

Reflections from the First DEI Coalition Meeting

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I often think that grant-making is much like sausage-making: the less you know about the process, the more you respect the outcome.

If that sentiment stirs feelings of both humour and guilt within you, then don't worry my friend, you are not alone. It is a sentiment which resonates with everyone working in the world of philanthropy that I have met thus far. It is also a sentiment which goes some way to emphasising why the work of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Coalition is so needed. This is work that is seeking to examine both the process and the people (guts and all - no pun intended) behind grant-making.

You will, of course, have read all about the aims and the need for this DEI work in the December 2019 issue of Trust & Foundation News (TFN). In that issue of TFN, my esteemed colleagues make a far more impassioned case for DEI in philanthropy than I ever could. I won't repeat what has already been said so well by others. What I thought I might do is provide a short update on the work of the Coalition and a call to arms to join us as this work progresses.

At the first meeting of the DEI Coalition, kindly hosted by colleagues at Lankelly Chase, much of our time was spent in free-flowing discussion about our individual and collective aims. I was encouraged to see the common ambitions and reassured by the shared challenges amongst trusts & foundations of all shapes and sizes. Although it was only our first meeting, this already feels like a safe space in which to share thoughts and our nascent community is already forging bonds for the betterment of the sector and the organisations we seek to serve.

Below I will explore the top three things that I took away from the first Coalition meeting and I would encourage others to share their own thoughts.

1. Equality is not the same thing as equity. We don't get to an equitable society by treating everyone equally, we get to equity by understanding and addressing the specific circumstances of disadvantage. In practice, this means that some groups might need more intensive interventions than others – and that's ok.
2. From Community Foundations working at a very local level to the biggest funders with the widest geographic reach: whilst we all seek to be more diverse both in terms of our partners and our people, it is important to recognise that this ambition for diversity is meaningless without the inclusive culture to back it up. Culture shift takes time and it needs active participation from all levels of an organisation.
3. This is not a piece of work with a start and end date. DEI is not something that sits within a 'Task & Finish Group' nor does it have a clear road map for consistent progress. We are prepared for every step forward to be met by the occasional step back and perhaps even the

odd sideways shuffle. I am fortunate to work with an amazing team at the City Bridge Trust – if you've ever met any of us I hope you'll agree when I say that we are a team that really values DEI – and part of that involves an honest and open acknowledgement of the fact that we will always have to work at this and we can always do better.

If we can adopt the principles of DEI into our grant-making process and in the way we treat people, then hopefully we will start to see a reversal of my opening statement. One day, I'd like to say that the more people know about the grant-making process: the more they respect the outcome.