

Funding transformation through racial healing

By Jeanné Isler

It's rare that a funder will unabashedly express a grand vision of transforming the nation, but that is what the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) did with its Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (TRHT) effort. The WKKF, and the recent recipients of TRHT grants, believe that racial healing is a key component to such transformation.

WKKF defines racial healing as: "To heal is to restore to wholeness; to repair damage; and to set right. Healing a societal racial divide requires recognition of the need to acknowledge the wrongs of the past, while addressing the consequences of those wrongs."¹

For more than 10 years, WKKF has invested \$200 million into organizations working to eradicate structural bias in their communities. The America Healing initiative was a key component of this investment, supporting research on unconscious bias, expanding racial equity movement efforts, exploring how communication can influence perceptions and behaviors, creating a movement for racial equity, and solidifying a network of civil rights and racial justice organizations.

WKKF staff see TRHT as a natural next step to America Healing. "We are very optimistic that these leaders and communities will do the hard work needed to succeed in the transformation they seek," said La June Montgomery Tabron, president and CEO of WKKF.

Dr. Gail Christopher, senior advisor and vice president for TRHT, explained that this is a long-term, broad-based, multi-sectoral effort, informed and in-

fluenced by several truth and reconciliation efforts from around the world. TRHT aims to transform our culture, moving beyond simple conversations about race and ethnicity to acknowledge our humanity, confront patterns that are persistent barriers to success and heal old wounds.

In 2016, WKKF worked with 176 leaders and scholars to develop a framework that communities can use to implement a TRHT process. In June 2017, it awarded grants to 14 regions totaling about \$24 million.² The investments range from approximately \$1.5 to \$4 million, and implementation lasts two to five years.

For each site, voluntary representatives from a variety of sectors, e.g., philanthropy, business, grassroots activists and media, came together to develop an implementation plan to pursue efforts in two pillars: narrative change, and racial healing and relationship building.

Healing circles, which are facilitated conversations in which participants share their experiences and beliefs about race and racism in diverse groups, are a core component of these efforts. Each place also chooses to pursue action and change in at least one of the three other areas within the TRHT framework in which racism manifests itself: separation (e.g., housing), the law and the economy.

TRHT is a collective funder organizing effort that seeks to empower those who are willing to be bold and lofty in shifting the narrative of racial hierarchy.

So, I asked leaders from three of the sites to tell me about how they are

implementing TRHT and how racial healing advances their goals to end systemic racism in their communities.

LOUISIANA: MOVING BEYOND CRISIS MODE AND "US VERSUS THEM"

Alfredo Cruz, vice president of programs and special initiatives at the Foundation for Louisiana, said the motivation for their work is the need to change the reality for people of color and other minorities who have been underrepresented in every aspect of power in the state. But nothing will change unless tackled through a racial equity lens, and such change requires racial healing – and that healing will need to take place in Louisiana communities and within the many organizations working to improve outcomes in the state.

For example, soon after Cruz started working at the Foundation for Louisiana, which was founded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to do disaster recovery, he realized that staff members were still operating in crisis mode. Ensuring that his colleagues are healing helps them to be more effective.

Additionally, John Pierre, professor at Southern University Law Center and Baton Rouge contact for the Louisiana TRHT, noted that people are isolated and entrenched in an "us versus them" worldview, not realizing how public policies can make all of us vulnerable. TRHT helps educate people about how policies affect each of us.

The plan for the first year includes diversifying the advisory committee.

Greater New Orleans Foundation is a partner, and though the Baton Rouge Area Foundation is not a formal partner, they invest in related work. Other partners to include are the people in the region who have already been leading racial healing activities.

There also is a long list of projects and ideas that need to be evaluated and prioritized in future years such as legal clinics for undocumented residents and programs that improve access to economic opportunities for young people. These projects will be concrete examples of what a changed narrative around race looks like in the state.

DALLAS: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BEING CALLED IN

The Embrey Family Foundation is a small foundation that has long focused on social justice, but racial equity is relatively new for them. Lauren Embrey and other leaders at the foundation wanted to bring the Facing Race conference to Dallas, but they realized they had to prepare their community for it first, so they created Dallas Faces Race in 2013.

“[We’re] not a big strategy house; [we’re] led and run by women who rely on intuition to tell us what is right,” said Diane Hosey, who handles philanthropic outreach for the foundation. “Philanthropy has been called in, and we need to respond. It’s the definition of philanthropy, and it’s our responsibility.”

Dallas Faces Race creates awareness building and training for nonprofit leaders to focus on racial equity by hosting dialogues within their organizations. They expected 20 partners, but more than 300 organizations have signed up. Over time they realized that conversation alone will not have a systemic impact.

When five Dallas police officers were shot and killed in a July 2016 mass shooting, their Dallas Faces Race program officer at Embrey was inundated with calls from the community. More funders got involved, including

the Communities Foundation of Texas, which is the fiscal sponsor and key thought partner for the TRHT grant. By the time Embrey sent the formal request to WKKF, five other funders cosigned the invitation letter.

Joli Robinson, manager in the office of community affairs at the Dallas Police Department, and David Lozano, executive artistic director of Cara Mia Theater, are the co-chairs of the Dallas TRHT.

