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Amber W. Brown of Coastal Community Foundation discusses the kick-off questions for Sharing Power from the Power Moves toolkit. Photo by Adam Chandler.



Equity isn't a declaration, it's a purpose that drives action

By Amber W. Brown

Coastal Community Foundation is located along and serves the coast of South Carolina. With more than \$300 million dollars in assets, CCF is among the top 100 community foundations in the nation. With a mission to create vibrant communities by uniting people and investing resources, CCF awards nearly \$20 million in grants each year.

"Power is the ability to achieve a purpose. Whether or not it is good or bad depends upon the purpose."

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Coastal Community Foundation's (CCF) devotion to equity came the hard way. After acknowledging the sordid history of slavery in Charleston, South Carolina, we were acutely reminded of its lasting effects with the Mother Emanuel Massacre in 2015.

At the time, the foundation's main office stood 2 miles away from Mother Emanuel AME, a church co-founded by slavery uprising leader Denmark Vesey. In response to news of the massacre, the foundation and board immediately

committed to making strides in our communities (and within our own walls) to address racial and other forms of injustice.

In 2018, when we were invited by NCRP to consider piloting a new toolkit that focused on equity with a peer-learning group of funders, we jumped at the opportunity to measure our progress on the equity goals to which we had devoted ourselves.

It was not until we partnered with NCRP that *(continued on page 9)*



challenging grantmakers
to strengthen communities

Equity isn't a declaration, it's a purpose that drives action

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we genuinely thought about how effectively the foundation exerts power to accomplish our objectives. Like many other community foundations, CCF aims to solve tough, long-standing problems including affordable places and inclusive spaces, education and economic opportunities in our region.

Today's political and social climate makes it more important than ever to ensure our work helps, not hinders, efforts to make significant progress to mitigate inequity. As such, we've committed to championing transparency and accessibility. In a sense, equity has become our purpose.

Over the last decade, philanthropy has shifted towards practicing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). For some, identifying equity's importance as the cornerstone of our endeavors has been more than a passing phase.

Our field also recognizes the limitations we have in being able to effectively measure our progress towards such invaluable efforts. NCRP's *Power Moves* guide has served as a mechanism to fill that very void, particularly as it's designed for foundations who desire to exercise the power they possess to create change.

It is intended for any grantmaker who cares about under-resourced communities and wants to more effectively advance justice and equity. It benefits funders who value community engagement and want deeper partnerships to achieve community-centered solutions.

I've found *Power Moves* to be unique in 2 ways: First, it identifies the link between power, privilege and equitable outcomes and, second, it is grounded in honest feedback from a foundations' grantees, peers and other stakeholders.

WHY WE DECIDED TO FOCUS ON SHARING POWER

How do you address power with your stakeholders when your stakeholders

are the entire community? Not without mistakes.

The piloting work began with the foundation's Grantmaking and Community Leadership (GCL) department in July 2018. We initiated a facilitated discussion process to identify the foundation's involvement in *Power Moves*.

We took on the kick-off questions in each section to help familiarize ourselves, while also evaluating our own practices.

Each week we took an hour to talk about power and how we exhibit, or want to exhibit, the characteristics found in the toolkit for building, sharing and wielding power.

While we found value in each power dimension, we knew we could only focus

on 1 at a time. Using an anonymous ballot process, the GCL team unanimously voted to pursue the Sharing Power section of the *Power Moves* toolkit.

Our decision was based on the need to challenge ourselves while realizing the limitations we had at the time.

We found that we'd done a lot of the work suggested in Building Power with a recently completed series of community-based conversations, and, although Wielding Power is where we wanted to be, we weren't quite ready for that body of work without having to strengthen the relationships we have with our stakeholders.

Sharing Power was a happy medium where there were things left to be accomplished, but we weren't starting from scratch either. We'd thought we'd done the hardest part.

WANT TO IMPLEMENT POWER MOVES SUCCESSFULLY? START WITH YOUR BOARD.

Making a declaration that something is so does not in fact make it so. We learned this lesson as soon as our *Power Moves* work was expanded outside of our small department. Our goal was to embed *Power Moves* into the foundation's overall culture as a tool we use to measure the success of our DEI work.

This couldn't be just a "grantmaking thing" if we wanted our endeavor to be successful. We quickly brought in the remaining foundation departments. We held a staff kickoff where we explained the toolkit and conducted a group discussion based on the Sharing Power discussion questions.

And from there, we asked for volunteers for a team to create and administer internal and external stakeholder surveys and analyze the data. We had an ambitious goal to get the internal data collection kicked off the next week.

However, we didn't have nearly as much interest from other departments

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EXAMPLES OF CCF PRACTICE CHANGES RELATED TO BUILDING, SHARING AND WIELDING POWER

- After analyzing its last 3 years of grants, and learning that CCF was not providing as much support as intended to rural organizations, toward groups led by people of color and for general operations, the foundation set targets in these areas, changed the questions asked in its applications, changed the way it does site visits, and changed the way it trains grants committees. At the next 3-year mark, CCF will measure progress again.
- With 60% of assets being donor-advised, CCF's development team has used *Power Moves* to inform how it engages donors where they are, to help them move them along a continuum of thinking about the impact of their grantmaking. Through individual 1 on 1 conversations between stewardship officers and donors, as well as larger donor gatherings, CCF is being more intentional about bringing diverse perspectives into donor learning on particular topics. And donors have started thinking about their philanthropy in a different way.
- CCF has examined its vendor policy with an equity lens and committed to specific benchmarks and milestones for hiring and procurement. CCF has challenged its auditors and investment managers about their diversity policies and practices.
- The foundation board has adopted a policy agenda in partnership with stakeholders. Based on community input, CCF is prioritizing education, access to opportunity and community engagement in its policy stances.

to get involved as we'd wanted. It had become a "grantmaking thing." Some staff felt they didn't really have anything to contribute to this process although it sounded interesting.

