

# PROCEEDINGS

# From the First Annual Researcher/Practitioner Forum

## The State of Research on Diversity in Philanthropy

El Pomar Foundation,  
Colorado Springs, Colorado  
September 27–28, 2007

Convened by  
Council on Foundations  
ARNOVA  
The Foundation Center



COUNCIL *on* FOUNDATIONS



ARNOVA

Association for Research  
on Nonprofit Organizations  
and Voluntary Action



FOUNDATION  
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Knowledge to build on.



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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report summarizes the discussions that took place at the first annual Researcher/Practitioner Forum which was held on September 27 and 28, 2007 at El Pomar Foundation's Penrose House conference facilities in Colorado Springs, CO. The Forum was co-sponsored by the Council on Foundations, ARNOVA and the Foundation Center and was made possible by a grant from the Lumina Foundation. The first annual Researcher/Practitioner Forum brought together 25 researchers and foundation representatives to discuss the state of research on diversity in philanthropy.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Council on Foundations, ARNOVA, and the Foundation Center wish to thank the Lumina Foundation for its support of the 2007 Researcher/Practitioner Forum and the Diversity in Philanthropy Project for its support of this publication. We would also like to thank Theo Gregory of the El Pomar Foundation for his hospitality in hosting the meeting, Joanne Scanlan for her vision in conceptualizing the Forum, Michael E. Cortès and Mary Ellen Capek for reviewing a draft version of the Proceedings, and Henry A.J. Ramos for help and support throughout the process of putting the Forum together. We also wish to acknowledge Steve Gunderson, president and CEO of the Council on Foundations, Stephen Rathgeb Smith, president of the ARNOVA board of directors, and Sara Engelhardt, president of the Foundation Center, whose leadership made this partnership possible. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the Forum participants and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Council on Foundations, ARNOVA, the Foundation Center, the Diversity in Philanthropy Project or the Lumina Foundation.

## ABOUT THE COUNCIL ON FOUNDATIONS

The Council on Foundations is a Washington, DC, area-based nonprofit membership association of more than 2,100 grantmaking foundations and corporations. The assets of Council members total more than \$282 billion. As the voice of philanthropy, the Council works to create an environment in which the movement can grow and thrive, and to provide Council members with the products and services they need to do their best work.

## ABOUT ARNOVA

Founded in 1971 as the Association of Voluntary Action Scholars, the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) is a neutral, open forum committed to strengthening the research community in the emerging field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies. ARNOVA brings together both theoretical and applied interests, helping scholars gain insight into the day-to-day concerns of third-sector organizations, while providing nonprofit professionals with research they can use to improve the quality of life for citizens and communities. Principal activities include an annual conference, publications, electronic discussions and special interest groups.

## ABOUT THE FOUNDATION CENTER

Established in 1956, and today supported by more than 600 foundations, the Foundation Center is the nation's leading authority on philanthropy, connecting nonprofits and the grantmakers supporting them to tools they can use and information they can trust. The Center maintains the most comprehensive database on U.S. grantmakers and their grants and conducts research on trends in foundation growth and giving. It also operates education and outreach programs that help nonprofit organizations obtain the resources they need. Its web site receives more than 54,000 visits each day, and thousands of people are served in its five regional learning centers and through its network of more than 370 Cooperating Collections located in every state and Puerto Rico. For more information, visit [foundationcenter.org](http://foundationcenter.org) or call (212) 620-4230.

Download Proceedings from the First Annual 2007 Researcher/Practitioner Forum on The State of Research on Diversity in Philanthropy at [foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/specialtrends](http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/specialtrends) or at [cof.org/files/Documents/Research/ResearcherPractitionerForum/RPPProceedings2007.pdf](http://cof.org/files/Documents/Research/ResearcherPractitionerForum/RPPProceedings2007.pdf).

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# FOREWORD

We are pleased to present in this report the proceedings from the first annual Researcher/Practitioner Forum that took place September 27–28, 2007 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, on the topic of diversity in philanthropy. The forum was sponsored by the Council on Foundations, the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), and the Foundation Center.

The purpose of the Researcher/Practitioner Forum is to provide an opportunity for grantmakers (practitioners) and researchers to exchange ideas on key issues in philanthropy in order to help focus and generate research that improves the quality and effectiveness of grantmaking. Participants are invited based on their background or experience with the topic or their expertise as a researcher.

Why the focus on diversity at this inaugural convening of the forum? Increasingly, conversations in the philanthropic sector are converging around two key questions: 1) What are the participation rates and career opportunities in the field for individuals with diverse backgrounds? 2) How is philanthropy addressing the needs of diverse communities? Field leaders are increasingly grappling with such slippery concepts as “diversity,” “effectiveness,” and “impact” and attempting to understand the relationships among them. (For a list of publications related to these issues and diversity in philanthropy, please see the Diversity in Philanthropy Bibliography, which is available online at [foundationcenter.org/getstarted/topical/diversity](http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/topical/diversity). This bibliography was prepared for and distributed at the Researcher/Practitioner Forum.)

