

Tracking Fifteen Years of Data on Diversity

In 1991, members of the Minnesota Council on Foundations (MCF) decided to address Minnesota philanthropy's diversity issues. Their goals were ambitious—to create a climate of inclusivity and recognize, work to eliminate, and prevent racism in philanthropy—but they quickly ran into a more mundane roadblock. They didn't have the data. How did foundations and giving programs in the state fare in terms of diversity? And what did diversity really *mean* to their member organizations, especially their leaders?

To address those questions, MCF launched the *Working Towards Diversity* series, reports that would be based on benchmark surveys conducted every five years of member organizations. The first report was released in 1995 and charted the demographics of staff and board members from Minnesota foundations and giving programs and documented how they defined and approached diversity.

The survey also underscored the need for more work.

"When we discussed this data and its implications, we recognized a need for a framework that would enable and encourage all foundations to engage in this work in multiple ways," says Bill King, MCF's President.

The framework that the association's Race and Diversity Task Force subsequently developed identified four roles that grantmakers play—funders, employers, economic entities, and community citizens—and explored the obligations and opportunities to serve diverse stakeholders that each of those roles implied.

The benchmark surveys remain a rich source of information for MCF and its members. With the release of the fourth progress report in April 2011, MCF will have charted more than 15 years worth of changes in the demographics, views, and diversity and inclusion policies and practices of Minnesota grantmakers.

"Becoming more diverse and inclusive requires grantmakers to have will and courage," King says. "Fortunately, as a field of practice, we can share data, examples of promising practices, and replicable strategies that can hasten our progress toward becoming more inclusive philanthropists."