

A letter to our colleagues, partners and friends on the journey we've taken at the Field Foundation from our President, Angelique Power

Last summer, I came to the Field Foundation as its new President and we entered into an intense period of reflection and planning asking ourselves: *What are our strengths? How can we impact the city with our limited funds? Can philanthropy itself do better for nonprofits, for Chicago?* Over the past year in this position, I have encountered the tactful and bold leadership methods of the past working in sequence with a dedicated staff and board looking courageously into the future. In this letter, my hope is to share with you, the community that informs us and holds us accountable, not only what is changing at the Field Foundation, but also why it is changing and how we arrived at the new grantmaking model below.

Community Empowerment through, **Justice, Art, and Leadership Investment.**

The journey began by asking Chicago's nonprofit community to hold us accountable and review *our* work. First, we listened by distributing an anonymous online survey to nonprofit leaders who are working in the trenches. We asked for feedback on our work at Field and on the field of philanthropy at large. We heard that nonprofits want foundations to be open, transparent and to show up. They also don't want to guess at funding. They want clarity and plainly stated priorities. They asked us to make it much easier to apply—no lengthy proposal, a simple letter would be good, accepted online preferably. And finally, realistic expectations for grants. We heard them and are attempting to live by these standards.

After the nonprofit feedback, we went on to study philanthropy ourselves and the different approaches a foundation can take to understand the impact we aim to achieve. To better understand the root causes of the issues that we face, the full board and staff went through racial justice training. As overtly racist and unintentionally racist policies have been and are being implemented that ensure the horrific outcomes many Chicagoans face every day, we needed to understand how we could make equity a core value of our work. We went on to create **heat maps** of Chicago which looked at quality of life indicators such as poverty levels, education outcomes, commute times to work, violence, and access to arts organizations. We found that in Chicago there is an incredible nexus of poverty, trauma, and divestment that aligns directly with ALAANA (African, Latinx, Asian, Arab, Native American) communities. We determined that while we cannot be race exclusive in our work, we will be race explicit and focus on understanding how funding with a racial equity lens can improve outcomes. Next, we spoke with a group of seventeen fellow foundations and shared our thinking while seeking input. Their feedback in combination with the thoughts from the nonprofit community helped us to understand our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and informed us of where we might be able to find partners or loopholes in Chicago's funding. To explain this process further, we have created a **process map** that can be found under the resources tab of our website, along with our **heat maps** which are now available for public use.

Nonprofit feedback, foundation peer input, racial justice training, heat maps of Chicago; all of these pieces helped reveal a path forward which for us is **Community Empowerment** through **Justice, Art, and Leadership Investment.**

Let's unpack this new model to be as clear as possible about what we mean.

First, we want to acknowledge that “empowerment” from a foundation might sound condescending. We want to clarify that we are not “empowering” the “powerless”; in fact, it's the exact opposite. Too often those most impacted by issues are not at the table to plan solutions. Using the visual of a microgrid, a localized power source, we seek to invest in community-based organizations, community organizers, network and alliance building in certain communities as critical to the success of the city.

Justice is our way of traveling upstream in our effort to impact the issues that face this city. We are moving from direct service to funding organizations that work on systemic reform. **Art** is an open and evolving term. We seek to fund artistic spaces that will bring civic life into divested communities and fuel creativity, intellect, and cultural connections. **Leadership Investment** will have three components. The first is a category of funding directed toward leadership development organizations around Chicago. The second, an award given by the board to organizations in the Justice and Art grantee portfolio, on behalf of their visionary leaders. The third is our **Field Foundation Internship** program, which is open to Masters of Social Work students throughout Chicago.

These funding categories represent our ethos—our underlying belief—that Chicago is about fighting for a level playing field, informed by stunning creativity and that our collective success comes down to the Chicagoans who make it all happen. Justice, Art and Leadership Investment is a grantmaking model—but more importantly it is our belief system for our city.

While we know these new **guidelines** will close the door on funding for some stellar organizations, we know it will also open the door for others and allow us to invest in neighborhoods that are too commonly divested in.

This new model parallels an internal technology upgrade process making it easier to [apply](#). Our goal is to build on our staff's reputation for friendly accessibility—by streamlining the grantmaking process and increasing the amount of time we spend in the field working with and learning from all of you.

As I head into year two of listening and talking, researching and designing, debating and reflecting, I realize that the magic of the Field Foundation is the city we live in, the boldness of Chicagoans, of big ideas. We are making some changes here; not for change's sake but for the sake of the city we love.

For all who have participated in this process, we thank you for your insight and wisdom. For all who still have questions, we ask you to please reach out to us directly via phone or email. Our vision for our foundation is a learning lab. I welcome your thinking and your continued guidance as we learn together what our city needs and ways we can rise to meet the challenges collectively.