



GIVING FORUM



Making Our Dreams Become Reality Requires Intentionality, Inclusion

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Do you have the powers to make my dreams come true? What about your own? If you did, what kinds of dreams would you convert into reality?

We have so many to choose from ... dreams for homeless children, dreams for impoverished communities, dreams for depleted neighborhoods. We imagine eliminating racism, teen pregnancy and violence. And what about our visions of increasing social enterprise and financial self-sufficiency? Or our ultimate dreams for collaboration among grantees and community-based organizations, models that really work, and grants that exceed expectations?



Tawanna Black

Minnesota grantmakers, individual philanthropists and nonprofits are dreamers of all sorts. The question is what do we add to ensure our dreams become reality?

Disparities Abound

In the last few months, Minnesota grantmakers and nonprofits have released new research reports about racial and gender disparities in health, education, income, wealth, homelessness and more. These disparities lie in stark contrast to the visions we strive to fulfill through grant-making and programming.

These reports and statistics about glaring inequities may shock individuals who don't experience them every day. For people whose lives reflect the disparities, the reports confirm that someone is listening, watching and knows what's happening. And maybe, just maybe,

Dream Deferred
By Langston Hughes
What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore -
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over -
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?

someone cares and knows enough to make a difference and put dreams into action.

Working with Intentionality

It would be easy to say that good intentions will get us there. We'll close the gaps, empower the people, and solve all of society's ills. But how? Good intentions can be misdirected. We are fully committed to talking about disparities and gaps, hosting forums and community dialogues. We're committed to funding research to measure change, even when we have no physical evidence to make us believe that it has.

But, to actually commit to addressing a disparity for as long as it takes to create systemic

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The Minnesota Council on Foundations (MCF), a regional association of grantmakers, works actively to strengthen and expand philanthropy. MCF members represent three-quarters of all grantmaking in the state, awarding more than \$900 million to nonprofits annually. Members include family and private independent foundations, community and other public foundations, and corporate foundations and giving programs.



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change and to sustain improved outcomes, too often we hesitate ... *even when those outcomes are the very dreams that fuel the missions of our organizations.* This lack of clear intentionality becomes a dream deferred.

Inclusion Means Adjusting the Golden Rule

For years we've been taught to treat others the way we want to be treated. I've never really thought that concept worked. Sure, if I want you to smile at me, I smile at you, or if I don't want you to keep walking when I'm struggling to open a door, I should take time to help you with a door.

But when we get beyond the basics of kindness and apply the rule to human services and community building, it's a bit flawed. For instance, a development approach that works in one neighborhood may not work in another that has different experiences and challenges. But, how will we know that?

We will know and understand by including in our work those we seek to serve and by creating a "platinum rule": *Treat others the way they want to be treated.*

Disparities as significant and sustained as those facing Minnesotans cannot be addressed in isolation. An inclusive model not only engages those we seek to serve, but it ensures that their perspectives, resources and talents are utilized in meaningful ways from beginning to end. This model has also been proven critical to sustaining change by creating a sense of collective ownership and progress.

LISC Models Inclusion in Local Policymaking

One local example of intentionality and inclusion is Twin Cities LISC's policy work. In 2005 it launched a community engagement pilot program with five Community Development Corporations. The lessons learned in The Building Sustainable Communities program are words of wisdom for foundations and nonprofits seeking to increase constituent engagement in policymaking:

- *Community engagement requires a sustained, long-term commitment to thinking strategically and imaginatively with the community.*

This demands a high level of intention and accountability, because the process can be slow, cumbersome, sometimes tense, and can seem to undermine other goals and timelines. Progress can be difficult to discern.

- *Community engagement is resource- and time-intensive.* It takes effort at all levels of an organization to build lasting, authentic relationships of trust among community partners. It requires greater resources from public and philanthropic partners to achieve deep, equitable civic participation.
- *No one size fits all.* What works for one organization may not apply to others. What is effective in one situation may not be easily replicated in another. Community engagement reinforces community voice, not programs or strategies, as the driver of process.

Using these and other lessons learned, we must keep dreaming. Dreams are the foundation of generations of change and progress in our organizations and communities. And, just as important, are intention and inclusion. **GF**