

# From Implicit to Explicit

Lessons for supporting funders in  
advancing racial equity in philanthropy



 See What I Mean



## Dear Philanthropy Colleagues:

Looking back on the last five years, the work we have done to advance racial equity in philanthropy in Iowa was all about timing. We listened, we learned, we committed, and we led at the critical moments to support our network. We listened to our members as they shared about needs in their communities and the growing disparities communities of color were facing in Iowa. We learned from experts about the importance of using race-explicit language in building strategies to address the needs of people of color. We committed to supporting this work by adopting a strategy to advance racial equity in philanthropy in Iowa. And, after all of that deeply intentional work, it was time to lead by inviting our members to walk with us on a racial equity journey – one we learned would be a life's journey.

Our members responded to the invitation by engaging in a year-long Racial Equity Cohort. In fact, nearly 40% of our member organizations chose to strengthen their commitment to race equity with us. It's not often that we begin something at the Iowa Council of Foundations (ICoF) without a clear end in mind, but when it came to designing this cohort experience, we knew our model needed to evolve.

Instead of a prescriptive peer-learning experience, this cohort was emergent. Instead of leading ourselves, we relied on experts in the field, trusted facilitators and leaders within our network. Instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, this cohort allowed participants to navigate their own learning agendas. Because of these important shifts, we found a formula that led our members to positive growth and change within themselves and within their organizations and communities.

We hope this report about advancing racial equity in philanthropy and moving networks toward adoption can serve as a guide for the field. As was expressed over and over again in our Cohort, this is life's work. There is always more to do. We look forward to continued learning from and with other PSOs and funders. We invite you to consider your current peer-learning and cohort models and how these lessons may inform your strategies to support broader network adoption to advance racial equity in philanthropy.

In partnership,

*Kari M. Boutell*

Kari McCann Boutell  
President



## Who Participated in the Cohort?

54 participants from 27 ICoF member organizations representing 38% of our network



### Member Type:

- Corporate Foundations
- Private Foundations (including QSOs)
- Community Foundations
- Re-granting Organizations

