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**FUNDERS TOGETHER  
TO END HOMELESSNESS:  
A Racial Equity  
Learning Journey**

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## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

Funders Together to End Homelessness began its racial equity journey in 2016. At the time the organization was going through a series of internal changes including new leadership with the addition of CEO Amanda Misiko Andere, who was the first African American woman to serve in this position. This decision was also reflective of the board's desire to focus more explicitly on racial equity. When Andere joined, the board and staff had already begun to do some internal work around racial equity. They were committed to this work because they realized that they could not think about systems change and ending homelessness without addressing racial equity.

Externally, the field of housing and homelessness was engaging in similar conversations about the need to address racial inequity to end homelessness and this provided an opportunity for Funders Together to join this broader movement and to push funders to consider the importance of these issues. As a result, at the end of 2016, shortly before the presidential election, Funders Together took the important step of naming racial equity as a priority in its strategic plan. This was a unanimous decision of the board and staff.

Following the explicit naming of racial equity in its strategic plan, Funders Together embarked on a learning journey together with its board, staff, and members to normalize the conversation about structural and historic racism and how it contributes to disparities in the homelessness system. Additionally, Funders Together sought to focus on philanthropy's role in addressing these disparities by centering racial equity. Funders Together began embedding a focus on racial equity at its annual in-person convenings and in its online programming and engaged in policy and advocacy efforts with a racial equity lens.

**The board began to push for an examination of Funders Together's mission and vision and the development of a "Point of View" around racial equity as it had done for other issues related to homelessness.**

Internally, recognizing that it could not support its members without a thorough understanding of the issues, Funders Together staff and board have engaged in learning through readings, discussions, and training. Funders Together also prioritized diversifying the board and being intentional and explicit about the criteria for identifying board members (e.g. people with lived expertise and those from underrepresented groups) and to hold its governance committee accountable to this. As a result, more than 56% of the board identifies as a person of color. This diversity is also reflected in Funders Together staff with 50% of staff identifying as a person of color.

An important internal step was the formation of a Racial Equity Working Group, whose purpose was to advise the board on policies and programming to advance racial equity and Funders Together staff on developing a learning agenda. One of the suggestions from the working group was to create a two-year community of practice, called

[Foundations for Racial Equity](#) (FRE), to help funders learn about systemic racism in housing and homelessness and move the field towards greater racial equity. FRE is now in its second year, with a second cohort launching in June 2021, and has been a critical part of Funders Together’s journey.

At the end of 2018, the board began to push for an examination of Funders Together’s mission and vision and the development of a “Point of View” around racial equity as it had done for other issues related to homelessness. This was another crucial step in the journey and resulted in the codification of the work that had already begun through the creation of its [Commitment to Racial Equity](#). The Commitment articulates how Funders Together has and will use a racial equity lens both internally and externally in supporting its members and the philanthropic sector to shift its practice, policy and grantmaking.

With the current public health crisis brought on by COVID-19 and the growing racial justice movement, this institutionalized commitment to racial equity has enabled Funders Together to be thoughtful and intentional in its recommendations, responses, and programming. It has allowed staff to continually emphasize the importance of centering racial equity and racial justice in addressing disparities that are rooted in structural racism.

Even prior to the public health crisis and intensification of the Black Lives Matter movement, members expressed excitement about the work that Funders Together was undertaking on racial equity and members were interested in seeing racial equity embedded within programming on other topics. Since COVID-19 and George Floyd’s murder, Funders Together has seen significant actions taken by some members around grantmaking to address racial justice and in speaking out and challenging their counties to use Federal funds in response to COVID-19 to address racial inequities. In sharing these responses with Funders Together staff, members have emphasized the tremendous contribution that Funders Together’s programming has played in the actions they have taken.

**There are days where they are “Woke” and there are other days when they are just at the beginning of the process with some of their internal work.**

Internally is where the organization still has more work to do. Funders Together has only recently started to have more sophisticated conversations at board meetings about inclusion and meeting the needs of a diverse board and staff. This is a big part of the work that is ahead. Funders Together staff has spent the majority of time internally on its learning journey, whether as a team, with the board, with members, or individually. Currently, Funders Together is working with its board and a consultant on their strategic planning process and considering how to operationalize all the work in their strategic plan with a racial equity lens. This process will help clarify the role of the Racial Equity Committee going forward and how it can hold the board accountable as well as engage and hold members accountable to this work.

In reflecting on where Funders Together is in its racial equity journey, Andere suggested that given the day they are in different places. There are days where they are “Woke” and there are other days when they are just at the beginning of the process with some of their internal work. As a result, they do not see themselves as being in one place. Funders Together is advanced in some ways because it has institutionalized a focus on racial equity through its mission and vision statement and by making a public commitment to racial equity. Additionally, it has buy-in from the board and staff. However, Andere emphasized that while Funders Together has a strong muscle in centering racial equity in its work and though it is at the core of its work, staff have to consciously exercise that muscle daily both internally and externally because it is not something that develops naturally.

## FUTURE GOALS

Funders Together leadership identified the following future goals:

- **Continue to build their racial equity muscle-** They want to ensure that embedding racial equity into everything they do becomes an automatic response and is institutionalized in policies and values so that it lives on beyond the current leadership and staff.
- **Ensure that funders prioritize racial equity in policy decisions-** They want to push funders both in their response to COVID-19 and in their reimagining of systems to prioritize racial equity.
- **Push philanthropy towards a focus on racial justice-** They see this as the moment for funders to lean into their values in centering people of color with lived expertise and to change the way they approach their grantmaking so that those who are most impacted are driving decisions.
- **Help funders use this moment to convince their boards-** They want funders to use this moment to convince their board or senior leadership that racial justice should drive grantmaking strategy and to emphasize the importance of shifting power to those who have historically not held that power.
- **Determine the next phase of racial equity work-** Funders Together is conducting interviews with members and partners to identify the next phase of work, including with FRE and its members, to explore how they can work together and move from learning to action to advance the field.
- **Continue to embed racial equity and racial justice into all programming-** Funders Together wants to ensure that members understand and are equipped to push racial justice in their policy and advocacy work and that members continue to move forward in their journey whether they are at an early stage or more advanced.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