Everyone must go through racial healing – not just “those in need,” said Lozano. Foundations, simply by their giving pattern, can define a narrative of what and who is important. Communities would typically adapt their narratives to fit the funder. He sees the transformative opportunity of people of color leading funders in narrative change and believes that doing it in this context can translate to empowering people of color in the larger society.

Robinson and Lozano agree that funders’ work is primarily to listen, which can create a paradigm shift and change the power imbalance. By engaging in healing circles and building relationships in their workgroup, community people can start to lead the conversation instead of funders. Lozano asserted that the pace of TRHT in Dallas feels slow, but they want to ensure they have a strong foundation for the work that needs to be done.

BUFFALO: A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

Clotilde Dedecker, president and CEO of Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, believes that institutions are built on people and racial healing brings the work to individuals. To the extent that individuals in institutions can understand the lived reality and trauma of systemic racism, they will follow through with equitable changes. In 2006, the board prioritized increasing racial/ethnic equity in the Buffalo region. After several successes, they said they wanted to do more and, in 2013, invested a year exploring what “more” looks like.

They invited Christopher to speak to a roundtable of 32 leaders from diverse sectors about the economic case for racial equity. The foundation made the case for narrative change with indicators of inequity and local data about the economic case to close the gaps. The hope is to “open the mind, heart and institutional will to drive systems change.”

The Buffalo TRHT seeks to offer authentic, asset-based alternative narratives to the dominant narratives around inequity. The foundation staff and roundtable participated in healing circles and are now training religious leaders and facilitators to build local capacity to host circles for others in the region. They also hosted a racial equity impact analysis *(continued on page 11)*



Photo courtesy of W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

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URGENT NEEDS IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

Systems and structures – in the South and in the LGBTQ movement – are changing. The Out in the South Fund, a project of Funders for LGBTQ Issues, has embarked on a multi-year project to increase LGBTQ funding among Southern grantmakers and Southern funding among LGBTQ funders. Southern institutions from hospitals to public universities are building out work and programs around LGBTQ issues, breaking a long silence.

But there is still the urgency of today and tomorrow. Tragically, more than half of the trans women of color who have been murdered to date in 2017 lived in the South.³ The prevalence of HIV rates among gay and bisexual men in the South, especially men of color, dramatically outpaces other regions of the country.⁴ Across Southern school districts, transgender children live without district-level policies that protect their rights under Title IX.⁵ You can still be fired for being LGBTQ in most Southern states.⁶

PAY IT FORWARD TO FUND THE FRONTLINES

Simply put, we need to get more funding into the hands of grassroots LGBTQ organizers across the South, and we need to do so as quickly as possible.

Established 501(c)(3) LGBTQ organizations in the South are well-positioned to lead an effort to fund grassroots work; we encourage more to do so. A quick glance at financials shows that if the six largest LGBTQ organizations in the region were to begin tithing at 10 percent to support grassroots work, it would release almost \$1 million into the region annually.

There's a moral case for doing so: Getting resources to where they are most urgently (continued on page 14)

tool training for 54 major employers and government organizations, so they can understand the forces and policies that led to current conditions. Finally, the foundation is convening five public-private partnerships focused on systems change around key issues.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

Despite the optimism surrounding TRHT from grant recipients, there are some serious hurdles:

- Criticism that TRHT strategies, specifically racial healing, are not systemic.
- People and institutions enter at different stages of capacity and will. Cruz shared the challenge of bridging two cities in Louisiana with similar racial inequity but very different cultures. Louisiana communities are segregated, and everyone wrestles with the fact that they have to work together with people they didn't choose. Hosey acknowledged fear around racial healing work across divides, especially in the south. Dedecker and Robinson noted that people in power don't always understand the conditions and effects of racism, and it hinders decision-making with an equity lens.
- Lozano mentioned the power that funders wield and the complexity of funders leading this work in their communities. Many people, often under-resourced, have been doing racial healing work at the grassroots level for years. Foundations who are leading TRHT work could reinforce the power dynamics overlook people already doing healing work.

The work of TRHT is a long journey. The funders who are leading TRHT initiatives offered advice for other funders who want to do such work.

- Show courage and leverage your relationships to get people into the room.
- Learn from those most affected by problems in your communities and iterate your practices and behaviors accordingly.
- Shifting the understanding of people in systems, including grantmaking institutions, is a part of shifting the systems themselves.
- The work is urgent, but the work is a journey. Act with urgency that can be sustained, not panic that will dissipate.
- Start from where you are, with a coalition of the willing.

Funders who are genuinely interested in transforming systemic causes of inequity in their community, especially systemic racism, can use their leadership to support healing the trauma that prevents us from collectively moving forward. ■

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Notes

1. W.K. Kellogg Foundation, "TRHT Implementation Guide," <http://www.racialequityresourceguide.org/TRHT-Summit>.
2. The TRHT sites are: 1. State of Alaska; 2. Baton Rouge, Louisiana; 3. New Orleans; 4. Buffalo, New York; 5. Chicago; 6. Dallas; 7. Los Angeles; 8. Richmond, Virginia; 9. Selma, Alabama; 10. Saint Paul, Minnesota; 11. Battle Creek, Michigan; 12. Flint, Michigan; 13. Kalamazoo, Michigan; and 14. Lansing, Michigan.