Some of our leadership felt that the commitment was too great for the bandwidth the foundation had available at the time, resulting in several staff being denied the opportunity to participate. *Power Moves* was described as another boiling pot being placed on a full stove. This perception was extremely problematic given that we didn't want this to be something additional; rather, *Power Moves* was something that needed to be embedded across the foundation. Our communication strategy had failed to deliver that message despite the GCL team's best efforts. It was at that moment that we realized our biggest mistake: We hadn't started with the board.

In September, we introduced *Power Moves* to our department's board committee and began a 4-month long discussion series. We delved into their engagement with the foundation and

how *Power Moves* could strategically advance our equity efforts.

From there, the board committee introduced *Power Moves* to the full board, and we began to set it as a priority for the foundation. Now the committee chairman, who is our incoming board chair, carries the *Power Moves* glossary and infographic with him as a touchstone.

In retrospect, had we introduced the concept to the board first, it would have been much easier to emphasize its importance to staff and leadership as a strategic growth opportunity.

INTEGRATING POWER MOVES INTO OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Despite our staff capacity obstacles, we persisted with data collection into the fall of 2018. We asked all staff to complete an anonymous survey about the power dynamics internal to the foundation, and we sent out an external survey to grantees, prospective grantees and applicants who'd previously been denied grant funding.

Shortly after receiving and review-



Coastal Community Foundation staff discuss the kick-off questions for *Sharing Power* from the *Power Moves* toolkit. Photo by Adam Chandler.

ing the internal data, we began to focus on the power structures at play within the foundation's walls. The results revealed that we had a communication problem, and the staff experience varied greatly from person to person. We'd been living inequitably, while pushing for equity externally. It was clear that we needed to get every department involved and focused on rectifying our own power imbalances.

In my opinion, our greatest struggle came with deciding how to integrate *Power Moves* into other departments. As written, the toolkit seems to focus primarily on the power of grantmaking and doesn't directly tackle the power other departments hold.

To help remedy the disconnect, we hosted a series of discussions and road mapping activities with each department. *Power Moves* provides a roadmap for each dimension of power that leads toward equitable habits.

With the original in mind, we developed roadmaps based on a series of internally created discussion questions designed to identify ways that each department can engage in sharing power.

These hour-long discussions left each team with the ability to identify their power as individuals, as well as a team, and provided us with a holistic view of the gaps in our equity pursuit. I evaluated each of the discussion notes for patterns, missed opportunities and ways for staff to feel the importance of their engagement.

At the completion of the analysis, the operations, finance and development departments, as well as the foundation's management team, left with a roadmap to guide their *Power Moves* involvement for the coming year.

It wasn't until then that our journey with power truly began. Equipped with a guiding document, each department was tasked with coming up with tactical plans for acknowledging power and

instilling equity into their work.

As an effort to solidify the importance and reward the dedication it takes to accomplish the objectives, we've embedded our progress into the foundation's strategic goals for the year.

A mere 18 months later, we are halfway through our first year of implementing *Power Moves* across departments. Our areas of focus include:

- Undertaking a culture evaluation.
- Increasing effective communications amongst staff.
- Developing a transparent budgeting process.
- Expanding the geographical diversity of our place-based impact investment recipients.
- Opening a consistent feedback loop for our grant partners.

We are, by no means, near the end of this journey and are sure to make more mistakes. Nonetheless, *Power Moves* has influenced the way we approach our everyday work. It has informed our DEI policies, communication strategies, our strategic framework and the way we engage with donors and community partners.

But even in our journey for equity we've yet to address everything that we can. Our focus has been primarily internal, initially, and we still have work to do with external stakeholders as we continue to move forward.

Grant partners want to hear more from the foundation and to engage in more training opportunities. Our work is ongoing and *Power Moves* will serve as a focus area for years to come. After all, equity cannot be declared as done; it can only be a purpose driver. ■

Amber W. Brown is program officer at the Coastal Community Foundation and has led much of the foundation's equity-oriented work with Power Moves.

New and Renewing Members

Advancement Project California
Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice
Barr Foundation
Capital & Main
Carnegie Corporation of New York
Chorus Foundation
CommonWealth Kitchen
The Conservation Fund: Resourceful Communities
David Rockefeller Fund
Daphne Foundation
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
Faith in Action
Field Foundation of Illinois
Foundation for Child Development
Foundation for a Just Society
General Service Foundation
Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Hull Family Foundation
ImmSchools
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
Latino Union of Chicago
Lawrence Foundation
The Libra Foundation
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation
Melville Charitable Trust
Mendelsohn Family Fund
Metro IAF
Meyer Memorial Trust
Mizrahi Family Foundation
The Nathan Cummings Foundation
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
New York Foundation
NEO Philanthropy
Norman Foundation
Ohio Voice
Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Rosenberg Foundation
Sandler Foundation
Southwest Organizing Project
Tarbell Family Foundation
Tennessee Justice Center
Wallace Global Fund
Weingart Foundation
Women's Foundation of Rhode Island