Funders Together leadership shared the following reflections:

- Creating a commitment to racial equity and making it public is a critical step for PSOs who are looking to center racial equity in their work. It provides a North Star for organizations even during challenging times.
- Having a dedicated group of people that can learn together about racial equity and use each other as a sounding board (e.g. FRE) is essential for moving the work forward. Additionally, bringing the broader membership along on the journey through sharing lessons and programming opportunities is important.
- Recognizing that the work of racial equity and racial justice takes a long time is vital. It is not built in a matter of a couple of years or through one or two programs but requires practice to build the muscle and to ensure it is not pushed aside in moments of crisis.
- Being a leader around racial equity in philanthropy while also being seen as a leader within a specific field such as housing and homelessness can create a tension when leading and working with grantee partners and giving advice to those trying to influence the field. It is important to consider how to use power and influence constructively.

## Case Story

### INTRODUCTION

Funders Together to End Homelessness began in 2004 as the Partnership to End Long-Term Homelessness, which was a network of seven national foundations focused on ending chronic homelessness. This group gradually broadened its focus to address all types of homelessness and to focus on systems change. In 2010, Funders Together became a nonprofit organization focused on building a network of funders committed to addressing homelessness. Funders Together currently has more than 250 members. As a Philanthropy Serving Organization (PSO), Funders Together is also unique in that it not only mobilizes philanthropy around these issues but also plays a leadership role in the field of housing and homelessness. The mission of Funders Together is to *“Mobilize its members to utilize the voice, influence, and expertise of philanthropy in ways that will advance lasting solutions to ending homelessness, including addressing its underlying causes like structural and racial inequities, and helping create policies and systems that center people with lived expertise.”*

Funders Together began its racial equity journey in 2016. At the time the organization was undergoing various internal changes including a transition to new leadership with the addition of Amanda Misiko Andere as the first African American woman as CEO. This decision was also reflective of the board’s desire to focus more explicitly on racial equity. When Andere joined Funders Together, the board and staff had already begun to do some internal work around racial equity. They were committed to this work because, as Andere shared, “They realized that as an organization and as funders who prioritize systems change work, we can’t think about systems change without thinking about racial equity and we definitely can’t end homelessness without addressing racial equity.”

This explanation for why it is essential for Funders Together to focus on racial equity was also encapsulated in a blog post that Andere wrote in October of 2016, for the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, that examined why ending homelessness would require the field to address structural racism and systemic racial inequities. In her post she wrote: *“...if we don’t talk about the structural issues that cause racial inequity in housing, human services, and criminal justice, can homelessness ever be rare, brief, and one-time?”*

*African Americans make up 13% of the U.S. population, yet represent 40% of people experiencing homelessness. Even when controlling for poverty, people of color are dramatically more likely to experience homelessness. And that fact alone is why we must address racial inequity.”*

Externally, the field was engaging in similar conversations about the need to address racial inequity to end homelessness. Around this time the Center for Social Innovation launched an initiative called [Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities](#) (SPARC), which was a research initiative incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods to understand and respond to racial inequities in homelessness. As SPARC began to discuss their work at conferences and convenings, it provided an opportunity for Funders Together to join this broader movement and to push funders to consider the importance of these

issues. As a result, at the end of 2016, shortly before the presidential election, Funders Together took the important step of naming racial equity as a priority in its strategic plan. This was a unanimous decision of the board and staff. The goal of the racial equity work as delineated in the plan is *“to engage philanthropy to address racial inequities in homelessness recognizing that unequal access to housing is the biggest equity issue.”*

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## DEVELOPING A COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY

Following the explicit naming of racial equity in its strategic plan, Funders Together embarked on a learning journey together with its board, staff, and members to normalize the conversation about structural and historic racism and how it contributes to disparities in the homelessness system. Additionally, Funders Together sought to focus on philanthropy’s role in addressing these disparities by centering racial equity.

Funders Together began embedding a focus on racial equity at its annual in-person convenings and in its online programming and engaged in policy and advocacy efforts with a racial equity lens. An important internal step was the formation of a Racial Equity Working Group, whose purpose was to advise the board on policies and programming to advance racial equity and Funders Together staff on developing a learning agenda. One of the suggestions from the working group was to create a two-year community of practice, called [Foundations for Racial Equity](#) (FRE) to help funders learn about systemic racism in housing and homelessness and move the field towards greater racial equity. FRE is now in its second year and has been a critical part of Funders Together’s journey, helping staff to both identify what funders are hearing in the field, and to share with funders what they are learning about philanthropy’s role in centering racial equity in grantmaking around housing and homelessness.

Internally, recognizing that it could not support its members without a thorough understanding of the issues, Funders Together staff and board have engaged in learning through readings, discussions, and training. Additionally, the board pushed for regular learning opportunities at in-person meetings and has spent time at each board meeting learning about racial equity, which in turn has contributed to changes in policies and practices at the board level. Funders Together prioritized diversifying the board, which as Andere pointed out, was something they struggled with given the lack of diversity within the field of philanthropy focusing on housing and homelessness. However, Funders Together’s commitment to racial equity allowed it to be intentional and explicit about the criteria for identifying board members (e.g. people with lived expertise and those from underrepresented groups) and to hold its governance committee accountable to this. As a result, more than 56% of the board identifies as a person of color. This diversity is also reflected in Funders Together staff with 50% of staff identifying as a person of color.