### Asset Range:

\$10M – \$600M

### Staff Size:

1–26

### Race:

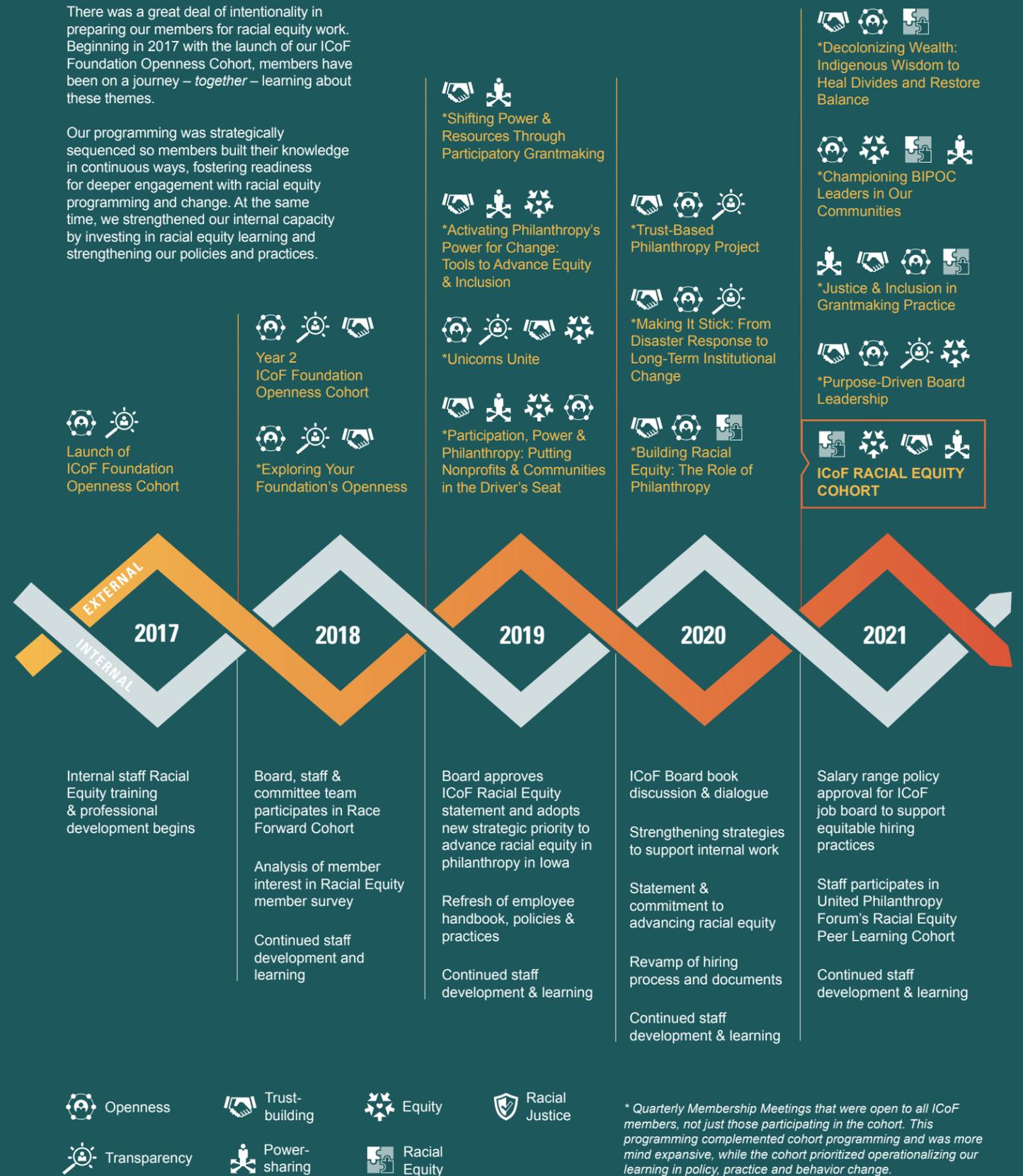
9% – Non-White

91% – White

## 5-Year Strategy

There was a great deal of intentionality in preparing our members for racial equity work. Beginning in 2017 with the launch of our ICoF Foundation Openness Cohort, members have been on a journey – *together* – learning about these themes.

Our programming was strategically sequenced so members built their knowledge in continuous ways, fostering readiness for deeper engagement with racial equity programming and change. At the same time, we strengthened our internal capacity by investing in racial equity learning and strengthening our policies and practices.



\* Quarterly Membership Meetings that were open to all ICoF members, not just those participating in the cohort. This programming complemented cohort programming and was more mind expansive, while the cohort prioritized operationalizing our learning in policy, practice and behavior change.

# Motivations for Participation

Here's what participants said in their applications...



## LEARNING & PERSONAL CHANGE

"I want to further my understanding of racial equity and develop skills and knowledge I can share with all the individuals in my corporate and personal relationships."

"I want to break down unconscious biases that exist in my mind and to expand my network to include more BIPOC individuals."



## ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

"To identify and implement changes that make our organization more equitable and inclusive in our staffing and operations, funding practices, resources we provide, and training we provide in volunteer engagement."

"As a Mexican-American, I am aware of the inequities people like me face everyday. Although there are efforts and programs in my community, there is still a lot of work to be done to move towards a welcoming community where we can all thrive."



## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE IN PHILANTHROPY

"I am very interested in working with my peers in the grantmaking world on the topic of racial equity because I would like to dig further into this issue than a lot of one-off trainings provide. I've been participating in a lot of recent trainings on equity but they often don't focus on the role of funders or they don't offer follow-up regarding implementation of best practices."

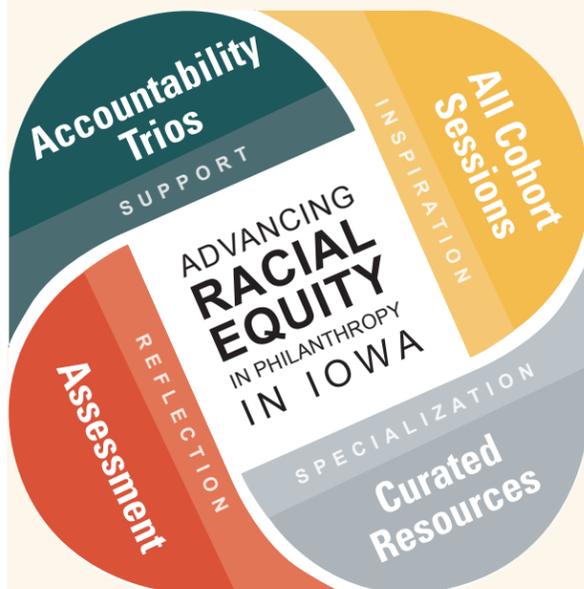
"I believe in racial equity, but do not know how to move our organization and community forward in the work in tangible ways."



## SUPPORT

"Increase my confidence in advocating for change within my organization."

"I know this is a journey which will continue throughout my life, but being intentional in learning and practicing how to create equitable systems, policies, and processes is an important next step, and having the opportunity to do that together with my peers across Iowa makes it all the more important to me."