Over one-and-a-half days, 25 key grantmakers and researchers met to identify and prioritize the types of research most needed by the field with respect to the topic of diversity in philanthropy. Through a series of guided conversations, the group reached consensus on four key areas in which it felt research is most needed and began devising specific research strategies for examining this issue. Those areas were:

1. What is the relationship between internal commitments and practices around diversity and the external impact or effectiveness of a foundation’s service to its community?
2. What are the cultural or institutional obstacles to change regarding inclusion? What kinds of leadership, strategies and practices help to institute and sustain change? Who are the leaders of foundations? Who leaves and who stays in foundation philanthropy?
3. What is the relationship of diversity to equality, power, and democracy? What is or has been the role of foundations relative to issues of diversity and equality in the larger society?
4. How well do foundations relate to external constituencies?

The structure of this report closely follows the meeting agenda, summarizing the results of each session in the sequence in which they took place. In structuring the report this way we hope to give you a sense not only of the outcomes of the meeting but of the process by which those outcomes were reached.

We wish to thank the Lumina Foundation for Education for providing the funding that made this forum possible. We also wish to thank the El Pomar Foundation for its generosity in hosting the meeting and the Diversity in Philanthropy Project for its financial assistance to publish and broadly disseminate the report that follows. We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Algernon Austin, former Assistant Director of Research at the Foundation Center, in recording the discussions at the forum and writing this report.

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# THE STATE OF RESEARCH ON DIVERSITY IN PHILANTHROPY

## Introduction

The first annual Researcher/Practitioner Forum, developed through a partnership among the Council on Foundations, the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), and the Foundation Center, was designed to do the following:

1. Facilitate a conversation between grantmakers and researchers on pressing issues facing the field related to the topic of diversity in philanthropy. (See Appendix A for a list of participants.)
2. Structure the discussion of how to define diversity so that differing definitions are efficiently heard and considered.
3. Provide grantmakers with an opportunity to describe to researchers the diversity issues on which they feel they most need research and data.
4. Prioritize the list of diversity issues for which research is most needed.
5. Provide researchers with an opportunity to suggest research strategies for addressing the diversity issues identified as most important by grantmakers.
6. Brainstorm mechanisms for moving the researcher/practitioner conversation forward on these issues.

To facilitate a conversation between grantmakers and researchers, we created a meeting agenda (see Appendix B) that alternated between large and small group discussions. In the large group discussions, we shared assumptions about the parameters of “diversity,” explored the range of issues that might be amenable to research, and worked to achieve consensus on top research priorities. In the small group discussions, we homed in on the specific research topics of greatest urgency and proposed strategies for conducting meaningful research on those topics.

In preparing for this convening, we recognized that the concept of diversity could lend itself to multiple agendas regarding both research and practice, and we were concerned that much time might be spent wrestling with just what diversity means to different people. To forestall this possibility, we asked participants to prepare written definitions of diversity, which were shared with the group in advance of the meeting. Those definitions were presented by each participant without elaboration or discussion during the first session of the forum. (See Appendix C for these definitions.) This allowed the group to acknowledge the range of definitions represented in the room, and to gain a sense of the degree of like-mindedness among participants. This process also highlighted the important point that diversity in philanthropy is, at minimum, a three-dimensional issue involving:

1. Diversity of individual backgrounds and perspectives
2. Diversity of organizational culture and practices
3. Diversity of organizational types and focus of activity

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**The precipitating idea for the Researcher/Practitioner Forum was to...improve the applicability of research to the needs of practitioners.**

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The precipitating idea for the Researcher/Practitioner Forum was to bring grantmakers and researchers into closer contact with each other in the hopes of improving the applicability of research to the needs of practitioners. Clearly, researchers operate within particular theoretical frameworks and schools of thought that shape their research agendas in ways that maximize the value of research from an academic perspective. We

wanted to make sure that the pragmatic frameworks within which grantmakers operate were made explicit during the meeting, so that points of possible connection could be made between the research agendas of academics and the needs of practitioners.

To accomplish this, we felt it was important to include space in the agenda for practitioners to explain to researchers what sorts of issues were most salient to them. The second half of Session I (Grantmakers' Agenda: What Are the Big Issues Facing the Field?) provided this opportunity. The diversity issues of greatest relevance to practitioners coalesced into nine areas of concern (see page 12), dealing with themes such as the relationship between internal foundation diversity and grantmaking effectiveness, how to work with grantees on issues of diversity, and clarifying the relationship between research and practice.

In response, researchers were given an opportunity to explain how various research strategies might illuminate the questions raised by grantmakers. They suggested some key research considerations to keep in mind:

1. To what extent is research needed that treats diversity as an independent (or causal) variable that leads to particular (desired) outcomes? To what extent is research needed that treats diversity as a dependent (or outcome) variable that results from particular inputs?