At the end of 2018, after engaging in a training facilitated by the Association of Black Foundation Executives ([ABFE](#)), the board began to push for an examination of Funders Together’s mission and vision and the development of a “Point of View” around racial

equity as it had done for other issues related to homelessness. This was the start of another crucial step in the journey and resulted in the codification of the work that had already begun. At the time that Funders Together began discussions around developing a “Point of View” a national group, called the National Racial Equity Working Group on Housing and Homelessness, was forming. This group was in the process of developing a values statement and since Funders Together was part of the planning team it decided to adopt this statement and work with the board to identify the implications for the organization and philanthropy. As a result, Funders Together was able to create its [Commitment to Racial Equity](#), which articulates how Funders Together has and will use a racial equity lens both internally and externally in supporting its members and the philanthropic sector to shift its practice, policy and grantmaking.

This public commitment was important for several reasons: 1) it codified the work that Funders Together had already begun; 2) it enabled Funders Together to put a stake in the ground and share its point of view; 3) it held Funders Together accountable to its members and the field; 4) it served as a vision for both the field of philanthropy and the field of homelessness.

With the current public health crisis brought on by COVID-19 and the growing racial justice movement, this institutionalized commitment to racial equity has enabled Funders Together to be thoughtful and intentional in its recommendations and responses. It has allowed staff to continually emphasize the importance of centering racial equity in addressing disparities that are rooted in structural racism.

## THE COMMITMENT TO RACIAL EQUITY

The vision as stated in the Commitment is:

*Because of the contributions from Funders Together to End Homelessness to this work, homelessness is a rare, short-term, and one-time event, and housing and services opportunities are not conditioned by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other personal characteristics.*

### ***The 8 Commitments that Funders Together will pursue in partnership with philanthropy are:***

- Advocate that funders support prevention strategies by partnering with other public systems to understand how these systems can address racial inequity.
- Engage people of color with lived expertise of homelessness in efforts to develop programs, set policy, conduct research, and redesign crisis response systems.
- Engage in short- and long-term strategies to center racial equity in their response to homelessness.
- Commit to learning more about systemic racism and anti-black, anti-native, and other forms of violence and oppression so they can educate themselves and their members about how this results in disproportionate homelessness among people of color.
- Commit to diversity of speakers in all programming.
- Commit to providing ongoing training and learning to analyze data through a racial equity perspective.
- Commit to improving organizational skills and capacity to address racial inequity in homelessness including diversity in board and executive leadership, career pathways, equity-focused competencies in hiring and promotion, among others.
- Use an intersectional lens and analysis to understand how experiences of systemic racism are shaped by gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other factors.

### ***Internally to ensure that Funder's Together is living its values they commit to addressing structural inequities with the following actions:***

- Maintain a Racial Equity board committee to oversee work in this area.
- Conduct and annually revisit an equity audit of the internal policies and external communications.
- Ensure all programs and policy priorities are developed using a racial equity lens.
- Ensure that policies in governance and organizational administration are conducted using a racial equity lens.
- Regularly promote racial equity throughout FTEH's communication platforms.
- Provide regular learning and training for FTEH board and staff to build capacity around racial and other inequities.
- Intentionally consider and select members from underrepresented and priority populations for the FTEH board of directors and staff (African American, Native American, Latin(x), and the LGBTQ community).
- Select staff and members for board service whose values include racial equity and social justice.
- Maintain a topic-area webpage on racial equity in homelessness and housing that includes up-to-date research and information for funders and the general public.
- Provide support for individual members and groups of funders who seek to end homelessness and center racial equity in their communities.
- Collaborate with other national, regional, and local organizations who are also working toward greater racial equity in philanthropy.

## EXTERNAL WORK

### *Conferences, webinars, and online resources*

Funders Together has focused on providing members with resources and space for discussion about racial equity at conferences and in-person events, and through webinars and online forums. It has been thoughtful about the progression of speakers and topics it provides its members.

With regard to conference programming, Funders Together began in 2017 at its annual Funders Institute with a keynote address from Glenn Harris, President of [Race Forward](#), who provided a grounding for members on what it means to address structural inequalities. The conference also featured Marc Dones and Jeff Olivet from [C4 Innovations](#) sharing information about SPARC and their research on racial inequity in homelessness. The following year at the Funders Institute, Funders Together hosted a funder conversation about how to operationalize racial equity within an organization and featured examples of how two different foundations had embedded racial equity into the work of their organizations. Additionally, it brought together representatives from SPARC and national and regional community leaders for a discussion about how to redesign homelessness prevention and response services with a focus on racial equity. At the 2019 Funders Institute, program participants learned about what other funders were doing to advance racial equity and the role of culturally specific organizations in ending homelessness. The conference also included a roundtable discussion for funders on building grantee capacity to undertake racial equity work. Most recently at the 2020 Funders Institute, which was held virtually, participants learned about strategies that philanthropy can support and engage in to push for racial and housing justice, how to make shifts towards racial equity and systems change internally, and what accountability and action look like for racial justice. The themes discussed at this conference were also indicative of the types of conversations that had begun to take place in FRE earlier this year around housing justice as racial justice. While some of these conversations had begun prior to the murder of George Floyd and the racial justice uprising, these events further solidified Funders Together's focus on racial and housing justice.

Funders Together has hosted numerous webinars, some focused more generally on racial equity and structural racism and some specifically around what it means to address racial equity in homelessness systems. Some examples include a webinar with Richard Rothstein on his book [The Color of Law](#), which provides a historical account of redlining and segregation; a SPARC webinar on how disaggregating data reveals racial disparities in the homelessness system that are not explained by poverty alone; and a webinar series from [Race Matters Institute](#) to provide foundational learning for members around key concepts and racial equity tools and strategies. A recent two-part webinar series on Anti-Blackness and Transformative Organizing that had been planned before the George Floyd murder became a timely conversation for both funders and PSOs who had also registered. The webinar series was marketed as a level 2.0 conversation requiring participants to have undertaken some prior racial equity learning. Following the webinar series, Stephanie Chan, Director of Membership and Programs, led a 90 minute debrief workshop for full members of

Funders Together to process what they had heard and learned particularly in the context of the implications for philanthropy and the work of ending homelessness.