## THE COHORT EXPERIENCE

Our cohort centered on advancing racial equity in philanthropy in Iowa. While ICoF hosted the cohort, it was the responsibility of members to change themselves and their organizations. We described what would be required of members in the application:

*"This cohort is intended to give participants not only the tools to make changes within themselves, but also to be advocates for change in their organization. Not everyone is in a decision making position, however, we recognize we each have power to make choices and engage in intentional conversations to influence change. If you ARE able and willing to commit to being an advocate for change in your organization/company/community, please type your initials in this box."*

On the next page, we have detailed the four components of the cohort experience. These opportunities provided members with the elements this work requires: support, inspiration, specialization and reflection.



## ACCOUNTABILITY TRIOS

1-hour self-organized check-in, 6 sessions.

**Purpose:** Members met in trios outside the large-group sessions. These self-organizing groups provided positive pressure for action and accountability. It was also a source of support to help each member develop the courage and confidence that change-making requires.

### TACTICS & DISCOVERIES

**Design:** When applying, members were asked about their accountability partner preferences. Final curation included consideration of geography, funder type, role, and people's experience in learning about and practicing racial equity.

**Emergence:** We considered using caucusing to divide the groups, but BIPOC participants did not indicate this was a priority in their applications. However, in our second session, a need for this emerged. We were able to connect BIPOC members of ICoF to a BIPOC Mentor Circle that was being facilitated by an ICoF member, Volunteer Iowa.

**Lessons:**

- Peer-coaching was instrumental in helping members with experimentation and change.

• Accountability trios were described by participants with the following words:

- Connection
- Genuine
- Support
- Trust
- Honesty
- Grace
- Solidarity

## ASSESSMENT

82 items in 13 capacities | Completed at the beginning and end of the cohort.

**Purpose:** To provide an opportunity for funders to reflect on where racial equity could be applied, internally and externally.

### TACTICS & DISCOVERIES

**Design:**

- All organizations completed the pre-assessment. Only two did not complete the full post-assessment. This demonstrates impressive commitment from members.

- We pulled in wisdom from the field and included ideas from authors and articles including attribution of the source. We then added items that were relevant to our members in Iowa.

- The assessment used a scale of "Not yet" to "Sustaining." We also asked members to include "action metrics" that were quantifiable. Action metrics helped organizations measure changes that were nascent and to acknowledge that adaptive shifts often come from many small changes. For example, we asked: *In the last year, how many times was racial equity brought up during a board meeting when it wasn't related to training or initiated by a staff member? One funder shared:*

– Beginning of the cohort: "A few times a Director would ask questions about DEI in relation to our strategic plan and leadership within the community, but more regularly brought up by staff." End of cohort: "Every Board meeting included discussion about DEI."

**Lessons:**

- We helped participants from the same organization compare their perceptions of racial equity practices.

- Some organizations still struggled to find "things to do." If we were to repeat the cohort, we would reframe the assessment as a planning tool.

## ALL-COHORT MEMBER SESSIONS

2 hours every other month, 6 sessions, virtual.

**Purpose:** A platform for the facilitators to share resources and for the network to inspire one another by sharing their efforts; not just a workshop from ICoF to members.

### TACTICS & DISCOVERIES

**Facilitation:** In a large cohort, we needed a variety of facilitative methods for different moments and members; from storytelling to workshoping. ICoF staff spent time following up with and listening to members after large group sessions to understand where we needed to go for the next session. The structure of the sessions was emergent.

**Lesson:** Our members place a very high value on examples from within Iowa. While many great resources exist in the philanthropic sector, the desire for homegrown examples motivated multiple peer-led breakout sessions.

**Learning:** Within serious work there is room for creativity and love too. We sent a gift box full of fun prompts – colored pencils, notebooks and clings sourced from BIPOC- and women-owned businesses and businesses supporting racial equity. We also repeated a video from the King Center called "Be Love" each session to ground us in our beloved community.

Cohort facilitator Sharina Sallis talked about how we wanted to place the cohort in a place of love for our beloved community.

## CURATED RESOURCES

[59 resources curated, cataloged and shared.](#)

**Purpose:** To make the large number of REDI philanthropy resources more accessible and usable by our members, especially tools that could provide more specialized information.

### TACTICS & DISCOVERIES

**Design:**

- Curated racial equity in philanthropy resources and new tools to apply your learning to your work. Included live links, length, summary and categorization to make sorting easier.

- Out of the many helpful articles about racial equity in philanthropy, we anchored our cohort around one in particular: *Operationalizing Racial Justice in Non-Profit Organizations* by Maggie Potapchuk with MP Associates. We used it to categorize breakouts, discuss definitions, develop group expectations, and, for interested members, to dive deeply into the nuance of the ideas.

**PSO Role:** Between meetings ICoF was active in sharing additional resources and hosting complementary ICoF programming that provided additional opportunities for learning. Offering these as opportunities, rather than "homework," allowed people to opt in to the offerings that matched their needs.

