

Barr Foundation Moves from "Diversity" to "Targeted Universalism"

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On the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) blog, Pat Brandes, the executive director of the Barr Foundation, points to a question from a Boston Globe article: "How much does race still matter around here?" To explore the question, she starts with a report from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council called "The State of Equity in Metro-Boston," a report on regional indicators funded by the Barr Foundation. The indicators are intended to be benchmarks for measuring Boston's social equity progress within the context of the region's MetroFuture growth plan to guide the region through 2030.

Barr is one of a handful of grantmaking foundations in the U.S. that has adopted a lens of structural racism for understanding issues of race. A focus on structural racism is different than the more typical foundation concern with racial diversity, and to highlight the issue, she cites a fact from a Boston Globe article written about the equity report: "The one the article focused on most is that, in Greater Boston, a college-educated black woman is more likely to have a low-birth-weight baby than a white woman who didn't finish high school." Her point is that most readers would think "education and social class [are] supposed to erase these kinds of disparities," but structural racism can mean that even with a "universal" prescription such as education, the results can turn out differently based on race. When interventions, resources, and solutions lead to disparate impacts based on race, something structural is afoot. Racial animus is not necessary for results that lead to structurally disparate racial results.

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