Funders Together has also developed a [Racial Equity Resources](#) page on its website to help funders start and continue conversations around addressing racial disparities in housing and homelessness and advancing racial equity. Resources range from definitions of key concepts to webinars, blog posts, research, and toolkits.

With the emergence of COVID-19 and the racial disparities it has laid bare, Funders Together created a page titled [COVID-19 Response and Recovery: Recommendations for Philanthropy to Support Immediate Needs and Long-Term Solutions to End Homelessness](#). In developing these recommendations Funders Together was very intentional in stating the equity implications of COVID-19 and why racial equity needs to be built into philanthropic response and recovery work as foundations broker relationships, support immediate capacity needs, and undertake evaluation of how their response is addressing public health and community well-being. In crafting this page, Funders Together both embedded racial equity throughout the recommendations and highlighted it as a specific category. A revised set of recommendations will be released soon.

**Andere also called on white people to be more than allies but rather “co-conspirator(s) for our shared liberation.”**

Funders Together staff has also repeatedly called attention to racial equity and racial justice issues through the Funders Together blog. In the wake of the George Floyd murder, Andere wrote a powerful [Statement on the Continuous Killing of Black People, White Supremacy, and Anti-Blackness in America](#). In it, she highlighted the fact that given Funders Together’s commitment to racial equity a statement should be expected. However, she shared how painful it was to not hear publicly from her white friends and colleagues. She emphasized that the work of being an anti-racist requires them to speak out to other white people, to listen to people of color with lived expertise, and “to study and understand the racialized history of our country.” Andere also called on white people to be more than allies but rather “co-conspirator(s) for our shared liberation.”

On a recent National Low-Income Housing Coalition weekly national call, Andere shared a series of remarks which were captured in a blog titled [There is no Low-Hanging Fruit in Ending Anti-Blackness and Racism](#). She was explicit about the work that organizations need to do to dismantle Anti-Black racism in every manifestation and the necessity of giving up power to Black and Brown people with lived expertise to truly transform the system.

#### ***Foundations for Racial Equity (FRE) Community of Practice***

As noted earlier, an important piece of the programming that Funders Together has offered its members related to racial equity is the FRE two-year community of practice. FRE evolved as a result of a recommendation by the Racial Equity Working Group. The goals of FRE are to help philanthropic leaders: understand the history of systemic racism in housing; learn about tools for applying a racial equity lens in their grantmaking and operationalizing racial equity

in their organizations; provide a call to action for funders working in homelessness; build a peer network to learn and act together in advancing racial equity in homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning, Funders Together was explicit about the criteria for participating in this community of practice. In advertising the community of practice to its members Funders Together emphasized that they wanted participants to:

- Have some influence or authority over grantmaking in their organizations
- Represent an organization that had committed to racial equity and had already undertaken some groundwork
- Commit to attending one in-person convening each year and all virtual monthly conference calls

The application process involved applicants sharing what racial equity work they had undertaken at their organizations and what they were hoping to learn from their participation in the community of practice. There are currently 29 participants from different member organizations participating.

Before the first meeting, Chan conducted interviews with each participant to gain a better understanding of what they hoped to obtain from the programming. One of the things she heard very clearly from the people of color who were participating was that they did not want to endure hours of definitions of terms during their first in-person convening. To ensure that this learning happened before the first meeting in 2019, participants were asked to undertake some foundational equity homework and received a list of articles, videos, terms, and definitions to review in advance. Additionally, participants were required to participate in the Race Matters webinar series that Funders Together was offering all members. For those that were unable to attend, Chan followed up by phone and shared notes around the foundational learning from that series. She wanted to ensure that everyone in the program was ready and prepared to engage in deeper discussions.

Participants were also required to participate in a webinar series on Anti-Blackness and Transformative Organizing to deepen their understanding of key terms and concepts, develop their knowledge around white dominant culture and how this shows up in organizational practices, and to reflect on how to connect this learning to their grantmaking and work to prevent and end homelessness. The webinar series was delivered by two organizers who emphasized that they were activists first and consultants second. As Chan observed, this provided a vastly different experience for participants than previous webinars that have generally been led by full-time consultants.

The current FRE cohort is in its second year of the program and a new cohort will begin in June 2021. Given that Funders Together's communities of practice are designed to be learning to action journeys, the current FRE cohort is beginning to explore joint activities that its members can undertake to support the field.

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<sup>1</sup> See: [http://www.funderstogether.org/foundations\\_for\\_racial\\_equity](http://www.funderstogether.org/foundations_for_racial_equity)

### *Public Policy and Advocacy*

Funders Together recognizes that in addition to encouraging its members to change their external and internal practices, to truly address racial inequities change also needs to happen at the systems level through policy. In addition to informing and educating members on various local and national advocacy and policy opportunities Funders Together is working with members to understand the racial equity implications of various policies. Staff wants to ensure that as members are engaging in their communities, they are pushing for racial equity to be centered in all efforts, especially with their grantees.

**Funders Together’s goal in the long term is for this reflective thinking about what it means to center and prioritize racial equity and racial justice both with policy and within philanthropy to become an ingrained response and not one that is set aside during moments of urgency or crisis.**

With the current pandemic, they have focused on educating their members about what centering racial equity means for philanthropy during this time. Funders Together recently launched a new partnership with the Northern California Grantmakers called the [Bay Area Homelessness Funders Network](#). It is intended to create a space for strategic thinking and collective action and to apply a racial justice lens in the work by centering the voices of grassroots leaders and those with lived expertise in order to advance long-term solutions to end homelessness. Additionally, this year Funders Together launched the [California Homelessness and Housing Policy Funders Network](#), which also focuses on racial justice and examines housing and homelessness policy in order to create a statewide coalition of influence and expertise.

