How Can Foundations be Centers of Positivity to Do Our Best Thinking and Work?

Northern California Grantmakers Together for Good Conference

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Amy Shields, Program Manager, GEO
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@ae_shields
1. Welcome & introductions
2. What’s so important about culture?
3. Attributes of productive grantmaker culture
4. GEO’s culture change framework
5. Connecting culture to your work on big issues
6. Conclusion & additional resources
Objectives

1. Understand the role of culture in tackling big challenges and the connection to smarter grantmaking practices

2. Understand GEO’s culture framework and how it relates to your organization

3. Explore a big goal and the changes needed to achieve that goal through the lens of organizational culture
Culture \ˈkəlCHər/ n
the collective behaviors and underlying assumptions of an organization
Productive Culture
Smarter Grantmaking
Stronger Nonprofits
Better Results
Organizations that implement practices that advance organizational culture are more likely to…

- Conduct evaluations
- Provide capacity-building support
- Provide multi-year support
Data from Other Industries

- 84% said culture is critically important
- 45% said their companies manage culture effectively
- Change efforts that pay attention to culture are at least twice as likely to succeed
Elements of Organizational Culture

Artifacts & Behaviors

Espoused Beliefs & Values

Basic Underlying Assumptions
Attributes of Productive Culture

- Collaboration and partnership
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Respect and humility
- Responsiveness
- Transparency and trust
- Curiosity and learning
Spectogram Activity
GEO’s Culture Journey Framework

Set Goal(s)

Understand
We're working to figure out what our culture is, how to talk about it and how it manifests at our organization.

Assess
We've identified the critical aspects of our culture and are trying to figure out what is positive and what needs to change.

Shift
We've identified the aspects of our culture that we want to change and are working towards our aspired state.

Tend
We've done a lot of work on organizational culture and have made big strides, but we're continually working to maintain the productive aspects of our culture.

Achieve goal(s)

Reevaluate

Reevaluate
Does Your Culture Support Your Best Work?

- Identify one of the big goals you would like to focus on
- Identify a sub-goal related to that big goal (if needed)
- Using the worksheet provided, think about your goal through the lens of organizational culture
  - What are the observable behaviors or artifacts you notice related to the goal?
  - What are the stated values or beliefs of your organization related to the goal?
  - What underlying assumptions or beliefs might be driving current behaviors?
Example

- **Change Goal**: Have a voice in our democracy
- **Organizational Goal**: Get better connected with youth to support them in advocating for their needs during local government elections
- **Espoused Values and Beliefs**:
  - Accountability, community, collaboration, respect
- **Artifacts and Visible Behaviors**:
  - We have great connections with school officials in our community
  - One of our program officers comes from a community organizing background
  - Our office building requires people to show a photo ID to get to the elevators, and some youth may not have such identification
- **Underlying Assumptions**:
  - Youth need formal structures and support in order for those in the community to take them seriously
Individual Reflection
Peer Brainstorming

• Break into groups based on the issue area you are most interested in
• Brainstorm artifacts, behaviors, values and beliefs that support progress on this issue
• Share behaviors and beliefs that may hinder progress in this area
Small Group Questions (optional)

- What patterns of behavior do you notice related to your topic (when “x” happens how do people typically react)?
- What are your organization’s unwritten rules?
- What are the underlying assumptions and beliefs that might be driving these patterns?
- What are the power dynamics in this situation?
- How does this relate to the work you do with grantees and the community?
- What are the incentives and rewards (either implicit or explicit) that keep things in place?
- What are leaders saying or doing that enables these behaviors?
- What blocks you from behaving differently?
Additional Resources

- Source Codes of Foundation Culture (2015)
- Shaping Culture Through Key Moments (2016)
- Exploring Microcultures and Why They Matter (2017)
Thank you!

shields@geofunders.org