities to discuss and reflect. Find ways to maintain the cohort connections post-grant.
- **Invite grantees’ communities.** Include the communities that grantees serve in capacity-building opportunities. Explore how data collection can be mutually beneficial to communities. And discuss what service providers ACTUALLY need to know to act.
- **Get technical.** Find opportunities for people to get into the weeds of data collection tools, technologies, and methodologies.

2

GRANT COMPONENTS

To refine the grant components, consider:

HOW MIGHT WE..

...better match grantees' needs with their capacities so that they can take full advantage of the opportunities available through Data For Equity?

...demonstrate the intention behind, and value of, a diverse cohort model and sustained and intensive engagement approach to grantees?

DESIGN IMPACT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Manage expectations.** Tell grantees up front, even session-by-session: Who is this most valuable to? What will I get out of this? Why should I prioritize this engagement?
- **Collaboration is transformative.** Grantees deeply appreciated the cohort experiences. Consider more ways to encourage cross-collaborative work and future partnerships amongst grantees.
- **Embrace diversity.** Keep the composition of the grantees receiving the grant diverse in size, focus, and leadership. However, more ways should be found to emphasize the value of this type of grouping. And, find opportunities to respond to more specific requests within existing session offerings (e.g. breakout discussions by sector).

3

TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY

To expand and deepen trust-based philanthropy, consider...

HOW MIGHT WE..

...as funders illuminate the value of relationship building to philanthropic institutions and their processes?

...as funders shift the philanthropic landscape toward trust-based philanthropy?

...as funders communicate expectations while maintaining our commitment to collaborative and flexible grant engagements?

...as funders help grantees maintain equitable data practices within the realities of conventional grantmaking?

DESIGN IMPACT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Use your voice.** Advocate for changes in the philanthropic field amongst your peers.
- **Offer assurance.** There is no report card. Assure grantees of the reporting process throughout the grant cycle — not just at the beginning or the end, to alleviate remaining uncertainties.
- **We're all on the same journey.** Remind grantees that funders are also figuring out equitable data practices while trying to model the same equitable data practices that grantees are learning and applying.
- **Continue to operate at the speed of trust.** Stay flexible and respond to grantees' needs while communicating expectations and expected outcomes.



The full report provides additional details about the findings and recommendations.