Similarly, when engaging with partners in the field to examine policy priorities Funders Together brings a racial equity lens as it thinks about the language that is used and the implications for communities that have been historically marginalized. Funders Together has been instrumental in bringing partners in the homelessness and housing field together since late 2019 to form a coalition called the National Coalition for Housing Justice, which is a group of national organizations that are aligned around seeking housing justice to end homelessness. They have come together to coordinate advocacy efforts, develop policy recommendations, and leverage their collective tools to garner the attention of both lawmakers and the public to meet that goal. The coalition defines housing justice as guaranteeing opportunities for everyone in the country to have affordable, safe, accessible, and stable housing through a racial justice approach. This group also serves as a model for Funders Together members who are encouraged to play the role of convener in bringing stakeholders together.

In their engagement with government officials, staff has focused on emphasizing Funders Together’s values and those of its members in centering racial equity and LGBTQ in youth homelessness as well as helping to educate government officials about what has

been working in the field and where there are opportunities for increasing public-private partnerships.

Funders Together's goal in the long term is for this reflective thinking about what it means to center and prioritize racial equity and racial justice both with policy and within philanthropy to become an ingrained response and not one that is set aside during moments of urgency or crisis in favor of white dominant approaches.

### *Partnerships in the Field*

Funders Together staff are regularly called on to speak at conferences and events about their journey and have also played a leadership role in convening national housing and homelessness organizations at conferences to create space for partners to share what they are learning.

Funders Together is one of the founding leadership groups of the National Racial Equity Working Group on Housing and Homelessness (NREWG). Recognizing that the field overall around homelessness and housing lacked a common language, a theory of change, and a way of learning and convening, the founding leaders came together to launch NREWG in early 2019 to center racial equity in the national response to homelessness. Through resources from Funders Together members the group has been convening three times a year. Through these convenings, working teams have emerged to focus on specific areas, such as internal work, research, policy, and external work. The work of NREWG has resulted in increased awareness about the intersection of racism and homelessness and a growing group of organizations committed to advancing racial equity.

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## **WHERE ARE FUNDERS TOGETHER MEMBERS IN THEIR RACIAL EQUITY JOURNEY?**

Funders Together has more than 250 members mostly within the United States. Roughly 69 of these members are full members and pay annual dues. The remaining members are known as basic members who do not pay dues but receive the Funders Together newsletter and engage in some programming. Among full members, there is a core group that is very committed to thinking about racial equity in their philanthropy and how to prevent and end homelessness in their communities. Most of these members are also in FRE. However, the majority of members are somewhere in the middle. These members recognize that racial equity is important and want to gain a deeper understanding of how they as funders can have an impact on advancing racial equity but they are either at the beginning stages of this work or may not have the buy-in from their organizations. These members look to Funders Together and some of the more advanced members to pave the way and set an example. Notably, Funders Together is not aware of any members who have not begun their learning journey.

The biggest issue that members struggle with, according to Lauren Bennett, Director of Communications and Policy, is how to get their board on board. While a few individuals

within the foundation are committed to learning, they might be struggling with moving to action and operationalizing this commitment to racial equity. For example, they may be at a family foundation that has a more conservative board, and often there is a disconnect between what members at the individual level want and how they bring that to their full organization. As a result, the “getting the board on board” piece is something that Funders Together is constantly working on both in terms of finding programming and finding ways to connect members to share their experiences. This is an issue that even members who are further along grapple with because even if their board is supportive there is still a great deal of learning that they need to undertake.

Members also look to Funders Together for advice and help around racial equity as it relates to their work in homelessness. Many members ask Funders Together for a toolkit, framework, or guide on how to advance racial equity. However, Funders Together staff find that they must explain that while they can provide those tools there is no single framework or guide that will have all the answers. Additionally, the field of philanthropy working to advance racial equity in ending homelessness is still very nascent.

Another topic that members request resources on is how to operationalize and center a commitment to racial equity. More specifically, members ask about how they can focus on centering people with lived expertise in a participatory grantmaking process or how to support people of color with lived expertise in their community. While many of their members are grantmakers they also show up in their communities in vastly different ways. Some are on “Continuum of Care Boards” and make decisions about policy and funding overall for the community around homelessness, while others sit on advisory committees. Many are guiding and working alongside their grantee and government partners to develop policy and practice. From a systems point of view, they are thinking about how to focus upstream on the systems that are disproportionately causing disparities in homelessness and how to analyze the tools that are used to evaluate and prioritize people for housing. They recognize that the tools being used are rooted in white supremacy culture and are biased to give better prioritization scores for white people experiencing homelessness. They want to know what they can suggest to their grantee and government partners about how to build a racial equity analysis of their internal and external policies. Additionally, they are interested in understanding how they as funders can give and share power. These more nuanced questions come from an understanding of the power and historical dynamics of philanthropy.

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## **MEMBER FEEDBACK ON PROGRAMMING**

Overall, members have been excited to see the work that Funders Together is undertaking on racial equity. As a result of their focus on racial equity, Funders Together finds that more members are interested in seeing racial equity embedded within programming on other topics. Webinars and in-person convenings that have more of a racial equity focus tend to see larger registration and attendance and more follow-up questions about speakers and inviting those speakers to attend foundation or grantee meetings.

*The Commitment to Racial Equity* also represented an important resource for members and garnered a lot of positive feedback. As Bennett explained, to her knowledge Funders Together was one of the only PSOs not explicitly focused on racial equity to make that commitment public. This was very eye-opening for some of their members in terms of providing a template and demonstrating how this commitment could be applied in an organization. For their national advocacy partners, it enabled them to highlight Funders Together as an example of how philanthropy was thinking about these issues and to justify the importance of doing the same.

**“I want to believe that our growth in our dues-paying membership is because we not only offer great value in our general programs but we also have a very strong point of view on racial equity and on our journey together with our members and people are seeking that out...”.**

The number of people within the philanthropic community who have asked Funders Together to speak at conferences and events about its journey has provided Funders Together with credibility both with its members and with its members' colleagues within the foundation. When Funders Together staff speaks at a conference not directly related to homelessness, about Funders Together's racial equity journey, members who might have a portfolio that is broader than housing and homelessness can justify both their engagement through a racial equity lens and their engagement with Funders Together.