*We grounded our cohort in beloved community. Our facilitator, Sharina Sallis, sees this as a way to invite everyone to the work. She shared, "I try to center love because we naturally think of love and so then the work doesn't feel like work. This work is really all about shared humanity – a love for your people, for your community."*

# What Did Change Look Like for Members?

This cohort focused on institutional changes in 13 capacities that can advance racial equity in philanthropy, not just fund racial equity through grantmaking. We took a comprehensive approach to help members consider all of the domains in which they had the opportunity to remove barriers to racial equity both internally and externally.



Sharina Sallis  
Co-facilitator

## Facilitation Matters

When thinking about who might be the best facilitator for your work, it's important to consider how participants are coming into the learning experience and how they may need to be supported. We knew our members needed the expertise and lived experience of a BIPOC leader. We knew our members place a high value in local, Iowa-grown models and stories. We knew our members would benefit from working with a trusted partner.



Stacy Van Gorp  
Co-facilitator

What we found is that co-facilitation was the answer for this cohort; allowing the facilitators to play for each other's strengths and points of view. Sharina Sallis brought all of those requirements to the table and so much more including her experience as a corporate funder, community organizer and DEI expert. Sharina had also been engaged with several ICoF members and the ICoF itself. Stacy Van Gorp was a trusted colleague, having been a former member of the ICoF, a private foundation leader, and having consulted with many members.

# MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS



DIGGING INTO DATA

## QUAD CITIES COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

After engaging in learning about diversity, equity and inclusion, foundation leaders put the learning to work by collecting and using data to understand patterns and make changes. Areas of data collection include board demographics of grant applicants, and demographic identity of scholarship recipients, youth philanthropists, volunteer committee members, and the Board. This led to several changes to grant programs, outreach strategies, and volunteer recruitment approaches.



LISTENING & COMMUNICATING

## COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF NORTHEAST IOWA

A strategic planning reset focused on integrating racial equity approaches in each of the foundation's strategies. To identify tactics, the foundation listened to BIPOC leaders through a survey. The feedback encouraged the foundation to implement new approaches that center equity and create a more inclusive environment. As a result, the new plan prioritized communicating more directly about racial equity. For example, a recent Annual Impact report shared nonprofit, donor and fund spotlights focused on racial equity. The plan also calls for finding new ways to communicate with BIPOC audiences, amplify Black voices, and increase inclusion through collaboration.



IDENTITY

## GREATER CEDAR RAPIDS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

The Community Foundation updated its vision, mission and values to reflect their commitment to racial equity. The process included an internal DEI committee, a racial equity steering committee, and feedback from the board. In addition, a public data report and community learning event was held about advancing racial equity in their county. Foundation leaders reflected and shared in their assessment: "This update of our identity and commitment to racial equity ensures this will remain part of our work for many years to come."



OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPLICITNESS

## OTTO SCHOITZ FOUNDATION

This quasi-healthcare conversion foundation found opportunities to be more explicit about racial equity in their day-to-day work. For example, adding racial equity metrics to the organization's internal dashboard, and adding questions about racial equity strategy to the annual board assessment. This year's assessment led to an endorsement of moving ahead ambitiously. Grant press releases also presented an opportunity for explicitness. The Foundation always shared its commitment to serving people who are "vulnerable." When appropriate, press releases are now explicit about race, ethnicity and equity in funding decisions.



CATALYZING ENGAGEMENT

## COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF GREATER MUSCATINE

Establishing a Racial Justice Fund and convening a community Advisory Committee of BIPOC leaders provided an avenue for engagement in this diverse rural county. Board members played a key role in the work by giving to the fund, promoting the fund, co-sponsoring community events and participating on the grant review team. The organization encouraged donations and urgency with a matching gift incentive. "The Racial Justice Fund will serve as a catalyst by deepening conversations, engaging bold ideas in eliminating racial disparities, and expanding learning platforms to collectively build proximity and center the voices of those often overlooked." - Charla Schafer, Executive Director



STRATEGY INTEGRATION

## IOWA CREDIT UNION FOUNDATION

This foundation undertook strategic planning while participating in the cohort. The timing allowed them to integrate racial equity strategies throughout their plan to support equity in both their internal and external policies and processes. Their next phase of work will utilize a dashboard to support accountability to the plan.