## Perspectives on Diversity

Melissa S. Brown:

- "Because we live in a three-dimensional world, diversity is not confined to a single plane (say, race or ethnic heritage) but takes into account all possible 'paths' or combinations of pathways: age, religious preference, gender, life experience (married or not; children or not; military service or not; etc.), qualitative or quantitative modes of collecting information, and much more. In short, diversity means that we consciously choose (at the fork in the road) to incorporate the complete range of human experience."

Mary Ellen S. Capek:

- "Most people hear 'diversity' and think race and/or ethnicity. But focusing on race or ethnicity apart from class, gender, and other complex differences in organizations creates false dichotomies. It's essential that our working definitions of diversity get beyond 'add a few and stir' or 'fairness' and tackle persistent, often unnamed roadblocks for institutionalizing diversity and inclusiveness in organizations."



2. Looking at diversity strictly from the perspective of numbers and demographics may be inadequate to address issues such as social justice, power, or inequality.
3. We need to specify what types of diversity ought to be looked at (gender, race/ethnicity, foundation type, etc.)
4. How do we operationalize “effective grantmaking”?
5. Should we prioritize research that examines internal foundation diversity or research on how foundations can best achieve diverse external outcomes?

Subsequently, the large group was divided into four smaller groups, with equal representation in each group among researchers and grantmakers. Each group was charged with the task of identifying the four highest priority issues for research. The various issues that emerged from the small group discussions were consolidated into a list of eight research questions, five of which focused primarily on the internal aspects of foundations and three of which dealt mostly with the external efficacy of foundation grantmaking.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the biggest question begging for an answer was how diversity (or inclusiveness) at the board and staff levels in foundations might lead to more effective grantmaking. Researchers candidly questioned whether a feasible research strategy could be designed that would begin to answer this question. How extensive and potentially costly, they asked, would such a program of research be?

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**The biggest question [is] how diversity (or inclusiveness) at the board and staff levels in foundations might lead to more effective grantmaking.**

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Other questions that rose to the top:

- How do organizational culture and organizational leadership contribute to or inhibit the diversification of boards, staffs, and decision-making practices at different foundations?
- What determines whether foundations are successful or unsuccessful at retaining staff members of color?
- What do we actually know about the people who govern the activities of foundations—where do board members come from, what kinds of diversity do they represent, and how do they make decisions?

Strategies for initiating research into these questions were proposed (see “Research Priorities and Strategies” on page 19), leading into a discussion of what steps should be taken to keep the conversation between grantmakers and researchers moving forward. Recommendations that emerged included:

1. Establish links between the Researcher/Practitioner Forum and the annual conferences of ARNOVA and the Council on Foundations. Disseminate the forum proceedings at both conferences. Include a panel session at each conference that reports on the work done at the forum. ARNOVA should consider institutionalizing a diversity in philanthropy forum for researchers and grantmakers.

2. Post the forum proceedings on the websites of the Council, ARNOVA, and the Foundation Center.
3. Establish links between the Researcher/Practitioner Forum and the national Diversity in Philanthropy Project (DPP) (see Appendix D). Report on the work done at the forum at DPP advisory committee meetings. Post the forum proceedings on the DPP website: [www.diversityinphilanthropy.org](http://www.diversityinphilanthropy.org).
4. Consider establishing a research roundtable on diversity (involving key infrastructure organizations such as the Council, ARNOVA, and the Foundation Center, and reaching out to others such as Grantmakers for Effective Organizations) that would advocate for funding and create mechanisms for sharing resources.
5. Create a repository of learning for scholars and grantmakers to share available research on diversity.

The consensus among forum participants was that there is a strong need for work to be done in this area. We expect the discussions at the annual conferences of ARNOVA and the Council to stimulate further refinement of both the key research questions identified during the forum and the strategies suggested for investigating them, leading to the development of fundable research proposals.

The Council on Foundations, ARNOVA, and the Foundation Center have committed to allocating time and resources to moving the field forward in this area. For additional information and updates on initiatives growing out of the Researcher/Practitioner Forum, please see [www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org), [www.arnova.org](http://www.arnova.org), [www.foundationcenter.org](http://www.foundationcenter.org), and [www.diversityinphilanthropy.org](http://www.diversityinphilanthropy.org).

## Perspectives on Diversity (continued)

Peter Frumkin:

- “What is diversity? In managerial terms, which is the way we typically understand it, diversity in philanthropy means embracing an open and pluralistic approach to handling the internal and external stakeholders involved in the giving and receiving of grants. Diversity covers not just race and gender, but point of view, underlying practice model, and political ideology.”

Marybeth Gasman:

- “Although ‘diversity’ is often defined broadly, for the purposes of our discussion, I think that we ought to consider issues of race, first and foremost, as well as class and gender. Despite ardent denial by some segments of the U.S. population, we have a vast racial divide in our country. Class and gender play a role in this divide as well. Too often, we water down the definition of diversity because we are fearful of deep discussions of what separates us.”