Funders together also saw a 56% increase in its dues-paying membership over the course of 2019 and while that is not entirely attributable to its racial equity focus, Funders Together staff believe that it has been a factor in their growth. As Andere shared, based on her anecdotal conversations with prospective members, “I want to believe that our growth in our dues-paying membership is because we not only offer great value in our general programs but we also have a very strong point of view on racial equity and on our journey together with our members and people are seeking that out....” The fact that Funders Together has not seen a decrease in people renewing their membership since sharing its commitment to racial equity is also a testament to the significance of this topic for its membership.

Members have also found great value in FRE. Based on evaluations from the first two in-person convenings, members share that they value having peers they can reach out to for advice and help in brainstorming through scenarios. Additionally, during FRE convenings and calls, members are invited to share their work on racial equity, which provides both a level of peer pressure and accountability to undertake the work. At their last in-person convening in October of 2019, the staff brought in a trainer to talk about white dominant culture and the participants spent time talking through how that manifests both in philanthropy and in the homelessness system. Participants' response to the training was extremely positive and many shared that it was valuable and thought-provoking and made them recognize that there is a great deal of work to be done to change those norms.

## EFFECTS OF PROGRAMMING ON MEMBERS' RACIAL EQUITY JOURNEY

Funders Together has also seen several members who have been successful in moving their boards or staff towards racial equity work as a result of participating in programming.

For many members who have already started their racial equity journey, the work of Funders Together has helped them make progress on their internal practices by providing an example of what national groups are doing. Members have also been introduced to trainers at Funders Together racial equity trainings that they have subsequently invited to work with their staff or boards to move their internal work.

Most of its members understand that this work is long-term and ongoing and Funders Together emphasizes that racial equity is about systems change and policy change, which is not something that happens overnight. Additionally, Funders Together is seeing more members who are changing their mission statements to include racial equity, which demonstrates their understanding of the centrality and the long-term nature of this work.

Some Funders Together members are also developing pilot projects around participatory grantmaking. Additionally, members have used the analysis that Funders Together has undertaken around tools that are used in the homeless system to push their communities to think about how to fund different tools and analysis of their systems.

While staff notes that not all the credit is due to Funders Together, it has served as a catalyst and a resource to members by connecting them to trainers or other partners that work with communities on racial equity, and by helping to provide a framing for how to consider these issues. Andere shared that she is aware of two or three members who have started to do work with their partners either at SPARC or the National Innovation Service—which undertakes racial equity governance work with communities—because they have been introduced by Funders Together or seen them work in partnership with Funders Together.

Funders Together has also seen movement within its members to build their racial equity muscle to do the work. One of its members, who is also a Funders Together board member, took her entire board and staff on an experiential learning journey to Montgomery and Birmingham, Alabama. The group visited the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery and then traveled to Selma and Birmingham to meet with individuals who had lived through the Civil Rights Movement. Following the trip, Bennett spoke with staff from the foundation and wrote a [blog post](#) about the board's experience. It was a very progressive way for the foundation to help its board members understand this work on a deeper level. For other Funders Together members, this was a great example and provided them with a peer they could connect with to explore implementing a similar experience.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND BLM ON MEMBERS' RACIAL EQUITY JOURNEY

With the current intensification of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, Funders Together has seen significant actions taken by some members around grantmaking. For example, the [Zarrow Families Foundation](#) has decided to commit the entirety of its funds to the cause of addressing racial injustice in their community. They have established the Commemoration Fund to honor the memory of the victims of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre and the effort will be dedicated to and overseen exclusively by people of color (POC). Another example is the [Pohlad Family Foundation](#), who have committed \$25 million to seek racial justice in the Twin Cities and are planning to listen and learn from those directly impacted by racial injustice to inform their efforts. Most recently, the [Denver Foundation](#), which is a community foundation, established the Black Resilience in Colorado (BRIC) Fund to direct resources to address systemic racism and its impact on Black communities across the seven-county Metro Denver region. Notably, the foundation has been reaching out to POC-led giving circles to contribute to the fund to ensure that POC are investing in POC-led organizations. While this initiative was almost eight years in the making, the time was right for it to finally come to fruition.

Other members have also shared personal stories with staff about speaking out and challenging their counties to use Federal funds in response to COVID-19 to address racial inequities, and committing themselves to engage on both a personal and professional front on racial justice issues. In these responses, members have emphasized the tremendous contribution that Funders Together's programming has played in the actions they have taken. Some have also shared how they have drawn on specific resources, conversations, and facilitated discussions that Funders Together has organized in both responding to COVID-19 and in coordinating discussions with other funders and their boards around racist policies and the interconnection with COVID's impact. One member shared the funding recommendations she made to her board recently, which included \$2.1 million going almost entirely to funding people of color-led organizations, racial equity research, and implementation. Additionally, she noted that the recommendation was influenced by Funders Together's guidance. Another member mentioned that Funders Together had taken her racial equity journey well beyond where she had started, and while she recognized the journey would never be over, she was more comfortable and intentional in applying a racial equity lens both internally and with her community.

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## INTERNAL WORK

Internally is where the organization still has more work to do. Funders Together has made progress in working with its board and being intentional about instituting policies and practices that hold the Governance Committee accountable to finding the right board members. However, Funders Together has only recently started to have more sophisticated conversations at board meetings about inclusion. Recognizing that diversity is only a first step, Funders Together has started to examine whether it provides an inclusive environment

that meets the needs of a diverse board and staff. This is a big part of the work that is ahead. Staff is also beginning to explore how the organization operates internally, such as how meetings are conducted, and examining Human Resource policies from a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens.

Funders Together staff has spent the majority of time internally on its learning journey, whether as a team, with the board, with members, or individually. Funders Together has also prioritized learning in its staff development budget.