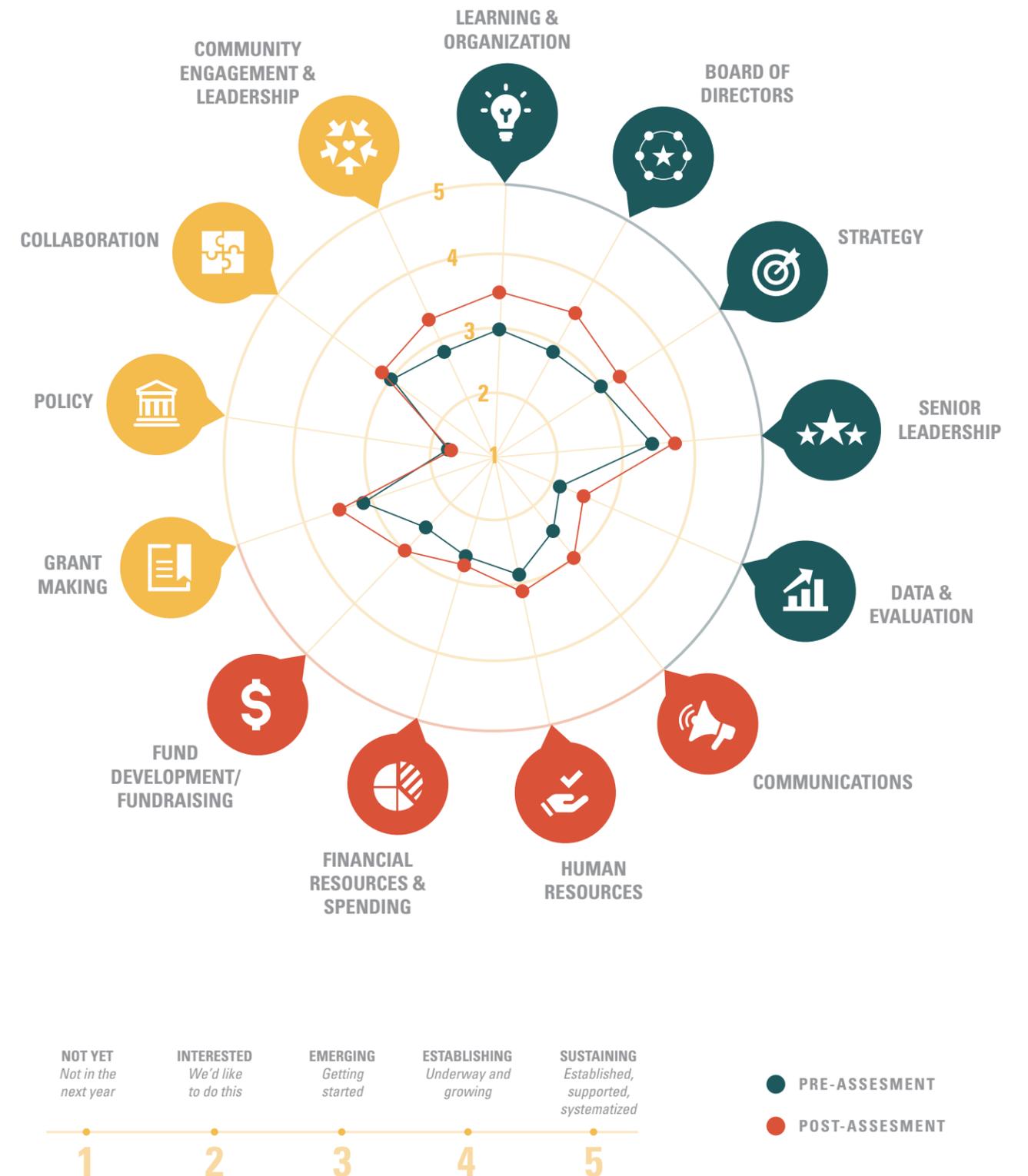
# What Patterns Did We See?

## From Beginning to End of the Cohort

- 1 There was positive movement in every capacity with one exception – **policy**.
- 2 Changes in the **Board** capacity saw the biggest gains from the beginning to end of the cohort.  
*For example*, “Board policy established regarding the organization taking a position on racial equity issues” and “Board’s awareness and understanding about racial equity” were among the top movers among the pre- and post- assessments. Engaging board members was a frequent topic of conversation during and prior to the cohort and it appears many members leaned in with their boards.
- 3 **Grantmaking** practices that were “down payments” on equitable practices (like providing general operating support and permitting fiscal agents) rose to the top at the beginning of the cohort and stayed near the top at the end. These items were well adopted and a credit to the ICoF’s work in openness and trust-based philanthropy. However, these top items were part of a small proportion of assessment items that were not explicit about race or advancing equity.
- 4 The greatest progress from pre- to post- assessment results was making racial equity more explicit in the way the organization operates and communicates.  
*For example*, the Board’s commitment to advance racial equity, developing shared language, amplifying BIPOC leaders, sharing demographic data, and discussing racial equity with donors. Building confidence in discussing racial equity internally and externally was an explicit goal of the cohort and was achieved by many members.
- 5 Using **policy** to advance racial equity remained the least adopted strategy at the beginning and at the end of the cohort. The pre- to post- assessment showed slightly negative progress.

