

on opportunities to try new approaches to grantmaking. Our board of trustees enthusiastically agreed to launch a rapid response fund in early 2017 for immigrants and refugees impacted by federal policy changes. Embracing such work required a streamlined approach to decision-making, which is different from our 70-year pattern. Together, with three other funders in Oregon, we were able to establish the Oregon Immigrant & Refugee Funders Collaborative⁵ to align our funding and reduce barriers for community-based organizations.

Also pushing our boundaries is the launch of a new initiative, several components of which were first imagined during our equity planning three years ago. Led by our new community engagement fellow, this initiative will provide multi-year operating grants and technical assistance to small and emerging organizations in communities of color, including those rooted in immigrant and refugee communities, disability and deaf communities and LGBTQ communities in Oregon. The work will be guided by a community advisory committee – the first ever for The Collins Foundation – that will help steer the process, select the program participants and make funding recommendations to our board of trustees.

These steps toward learning, growth and experimentation have value in their own right: They are deepening our relationships with Oregon's diverse communities and making our grants more responsive to ever-evolving needs on the ground. At the same time, they are building habits of openness and flexibility within the foundation that will serve us well when we welcome the next generation of community trustees.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Our responsive grantmaking and our processes are evolving, too, with new opportunities for adaptation consistently showing up.

Because we anticipate our new community trustees will also be working full-time and juggling multiple responsibilities, we recently disrupted yet another tradition – the expectation that trustees will read every grant proposal in its entirety, of which there are nearly 40 every two months. By authorizing staff to make funding recommendations on smaller applications, the trustees will shift to reading only the summary write-ups on smaller requests. And, with less time dedicated to reviewing individual applications in board meetings, there will be more opportunity for shared learning, community engagement and strategic discussions.

This change grew out of an increasingly collaborative staff-review process, which itself began evolving as we welcomed new staff members with diverse perspectives and experiences.

THE WAY FORWARD

Today, The Collins Foundation is an evolving organization with a long history behind it, a blossoming of fresh ideas and a willingness to grow and

change. But none of this would have been possible without hours dedicated to discerning our values, questioning our traditions, looking for growth opportunities and learning how to embrace difference.

One piece of advice, in particular, lingers from that 2016 retreat with non-profit leaders: The foundation should think of welcoming new board members not as a final destination, but as part of our continued growth and evolution.

While the pursuit of equity at The Collins Foundation is well underway, there is no doubt that the next generation of trustees will be influential in further defining what this pursuit looks like for a general-purpose family foundation committed to responsive and equitable grantmaking in the 21st century. ■

Cynthia Addams is CEO and Colin Jones is grants manager at The Collins Foundation, a 70-year-old family foundation in Portland, Oregon.

Notes

1. View the report at http://gosw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ORDiversity1Q_single-pages_web.pdf.
2. Download the report at <http://www.coalitioncommunitiescolor.org/research-and-publications/cccpilanthropyinoregon>.
3. View The Collins Foundation's diversity, equity and inclusion plan at <http://www.collinsfoundation.org/diversity-equity-inclusion-plan>.
4. Learn more at <https://www.umoj.org/newsdetail/new-lgbtq-advocacy-coordinator-ready-for-spirits-to-be-stirred-11121538>.
5. Learn more about the Immigrant & Refugee Funders Collaborative and its submission guidelines at <http://www.collinsfoundation.org/submission-guidelines/immigrant-refugee-funders-collaborative>.

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