### **Board Learning**

Board and staff participated in a training conducted by ABFE as well as undertaking foundational work with [Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity \(PRE\)](#) when Funders Together was just beginning its journey. They also recently worked with a consultant on the topic of white dominant culture and how that manifests in philanthropy and their board culture. Additionally, at board meetings, they try to include time to learn from communities. For example, they spent one board meeting in Los Angeles, learning about the city's Ad-Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness.

Much of the learning with the board has been at a high level focusing on racial equity principles and how communities who are addressing homelessness with their funding partners are reflecting on this.

The board has been very receptive to the learning at meetings and board members have considered how to share this learning with their own boards and conceptualize it for their community. Above all, they have expressed a desire to keep going. Additionally, it is the board who expressed a desire to commit to learning about racial equity at every meeting. As a result, this commitment has become normalized in Funders Together's board culture. While that does not necessarily mean that they have a collective sophisticated analysis of racial equity, it is expected and incredibly important that they bring these learning opportunities. For many board members whose foundations may not be as far along on their racial equity journey, these learning opportunities are a resource that they can bring back to their teams or staff internally.

### **Staff Learning**

Funders Together staff have engaged in learning both as individuals and as a team. Last year, three staff members attended a two-day training on facilitating racial equity conversations, through the [Interaction Institute for Social Change](#). Andere and Chan also received a condensed version of the "Groundwater Approach" training from the [Racial Equity Institute](#), in partnership with other advocacy organizations working on homelessness, earlier this year. The training was four hours and focused on racial equity and how structural racism has contributed to disparities in every system. This fall, all staff members participated in the [Facing Race](#) conference, which was held virtually. Andere and Chan also attended this conference in 2018 with several of their homelessness and housing partners.

As a staff, they have also started reading Ibram Kendi's book [How to be an Anti-Racist](#). One of their goals over 2020 has been to convene regularly and discuss sections of the book. As Chan emphasized, one important message they have received from the board and Andere

is that the learning does not just happen during work hours. They have been encouraged to read books when they can and to find local trainings or events in their communities that they can attend. Bennett has found this advice valuable and shared that it has reinforced the notion that the learning is not just limited to work but should also be implemented in their personal life.

### ***Racial Equity Working Group***

As noted earlier, a key part of the internal work involved the creation of a Racial Equity Working Group to advise the Funders Together board and staff on policies and programming to advance racial equity. The Racial Equity Working Group consisted of board members and Funders Together members.

When Funders Together first began its journey, the working group was extremely active in advising the organization about the types of learning in which to engage, issues the board should be considering, and on the development of FRE. They were also helpful in sharing racial equity topics that were coming up in their organizations or communities for other learning series. The working group has now become a standing Racial Equity Committee of the board. However, as the board spent time developing Funders Together’s Commitment to Racial Equity this focus on racial equity become the overall work of the board. As a result, the committee has not needed to be activated as much.

**There are days where they are “Woke” and there are other days when they are just at the beginning of the process with some of their internal work.**

Part of Funders Together’s internal work going forward will be to think about how best to use the committee to hold the board accountable as well as to engage and hold members accountable to this work. Currently, Funders Together is working with its board and a consultant on their strategic planning process and considering how to operationalize all the work in their strategic plan with a racial equity lens. This process will help clarify the role of the Racial Equity Committee going forward.

Funders Together’s Commitment to Racial Equity also included a plan to conduct and annually revisit an equity audit of their internal policies and external communications. Part of the strategic planning process will help define what the internal audit will include.

## **WHERE IS FUNDERS TOGETHER IN THEIR RACIAL EQUITY JOURNEY?**

In terms of where Funders Together is in their racial equity journey, Andere suggested that given the day they are in different places. She referenced Equity in the Center’s [Awake to Woke to Work](#) model and said she likes to use that as a reference because it is a reminder that the process is not linear. There are days where they are “Woke” and there are other days

when they are just at the beginning of the process with some of their internal work. As a result, they do not see themselves as being in one place. Funders Together is advanced in some ways because it has institutionalized a focus on racial equity through its mission and vision statement and by making a public commitment to racial equity. Additionally, it has buy-in from the board and staff. However, Andere emphasized that while Funders Together has a strong muscle in centering racial equity in its work and though it is at the core of its work, staff have to consciously exercise that muscle daily both internally and externally because it is not something that develops naturally.

As Funders Together works with its members around policy advocacy, they regularly discuss how to approach this work with a racial equity lens. Despite the urgency of responding to COVID-19 it is trying both as an organization and with its membership to ensure that people are taking the time to pause and consider the racial equity implications of different policies or decisions. This is still a learning process for Funders Together because the environment is changing so rapidly, and current events can often blindside staff. Funders Together is working to operationalize a racial equity lens in all its policy work both at an organizational level and by pushing its members to do the same. For those members that are newer to policy and advocacy engagement, Funders Together wants them to understand what it means to operationalize a racial equity lens.

Funders Together is also trying to push its members to think about how homelessness fits into the context of housing justice and to recognize that housing is a human right. While equity is one piece of this in terms of who is becoming homeless and the tools being used to prioritize people for housing, a justice focus means ensuring that people attach to housing, remain stably housed, and are connected to the community and the support they need. As a result, Funders Together is now focused on moving the conversation from an equity framing to a justice framing.

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## **FUTURE GOALS**

One of Funders Together's future goals is to continue to build its racial equity muscle so that embedding racial equity in everything it does becomes an automatic response. From a programmatic lens, staff is conscious about ensuring that they are incorporating racial equity into their conversations and that they are centering the voices of people of color with lived expertise into their programming. They would like to get to the point that this reflective thinking is built into their internal processes so that if new staff members join the organization and examine process documents for designing programming they would see this written out, both as a value and as an approach to framing conversations or inviting speakers, etc. Secondly, in terms of building the capacity of the organization, there is more learning that the staff needs to do about the history of structural racism, current policies, and how to transform those. This continued growth will help to guide their programming. As Chan shared, there is both personal growth in terms of the learning they have to do as individuals and there is also the work to put this into practice and institutionalize it in their processes and values so that it lives on beyond the current staff and leadership.