*“Despite all of the work we felt we’ve done in the past, it has not been strategic or concentrated. [The assessment] made it clear we have our own internal work to focus on.”*

# Pre-Assessment / Post-Assessment Data



# Shifting Approaches

## for Philanthropy-Serving Organizations

Reckoning with racial equity has resulted in many Philanthropy-Serving Organizations (PSOs) considering new ways of working. The Iowa Council of Foundations leaned into two approaches:

- 1 Guiding More Strategically: Our Network's Adoption of Change
- 2 Using Our Influence to Support Funder Change

*"It was useful to hear from peers and colleagues across the state that they are grappling with similar issues regarding race and equity in philanthropy."*

## Guiding More Strategically Our Network's Adoption of Change

Offerings — *workshops, communities of practice, webinars, toolkits, research briefs* — is the heart of a PSO's role. In fact, this report is likely to be useful to PSOs because it describes how we offered a Racial Equity Cohort.

This section moves away from discussing a single offering to highlighting the strategic approach of delivering interwoven offerings in order to generate momentum for network adoption of racial equity policies and practices. Guiding network adoption requires a strategic approach to timing. WHEN an offering is launched, especially in relationship to other offerings and member readiness, impacts uptake and success.

So, how do you know WHEN your network is at the right moment to support movement across the adoption curve? WHEN is it necessary to lead, to follow, to push, to nudge? Looking back, we can identify the cues that helped us recognize when and how to support our members in adoption of racial equity.

### 1 Not yet interested.

**WHEN YOU HEAR:** "I went to a national conference and there was a lot of talk about racial equity. I know it's important but I can't imagine how we'd do that."

#### THE PSO'S ROLE IN THIS PHASE:

Encourage curiosity even when members are not yet ready for action. Build awareness in order to generate interest.

**PACE, BUT DON'T WAIT.** PSOs don't need to wait until lots of members are clamoring for an offering. Instead they can build demand for offerings in important areas. Hub leaders often have the privileged perspective of seeing emerging trends before they hit a tipping point into broad-scale awareness. Building demand takes time and persistence, so start with a pace you can sustain. ICoF's racial equity network adoption process started five years ago.

**REPEAT, REINFORCE, REVIST.** Introduce racial equity through all of your channels and repeatedly integrate it into your existing efforts and offerings. ICoF did this by adding more articles about equity to their newsletter, and reinforced their work by asking every guest speaker to make a link between their topic and equity. They also initiated racial equity conversations with members one-on-one and with members active on the ICoF's Board.

**CONNECT THE PROCESS TO PAST SUCCESSES.** For ICoF, a previous cohort that successfully explored funder openness was an on-ramp to DEI and racial equity.

The earlier cohort gave members practice in disclosing challenges and supporting one another while building member confidence that change was possible. PSOs should highlight past projects that successfully advanced change when pushing toward new goals.

**CREATE AH-HA MOMENTS.** Mindset shifts often precede behavior change. Serious games and table top activities from ICoF's Openness Cohort helped funders confront patterns of bias toward particular grantseeker personas. This *ah-ha* opened the door to conversations about other types of bias, including racial bias. We recognized that as a moment when we could begin moving with the cohort from openness to equity.

**FOCUS MATTERS.** Member attention is not unlimited. PSOs should make choices about the number of priorities they're trying to advance at one time. Focusing on adoption of racial equity means we passed on opportunities to increase adoption of other practices during the same period.

### 2 Ready and getting started.

**WHEN YOU HEAR:** "We're interested in working on racial equity but we don't know where to begin. Do you have some resources?"

#### THE PSO'S ROLE IN THIS PHASE:

Provide resources and experts to answer the questions people are asking right now. Help members engage in a few "quick win" effective actions that advance the goal. Support the willing. In any network, a small subgroup of members will begin adoption earlier than others. When this happens, start shifting your facilitative energy to support the willing members. Offer workshops, webinars, and conversations that meet their needs.

**SHARE THE STORIES OF PROGRESS.** Highlighting members who are working in new ways can paint the picture of network adoption for members who are still in the curiosity phase. ICoF did this through newsletters and member storytelling at quarterly membership meetings.

**TIME FOR TOOLKITS, TRAINING AND EXPERTS.** We acknowledge that racial equity requires adaptive organizational change and that's messy and complex. Breaking adaptive change into manageable tactical changes can help many members during this phase of adoption. This is a time when experts, toolkits and workshops work best.

