

## Advancing Equity in Grantmaking Request for Proposals (RFP)

### SUMMARY

Through its Spring 2021 grant cycle, the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham is launching the Advancing Equity RFP, which aims to address racial disparities and build the capacity of Black nonprofit leaders and organizations working to build and sustain Black communities. This RFP is rooted in the Foundation's vision of a *just, prosperous and unified region where every person is empowered to reach their full potential*. It addresses two of the Foundation's equity goals:

- Increase program focus on and funding for equity and inclusion, with a particular focus on racial equity and justice
- Ensure more diverse, under-represented community members are involved in grant review processes

The Foundation is partnering with the Birmingham Change Fund, an African-American giving circle housed at the Foundation, to implement this RFP. See details below on eligibility and how to apply.

### BACKGROUND

In 2019, The Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham launched a new strategic plan centered on five strategic priorities: Thriving Communities, Regional Cooperation, Overcoming Persistent Poverty, Equity and Inclusion, and Economic Opportunity for All. The Foundation committed to equity and inclusion as both a grantmaking priority and a crosscutting value for the organization, informed by input from across our region. In 2020, Foundation board and staff undertook a planning process to bring this value forward into all aspects of our work. At the same time, as the COVID-19 pandemic took root, we pivoted our grantmaking to support our community's most urgent needs, and we saw the painful impacts of racial inequity on communities of color brought into bold relief. This year of hard truths, and our focus on equity and inclusion, led the Community Foundation to do considerable thinking around how to make the greatest impact through our grantmaking.

A recent report from The Bridgespan Group and Echoing Green relates a troubling fact: Black-led organizations have 24% less average revenue and average unrestricted net assets that are 76% lower than organizations with white leadership. This point is reiterated by Susan Taylor Batten, CEO of the Association of Black Foundation Executives (ABFE) who states, "our organizations are underfunded and for that reason have smaller staffs, smaller budgets, and little to no operating reserves". In the Community Foundation's own surveys conducted during the COVID crisis, we found that smaller

organizations and organizations led by people of color have had a harder time securing funding, face steeper revenue declines, and are at higher risk of having to substantially scale back services all while having to maintain steady or expanded levels of service. In just one example from the CFGB survey data, three times as many organizations led by African-Americans saw revenue declines at least 50% greater than White-led organizations in 2020.

We believe that addressing these disparities requires us to be intentional and strategic in our approach. As a part of our ongoing research around how philanthropy is engaging these issues, we looked to other foundations that have established special RFPs and funds and found some common themes that helped inform our thinking:

1. **Those most affected by an issue should be central to creating the solutions.** It is critical to support and strengthen leaders who are close to their communities and the challenges they face. As Darren Walker, CEO of the Ford Foundation, notes, “communities most proximate to the problems possess unique insight into the solutions. That is why, in everything we do, we ought to ensure that the people affected by our work are guaranteed a voice in its design and implementation”. When we support organizations led by people of color and rooted in the communities that they serve, we are supporting solutions from those with lived experience. When we ensure more people of color are involved in grant review processes, we bring more depth of perspective and experience to the table in addressing the needs of communities of color. These steps also open the door to more innovative solutions. A foundation leader quoted in the above referenced report puts it this way: “If we are going to make progress on persistent, complex social challenges, we need the best ideas from everyone. The capital gaps for leaders of color means we are missing out on too many great ideas and too much talent.”
2. **Building capacity and infrastructure is essential** if we want to drive the changes that build thriving communities and shift deep-rooted inequities. A recent article by Community Wealth Partners cited a Meyer Foundation study showing that ‘investments in capacity produced positive, long-term financial results for grantees, regardless of the type of capacity-building grants provided’. As stated by Tiffany Turner-Allen in an article for Nonprofit Quarterly, “If you want to support Black-led nonprofits, focus on capacity building and infrastructure. Do the work to find the hidden gems doing good and not [only] well in their communities. Transform your thinking.” It is important to fund good projects, but it is not enough. We should aim to build the resources, capacities, and connections for those organizations to thrive.

With this in mind, the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham will set aside a portion of Cycle 1 2021 competitive grant dollars for this new RFP designed to strengthen the capacity of Black-led organizations, increase self-efficacy, and improve the conditions that affect Black communities. This RFP will be the primary vehicle of the Foundation’s grant making for our Spring 2021 grant cycle under the Equity and Inclusion priority.

## SCOPE

The intent of this RFP is to identify innovative, community-based organizations in the greater Birmingham region that are led by African-Americans and primarily serve the Black community. Particularly, we are interested in providing funding and resources to those organizations working to improve the conditions that affect Black communities.

Grant funding uses may include:

- Operating support for projects/programs
- New or pilot programs
- Expansion of existing programs
- Capacity building and/or infrastructure support

## ELIGIBILITY

Eligible organizations must be Black-led, with additional preference given to those meeting at least two of the following criteria:

- Organizational leadership is greater than or equal to 51% Black.
- Board of Directors membership is greater than or equal to 51% Black.
- Constituents and/or community served is greater than or equal to 51% Black.

## HOW TO APPLY

- This RFP will be part of our regular grant cycle, but applicants will apply under the Equity and Inclusion priority and complete a special application. Please submit applications through CFGB's grant online application portal [here](#).
- Applicants may submit an optional video to share more about their organization, project, program, or other need that is the focus of the funding request. Creativity is encouraged.
- Applications are due by **March 26, 2021**. Grants will be awarded at the end of May 2021.
- The use of a fiscal sponsor from a non-Black organization is allowed, consistent with the fiscal sponsor rules in the competitive grant guidelines (see below).
- All CFGB competitive grant guidelines apply unless otherwise specified – see guidelines [here](#).
- Please direct questions about your application to Quang Do at [gdo@cfbham.org](mailto:gdo@cfbham.org).