From a policy perspective, one of the priorities for the organization in 2020 was the upcoming election and identifying policy priorities to make public in partnership with its board and national advocacy partners. Funders Together had planned to be very explicit about the racial equity implications of those policies. While this is still important, as a result of COVID-19 and the fact that it is a leader in the field to both philanthropy and housing and homelessness, Funders Together is focusing on getting people to prioritize racial equity in their response and reimagining of systems. Staff sees a clear need for a leader in this space to work with philanthropy to influence their communities to consider how they are reaching those most impacted. This will continue to be their future focus.

Funders Together would also like to push philanthropy towards not just thinking about racial equity but thinking about racial justice and what that looks like. Even before the George Floyd murder, this was a priority for Funders Together. Its *Commitment to Racial Equity* mentions the importance of centering people of color with lived expertise and staff see this as the moment for funders to lean into these values and change the way they approach their grantmaking so that those who are most impacted are driving decisions. This is also true in terms of advocacy and policy work. They want funders to ensure that people of color with lived expertise are the ones driving policy changes.

Additionally, they would like to see funders using this moment to convince their boards or senior leadership that racial equity and racial justice work needs to drive grantmaking strategy and that they should be shifting power to those who have historically not held that power. Funders Together has already started to see some movement happening around this in the work to end youth and young adult homelessness and centering youth of color and LGBTQ youth in advocacy work. Some of this was happening before COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd. Staff is anxious to continue to move that work forward and to help showcase how to shift power to other populations experiencing homelessness. During one of their recent FRE virtual convenings, there was a discussion about the number of grants that have been switched to operating support and how funders are focused on making grantmaking processes easier. Some asked why this is not the norm. Funders Together staff hope that this is the start of more conversations about how to live the values of equity and justice and would like to see these types of questions and conversations continue to grow during this time.

As part of Funders Together's strategic planning process staff are also conducting interviews with members and partners, which will determine the next phase of racial equity work with their members. They anticipate that members who have been part of FRE will continue to meet and work together in some capacity as their communities of practice are always designed to be learning to action journeys and FRE is beginning to have discussions around what they can create to advance the field. Additionally, Funders Together is planning to have some members from the first cohort of FRE serve as mentors or peer coaches for the second cohort.

Given Funders Together's commitment to embedding racial equity into all its programming, it will continue to move members forward. In its next phase of work, Funders Together will focus even more on ensuring that members understand and are equipped to push racial justice in their policy and advocacy work. Additionally, staff will continue to offer racial equity programming that covers the basics for those at an early stage, while still offering more advanced conversations.

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## REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

In reflecting on their racial equity journey, staff emphasized that creating a commitment to racial equity and making it public has been an important part of their journey. Revamping their mission and vision statement and creating their Commitment to Racial Equity was crucial to their work because it provided them with a North Star that they could point to, even during this challenging time, to explain their actions. It has helped internally to guide their responses and their policy work. It has also served as a guide for their partners and other funders who can highlight the *Commitment* and explain why it is important to center racial equity not just in response to the current crisis but also in long-term recovery efforts. As a result of its public commitment, Funders Together members understand that it will continue to prioritize racial equity throughout all its programming, assistance, and guidance in response to COVID-19, and with a long-term strategy to redesign systems. With the response to COVID-19, often a focus on racial equity has taken a backseat for some organizations and therefore having a public commitment is even more important during a crisis. While it took time for Funders Together to get to a public statement, this is a critical step for PSOs who are looking to center racial equity in their work.

**The muscle that is required to do this work consistently is not built in a matter of a couple of years or through one or two programs, it takes practice.**

In thinking about programming, it is important to have a dedicated group of people that can learn together about racial equity and use each other as a sounding board in order for racial equity work to move forward. FRE is an example of this. Those in FRE have valued the community that has allowed them to turn to each other for peer support, to share strategies around how to move their senior leadership, and to discuss current issues that they are dealing with internally in their organizations. However, it is also important to bring the broader membership along on the journey. Funders Together has prioritized sharing the racial equity programming and lessons learned within the FRE cohort with the broader membership. Funders Together has offered webinars that have been open to all members and even those that were required for FRE were open to all members. Moving forward, staff plans to be more intentional about sharing the conversations that are happening within FRE with the broader membership.

For PSOs just beginning a racial equity journey, an important lesson that Funders Together has learned is that the work of racial equity and racial justice takes a long time. The muscle that is required to do this work consistently is not built in a matter of a couple of years or through one or two programs, it takes practice. Funders Together found that with the COVID-19 crisis, the first instinct of many communities was to focus on operationalizing a response, but the muscle to pause and analyze the racial equity implications of these decisions was still weak. After time had passed there was more recognition of the need to be cognizant of racial inequities and how certain decisions perpetuate those inequities. Funders Together's North Star is to build the muscle of not just funders but also communities so that racial equity is not an afterthought or pushed aside when there is a national crisis.

One of the challenges that Andere shared in reflecting on their journey was around leadership in the field. She noted that most PSOs serve in a very specific role of leading the field of philanthropy and many PSOs also work closely with their members' grantee partners. Funders Together has found itself in the unique position of leading the field around racial equity not just in philanthropy but also in the housing and homelessness field. As a result, people in the housing and homelessness field turn to them frequently for advice. Initially, they were unsure if that would be the appropriate role for them or that they would have the capacity to serve in that manner. However, they also felt an obligation to the field of housing and homelessness overall. This has created an interesting dynamic for the organization. While they have been able to use the strength and power of funders to center racial equity and bring others to the table, they are also aware of the tension that exists when a PSO is leading and working with grantee partners and giving advice to people who are trying to influence the field. In this respect, they have been fortunate that philanthropy has been ahead of some of their grantee partners but Funders Together has been mindful of its role within philanthropy. Andere said she continues to grapple daily with how to use their power and influence constructively.