ICoF did this by leveraging partnerships with national PSOs who are on the leading edge of racial equity in philanthropy.

**PUSH MEMBERS TO PRIORITIZE FEEDBACK.** In both our Openness and Racial Equity cohorts we found that when members took their first actions (prototypes) to their community they became motivated and their commitment to their goals was deepened. For example, a funder who met with several BIPOC leaders with drafts of equity statements received feedback that motivated them to move more quickly. Now is the time to initiate a feedback loop on initial changes.

### 3 Making it really work at my organization.

**WHEN YOU HEAR:** “We’re working on racial equity and I’m running into politics and resistance from people in power. I’m not sure what to do next?”

#### THE PSO’S ROLE IN THIS PHASE:

Support members in making adaptive changes to culture, power, systems, and policies. Help members persist and deepen racial equity work through peer support models.

**SUPPORT THE SHARED STRUGGLE.** Instead of traditional workshops and training that provide answers and experts, during this point in the adoption journey members need allies and spaces where they can confide, brainstorm, compare, and gain confidence to take the next steps. ICoF’s Accountability Trios were a platform for shared struggle, as was our scenario-based large group Q&A sessions when Sharina Sallis, our facilitator, would share insights and stories of her experience.

**COHORTS AREN’T ALWAYS THE RIGHT TOOL.** In our experience, cohorts -- as a platform for members to struggle together and support one another -- are optimal experiences once many members have already taken concrete steps toward racial equity. Using this methodology too early can leave members looking at one another for answers that would be better provided by experts.

### 4 Greater than the sum of its parts.

**WHEN YOU HEAR:** “Our network should start making some public statements about racial equity.” OR “I think we should consider commitment to these goals to be a requirement for being part of our network.”

#### THE PSO’S ROLE IN THIS PHASE:

Help members to see their place in something bigger than themselves and scale adoption expectations to the network.

**RESOURCING IS THE ROLE.** Once a network grabs onto a cause, members often pull on the PSO to move faster, go bigger, and take a stand. This means finding additional funding, bringing a spotlight to the work, and encouraging late adopters to participate. It can sometimes feel like the PSO has fallen a step behind.

**SHARE POWER.** This phase is best driven by member leaders with support from a PSO. It reinforces the idea of the power of a network and provides new opportunities for leadership.

**SUSTAIN THROUGH SHIFTS.** Networks can slide backward on the adoption curve, especially as dynamics change. For example: How do we ensure our network will continue to

support racial equity shifts when we enter a recession, or as politics continue to turn divisive? Continuing to highlight examples of racial equity, documenting learnings (like this guide), and sharing the story are all important to sustaining and advancing racial equity in Iowa.

**FIND THE NEXT WAVE.** A strength of the ICoF is its ability to scout and begin working toward what’s next. As of this writing, we’ve begun building demand and interest in intersectionality and racial justice.

## Using Our Influence to Support Funder Change

*What’s the most important way for a PSO to think of its role: philanthropy-serving or philanthropy-guiding?*



Rather than answer with an “either/or” framing, we applied an approach developed by *See What I Mean* called *Leading in Networks of Influence*. Networks of influence describe structures where the “hubs” (PSOs) have little authority to force change. Instead, PSOs have influence, a capacity that brings together serving and guiding as an integrated and powerful force for change. **We relied on six principles to operationalize our network influence:**

### Center on What Matters vs. Chasing Outputs

*Our cohort centered on advancing racial equity in Iowa by changing philanthropy. Not just making grants to support racial equity.*

The cohort called on funders to move beyond grantmaking and look for opportunities to strengthen and change more holistically: from **staffing**, to **planning**, to **partnerships**, and **systems**. The assessment and our sessions provided opportunities to consider 13 funder capacities.

### Focus on Assets vs. Distracted by Deficits

*Our cohort’s assessment focused on choices of adoption rather than on a checkbox or grading system.*

This helped us to focus where each organization — *and the network as a whole* — had energy for change. We followed the energy knowing that anti-racism work is ongoing without a fixed end point and that generating momentum from the start is critical for sustained action.

Taking an asset-based approach also meant resisting the urge to spend our energy convincing every ICoF member to prioritize racial equity. We focused on serving members that self-identified as ready to dig in. We made sure to notice assets outside the traditional “big two”: endowment size and number of staff. Instead, we acknowledged different approaches to change. **For example:**

- 1) We featured a small organization whose strength of analysis led to steady progress in an organization that values stability.
- 2) We featured a leader who used their power as a relational consensus builder to ensure progress would stick.
- 3) We honored the strength of a confident and out-front leader who announced a plan and asked others to come along.

*“Today I learned the difference between equity and justice. That will definitely influence my perspective and approach to the work moving forward.”*

## Design for Inclusion vs. A One-size-fits-all Approach

*This cohort was not prescriptive. Each of the 27 member organizations could customize their learning and take responsibility for their own implementation choices.*

This also meant members came to the cohort with an array of needs. Some were seeking accountability, others needed help deciding what to prioritize, and others sought a confidante with whom they could sort out challenges.

**Variety** was our answer to meeting diverse needs. Instead of one method, like a workshop, we offered four parts to the experience. Instead of one speaker, most sessions had 4 or 5 breakouts.

While we wanted to match every member's needs every month, some cohort members experienced a mismatch with what we offered. We welcomed learning of the mismatches through surveys and one-on-one conversations and continued to adjust our approach. In one case, member needs led us to offer an extra session for corporate funders.

## Co-create and Iterate Together vs. Perfecting Plans

*We were intentional about remaining responsive and not pre-designing the entire experience. Members were gracious and didn't reject our emergent approach even though it was not always comfortable for them or for the facilitators.*

Sometimes we responded to needs expressed by members. In the beginning many members asked for help with "shared language." After we provided some definitions we recognized that the need was less about technical change and instead recognized the need to **build confidence** to talk about race. This led to breakout sessions where members shared their experience and gave many examples of language that worked for them.

Sometimes we pushed into the future. **For example:** in the last few sessions we invited members to consider adding a focus on racial justice. Powerful ideas were generated, including changing where the fundamental power of philanthropy resides. This conversation also led to an acknowledgement by a member who said (paraphrased) *"just when I feel like I'm making progress with racial equity, we get the push to keep going."*

## Invest in Complementary Capacity-building vs. Centralized Expertise

*PSOs often see their role as providing answers and helping members to easily make changes in their practices. Those expectations were unrealistic in this endeavor.*

**Humility**, especially with mostly white leadership, precluded ICoF from fully owning the role of the expert. The insidiousness of anti-Black racism meant that change would not be easy for our members. **We dealt with this ambiguity in four ways:**

- 1) Invested in the ICoF's capacity to support the discussion (see *timeline on page 3*).
- 2) Called on the complementary expertise of our network to share their knowledge, strategy and lived experiences with their colleagues. There were many people with expertise in our network and the facilitative role was to amplify their stories.
- 3) Reframed the cohort from a place where members find answers, to a place where we struggled together and supported one another to advance racial equity in Iowa.
- 4) Honored the work that our cohort participants were doing back in their communities to learn about and support racial equity, diversity and inclusion. We valued this work as complementary and supportive to our cohort and it allowed us to stay laser-focused on philanthropy's role in advancing racial equity.

## Share power vs. Control and Hierarchy

*The beauty of networks is that they can become bigger than the sum of their parts. They can inspire and feed innovation. They are places where good ideas can spread quickly.*

But, networks can also feel isolating, controlling, and overtly normative. To lead in a network of influence means giving up control and inviting shared decision-making. **In this cohort we operationalized this in several ways:**

- 1) Acknowledged that the choices of implementation belonged to each member.
- 2) Invited BIPOC leaders to participate on their own terms. **The application asked,**

*"Your facilitators would like to get a sense of participants' background and previous experience, if any, with racial equity, diversity and inclusion work. For BIPOC individuals:*

*What is your experience educating others about racial equity?*

- providing formal training to my colleagues
- consulting inside or outside organization
- initiating conversations about racial equity
- other

*Are you willing or interested in serving in similar roles in the cohort? If not, don't worry. We want to honor your assets and desires." Many BIPOC members of the cohort volunteered to serve in this role.*

- 3) Asked members to share their experience with their peers. We did not control how and what they decided to share. We did provide support as requested.

# Moving Forward

During our final cohort session, we asked BIPOC leaders in our cohort to share their advice for foundation leaders to support them in their work to advance racial equity in their organizations and communities. Here is what they shared:

*"Three pieces of advice moving forward: 1) lead with intent; 2) don't be afraid to ask questions and go deeper; and 3) listen to other experiences and viewpoints."*

*"Giving equal rights and opportunities to others does not mean that you have fewer rights."*

*"It's okay to move forward in small ways, they are meaningful and build momentum. Do not be afraid that an action is too small to make a difference."*

The conclusion of our cohort was not the end; in many ways it was just the beginning. We're now inviting our members to consider how they can support both racial equity and racial justice. We have much to learn from other leaders in the field and our communities. We also have so much to explore in terms of intersectionality and how racial equity work cross-cuts everything we do in our communities. We also have a good portion of our members who did not participate in the cohort to invite into this journey with us. We know this is life's work and we remain committed to supporting our members as we move forward – together.



[www.IowaCouncilofFoundations.org](http://www.IowaCouncilofFoundations.org)



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